

Guiding Questions

How important is studying languages for undergraduate students and why (not) study languages?

Van Gorp, K., Uebel, E. H., Kronenberg, F. A., & Murphy, D. (2024). How important is studying languages for undergraduate students and why (not) study languages? *Foreign Language Annals*, 57, 900–920. <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12783>

1. Background: Current Context of Undergraduate Language Study

Van Gorp et al. notes that despite policy and institutional rhetoric about the value of multilingualism, undergraduate enrollments in foreign languages have steadily declined.

What factors do you think have most influenced students' choices to study—or not to study—languages at the college level? How does this compare to your own educational or professional context?

2. Findings: Value of proficiency in LOTE

The article reports “students found the value of the ability to speak a language for all reasons to be moderately important. They valued the speaking of languages for personal reasons slightly higher than for career reasons” (p.908)

In your experience, what arguments resonate most with students when deciding whether to pursue language courses? How should the focus of language courses change to address students' motivations for studying a language, especially at higher levels?

3. Findings: Institutional and Curricular Influences

The authors found that the top three reasons for not enrolling in a language course were: 1) no language requirement for major; 2) language courses do not fit schedule; and 3) feeling a lack of aptitude for language. (p.913)

What institutional policies or curricular models have you seen that either encourage or discourage language study? What changes could make language courses more accessible or attractive?

4. Implications: Rethinking the Value of Language Learning

Van Gorp and colleagues suggest that language educators consider the diversity of their student population and invest in understanding their language needs. They mention the importance of developing partnerships with K-12 schools.

Do you agree? What are the pros and cons of such collaborations?

5. Implications: Providing more flexibility with language courses

The authors point to the need for creative solutions, such as interdisciplinary course pairings, flexible pathways, or different formats (hybrid, asynchronous/autonomous courses).

What initiatives have you seen (or would you propose) that could successfully address the need to give students more options to study the language?