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Russell Berman
Modern Language Association of America
26 Broadway, 3rd Floor
New York, NY 10004-1789

February 24, 2012

Dear Russell,

On behalf of the National Council of Teachers of English, I would like to commend the MLA on developing the statement **Learning Another Language: Goals and Challenges** and offer NCTE's assistance in making our members aware of it. Since we do not, as a matter of course, refer our members to policy statements from other groups, I'd like to sketch some of the reasons why we see this statement as congruent with NCTE's mission and policies.

If we consider "literacy" to mean developing adeptness in a discourse, then the interconnected global community of the twenty-first century requires that our students be not only singularly but multiply literate--to have developed adeptness in interconnecting and contrasting discourses, multiple literacies that allow them to negotiate both local and global terrains. This includes proficiency in languages other than English.

Every use of language encodes certain perspectives. Learning other languages, therefore, means not only gaining cultural awareness or expanding specific linguistic capacities but also learning other ways of thinking. Studying an additional language introduces students to how those outside of their own language culture have constructed and valued knowledge. Moreover, such study helps to prepare students to range beyond the monolingual limitations of most Americans to engage in productive and respectful communication with speakers of other languages. We must eventually retire the old joke that speaking three languages is to be trilingual, speaking two is to be bilingual, and speaking one is to be American.

NCTE remains alarmed, therefore, about the declining levels--despite evidence of strong student interest--of institutional and federal government support for foreign language programs in American higher education. Our organization believes that every college student should have ample opportunity in the curriculum to pursue what we have traditionally termed foreign language study and that such endeavor logically follows the imperative to build strong foreign language programs beginning in elementary school. NCTE's 1997 [Resolution on Developing and Maintaining Fluency in More than One Language](#) summarizes succinctly: "Proficiency in more than one language is a decided intellectual and emotional advantage."

Further, NCTE's concern with foreign language instruction is integral to our broad interest in engendering increased support for humanities and in reminding everyone of the vital role of humanistic inquiry in education and citizenship. Study of the humanities enables students to start their careers most alertly and to develop the sophisticated perspectives needed to engage in the complex decision making of modern life.

We look forward to ongoing work with MLA in these challenging times to underline the value of teaching and studying language and the humanities generally. Thank you for reaching out to us on this matter.

Sincerely,

Keith Gilyard, President
National Council of Teachers of English

c: Rosemary Feal, Executive Director