

MLA's Fall 1998 Survey Shows Increase in Foreign Language Enrollments in United States Colleges and Universities

The MLA has released the results of its fall 1998 survey of foreign language registrations in colleges and universities in the United States. The survey is the nineteenth conducted since 1958 with the support of grants from the United States Department of Education. Responses from 2,763 institutions, or 97.4% of those surveyed, showed a record-high total of 1,193,830 registrations in 153 languages, ancient and modern. This total represents an increase of 4.8% over the total recorded in the previous survey, in 1995, which showed a decline of 3.8% between 1990 and 1995 (See fig.). In relation to the growth in size of the college-student population, 7.9 of 100 students were studying a language in the fall of 1998, and 7.7 of 100 students were studying languages in fall 1995. Noteworthy is the continued rise in foreign language registrations in community colleges—8.8% from 1995 to 1998 and 3.6% from 1990 to 1995. The overall rise in enrollments, though small, suggests that undergraduates in the United States continue to be interested in studying other languages and cultures.

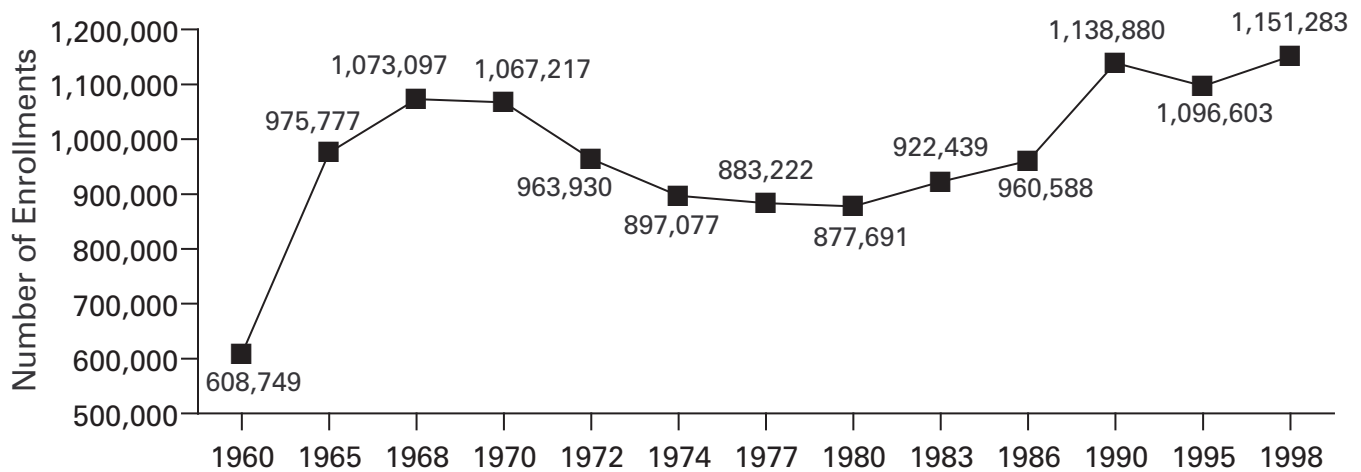
The accompanying table summarizes the results of the 1998 survey and compares registrations in the 15 most commonly taught languages with those recorded in 1995. The table also shows an aggregate count for the 138 other languages for which enrollment data were recorded. The table makes clear how the totals for specific languages shifted between 1995 and 1998. Spanish, which continues to be the most commonly taught foreign language in United States colleges and universi-

ties, experienced an 8.3% increase in enrollments between 1995 and 1998 and accounts for 55% of the total of foreign language enrollments in higher education. With 656,590 enrollments, Spanish has further consolidated its already strong position in the United States college curriculum.

Among the other most commonly taught languages, French, German, Japanese, and Russian showed decreases between 1995 and 1998; however, these are slight compared with the drop in registration in these languages from 1990 to 1995. Enrollments in these languages may be stabilizing. Other languages on the list showed increases ranging from very slight (Latin and ancient Greek, each no more than 1%) to very substantial (American Sign Language, 165.3%; biblical Hebrew, 61.1%; Korean, 34%; Arabic, 23.9%).

The development and completion of the survey was overseen by Richard Brod, director of special projects, who has conducted the MLA's enrollment surveys over the years. A detailed report will appear in the Winter 2000 issue of the *ADFL Bulletin*, and further information will appear in the project report that will be submitted early in January to the United States Department of Education. Copies of the full report, or of excerpts from it, will be made available through the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Clearinghouse, which is accessible online at many university libraries. This report will be available in February by fax at flenrollments@mla.org and at the Web sites of the MLA (www.mla.org) and ADFL (www.adfl.org).

Modern Foreign Language Enrollments by Year



Fall 1995 and Fall 1998 Foreign Language Enrollments in United States Colleges and Universities

Language	1995	1998	Percentage Change
Spanish	606,286	656,590	8.3
French	205,351	199,064	-3.1
German	96,263	89,020	-7.5
Italian	43,760	49,287	12.6
Japanese	44,723	43,141	-3.5
Chinese	26,471	28,456	7.5
Latin	25,897	26,145	1.0
Russian	24,729	23,791	-3.8
Greek, ancient	16,272	16,402	0.8
American Sign Language	4,304	11,420	165.3
Hebrew, biblical	5,648	9,099	61.1
Portuguese	6,531	6,926	6.0
Hebrew, modern	7,479	6,734	-10.0
Arabic	4,444	5,505	23.9
Korean	3,343	4,479	34.0
Other languages	17,271	17,771	2.9
Total	1,138,772	1,193,830	4.8

Source: "Foreign Language Enrollments in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 1998." Prepared by the Modern Language Association of America.