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Data on Second Majors in Language and Literature, 2001–08

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ON 19 May 2010 data on second majors, beginning in 2001, were added to the online database for the degree completions component of the US Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), available on the National Science Foundation's WebCASPAR Web site (https://webcaspar.nsf.gov/). Following are selected findings pertaining to second majors in language and literature. Looking at data on language and literature bachelor degree conferrals overall shows that in some fields, such as foreign languages, second majors make up an unusually large share of the students receiving bachelor degrees. Comparing the number of second majors in a field with the number of first majors, second majors range from 4%–5% of first majors in fields like education and psychology to 10%–12% in economics and political science but jump to significantly higher percentages in foreign languages. In 2001 the number of second majors in foreign languages was 28% of the number of first majors, increasing to 36% in 2008. Nearest to foreign languages in percentage terms are area, ethnic, cultural, and gender studies (28.6% of 8,448 first BAs in 2008) and philosophy and religious studies (22.1% of 12,275 first BAs in 2008). At 7,757 in 2008, second majors in foreign languages exceeded the absolute number in the next most populous field—psychology, at 4,561—by 70.0%.

Data on first and second majors are reported by institutional representatives, not by individual degree recipients, so we cannot attribute individual intention to the ranking of first and second majors. This report uses first majors as the primary number of reference, because this number indexes how many bachelor degrees are granted each year.

Figure 1 and table 1 show the number of first majors from 2001 to 2008 in selected disciplines, including education, psychology, and visual and performing arts. Figure 2 and table 2 give numbers in the same disciplines for second majors. Figure 2 shows a striking standout: the number of second majors in foreign languages outstrips other disciplines significantly. Foreign languages not only show higher absolute numbers of second majors, as figure 2 illustrates; they also have a remarkably higher rate of second majors in relation to the number of first majors. Table 2 gives the absolute number of second majors as well as this number as a percentage of the number of first majors (from table 1) in those disciplines. Table 2 shows that the percentage is highest among foreign languages, about 28%–36%. Only philosophy and area studies come close to foreign languages's figures, although there are also significant percentages of second majors in economics, political science, sociology, and history.

Table 3 shows the sum of first and second degree conferrals in selected disciplines. This table allows us to see that foreign languages, at 28,828 degrees, surpasses economics in the total number of degrees conferred when second majors are added

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to first majors. (Second degree conferrals are distributed by gender in proportions nearly identical to first degrees.)

Tables 4 and 5 give number of bachelor degrees awarded to first and second majors in detailed areas of English and foreign languages. Both Germanic and Romance languages show rates of second majors that are over 40% the number of first majors.

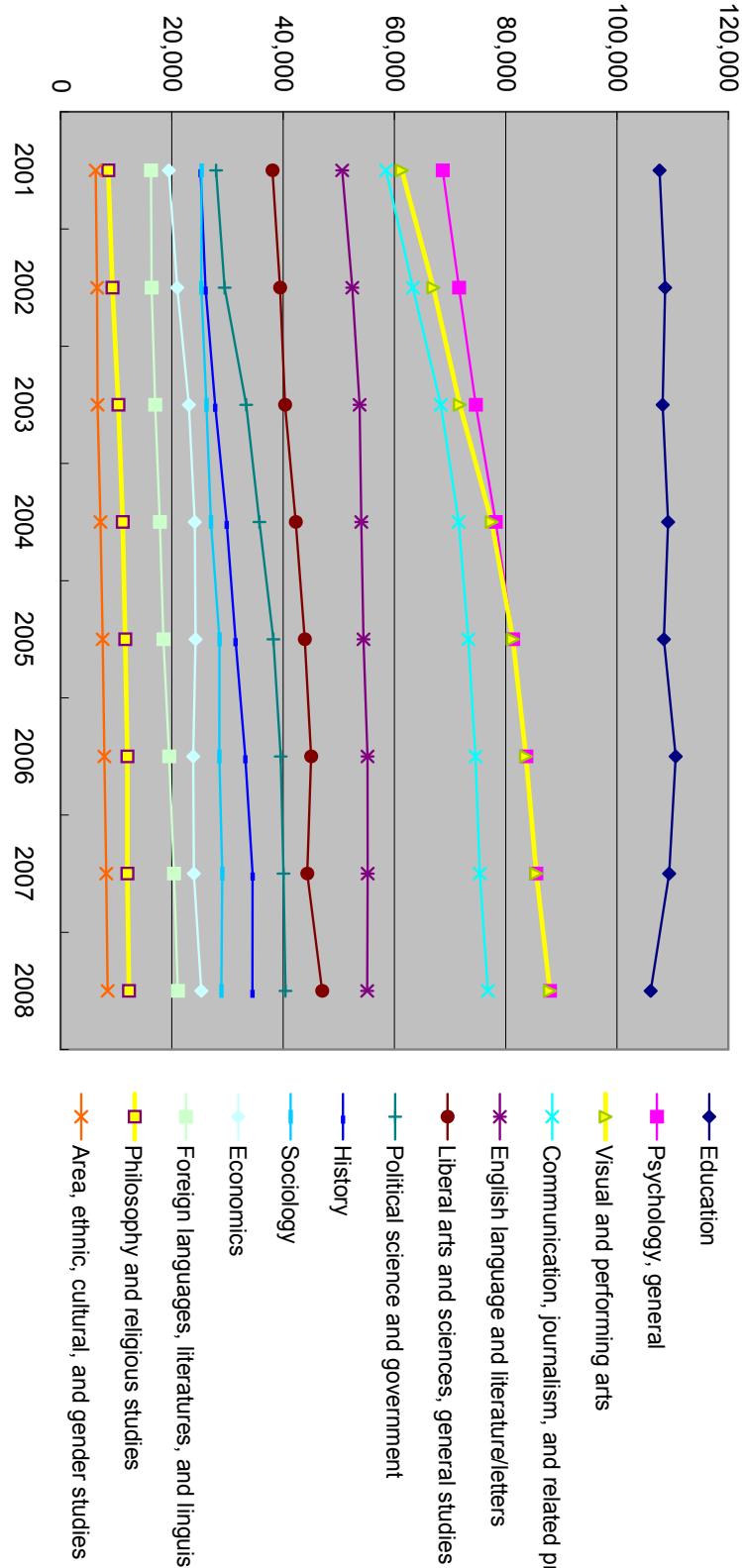
Finally, we should mention that the Humanities Departmental Survey of 2006–07 found that 27,710 students completed a minor in English and 51,670 completed a minor in foreign languages (Laurence 4). Figure 3 shows that in foreign languages the number of minors (51,670) exceeds the number of majors (28,710). Taking second majors into account, the number of minors in foreign languages is still greater than the number of majors. When majors and minors are both considered, the number of undergraduates moving through bachelor degree programs in foreign languages rises to be roughly comparable to the number moving through bachelor degree programs in English—a discovery that revises the common view of foreign language programs as smaller than English, in both the number of undergraduates they are attracting and the number they are serving in the upper division.

Doug Steward

Work Cited

Laurence, David. "The Modern Languages in *The 2007–08 Humanities Departmental Survey*." *Humanities Departmental Survey*. Humanities Resource Center Online, 15 Jan. 2010. Web. 3 Aug. 2010.

Fig. 1
Number of First Majors in Select Disciplines, 2001–08



Data on Second Majors in Language and Literature, 2001–08

Table 1

Number of First Majors in Select Disciplines, 2001–08	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Education	107,642	108,653	108,202	109,170	108,426	110,550	109,368	106,039
Psychology, general	68,670	71,596	74,599	78,175	81,315	83,691	85,476	87,927
Visual and performing arts	61,336	66,989	71,747	77,479	81,291	83,618	85,500	87,934
Communication, journalism, and related programs	58,478	63,311	68,334	71,548	73,276	74,561	75,352	76,791
English language and literature/letters	50,607	52,434	53,736	54,032	54,431	55,145	55,179	55,109
Liberal arts and sciences, general studies and humanities	38,066	39,441	40,341	42,261	43,884	45,030	44,334	47,015
Political science and government	27,943	29,486	33,351	35,717	38,245	39,558	40,065	40,410
History	25,145	26,053	27,777	29,838	31,437	33,190	34,490	34,484
Sociology	25,354	25,295	26,198	27,020	28,556	28,541	29,050	28,897
Economics	19,468	20,961	23,057	24,113	24,267	23,841	23,960	25,300
Foreign languages, literatures, and linguistics	16,232	16,361	17,010	17,833	18,469	19,518	20,378	21,071
Philosophy and religious studies	8,580	9,332	10,374	11,169	11,609	12,003	11,990	12,275
Area, ethnic, cultural, and gender studies	6,320	6,564	6,633	7,185	7,573	7,882	8,195	8,448

Fig. 2
Number of Second Majors in Select Disciplines, 2001–08

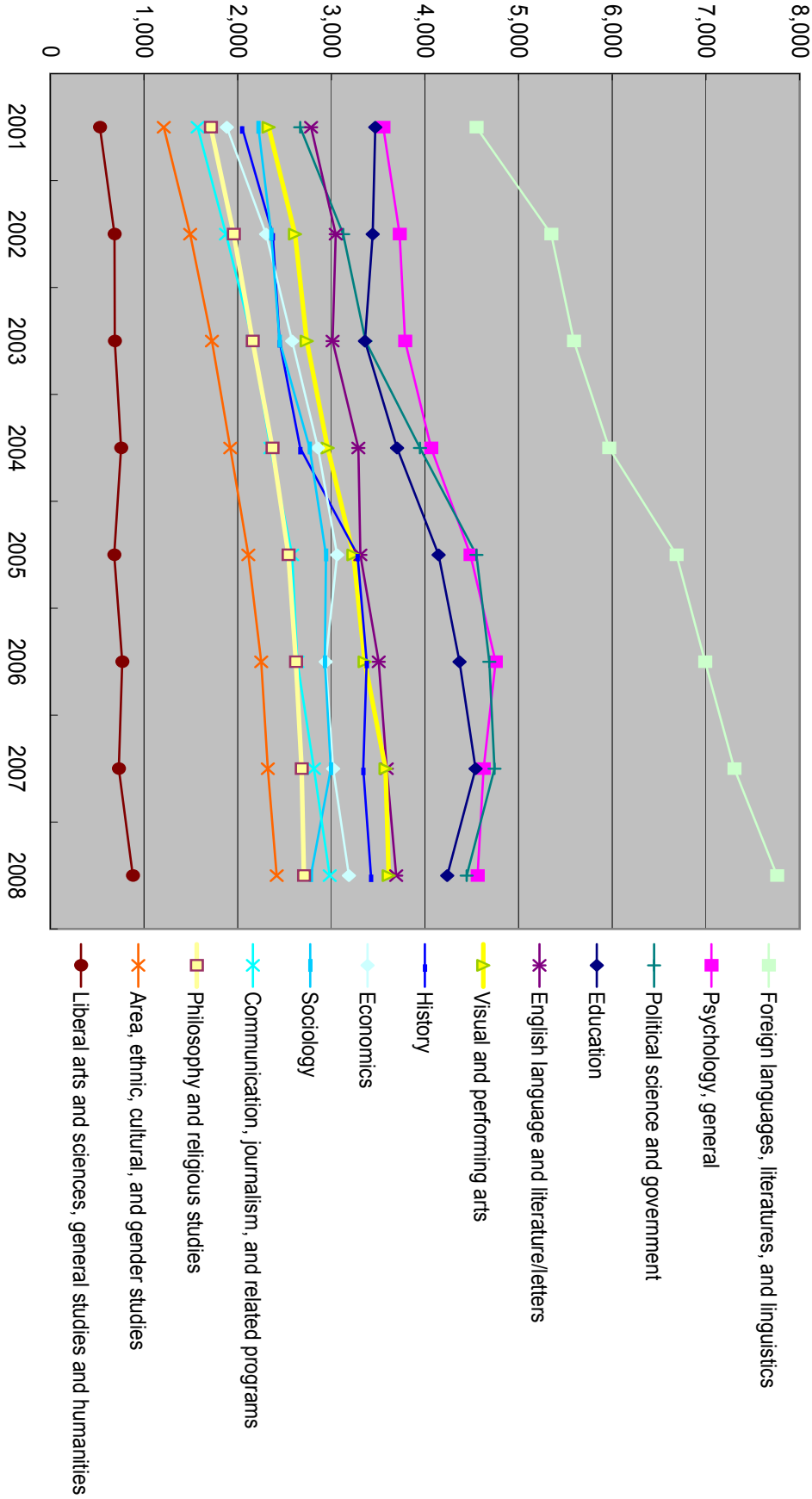


Table 2

Second Majors in Select Disciplines, 2001–08

a. Number of Second Majors	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Education	3,469	3,442	3,359	3,703	4,146	4,370	4,541	4,237
Psychology, general	3,555	3,729	3,787	4,067	4,485	4,755	4,626	4,561
Visual and performing arts	2,332	2,612	2,739	2,961	3,237	3,357	3,580	3,612
Communication, journalism, and related programs	1,572	1,875	2,160	2,351	2,583	2,638	2,816	2,982
English language and literature/letters	2,785	3,046	3,013	3,290	3,310	3,506	3,591	3,692
Liberal arts and sciences, general studies and humanities	528	684	689	755	682	767	731	882
Political science and government	2,667	3,126	3,366	3,946	4,548	4,687	4,743	4,445
History	2,048	2,375	2,447	2,668	3,279	3,377	3,342	3,422
Sociology	2,221	2,359	2,446	2,770	2,944	2,930	2,994	2,782
Economics	1,886	2,305	2,583	2,857	3,063	2,939	3,020	3,187
Foreign languages, literatures, and linguistics	4,550	5,347	5,588	5,967	6,686	6,990	7,302	7,757
Philosophy and religious studies	1,712	1,957	2,159	2,371	2,542	2,621	2,682	2,707
Area, ethnic, cultural, and gender studies	1,213	1,492	1,724	1,922	2,115	2,251	2,322	2,417

b. Second Majors as a Percentage of First Majors	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Education	3.2	3.2	3.1	3.4	3.8	4.0	4.2	4.0
Psychology, general	5.2	5.2	5.1	5.2	5.5	5.7	5.4	5.2
Visual and performing arts	3.8	3.9	3.8	3.8	4.0	4.0	4.2	4.1
Communication, journalism, and related programs	2.7	3.0	3.2	3.3	3.5	3.5	3.7	3.9
English language and literature/letters	5.5	5.8	5.6	6.1	6.1	6.4	6.5	6.7
Liberal arts and sciences, general studies and humanities	1.4	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.6	1.7	1.6	1.9
Political science and government	9.5	10.6	10.1	11.0	11.9	11.8	11.8	11.0
History	8.1	9.1	8.8	8.9	10.4	10.2	9.7	9.9
Sociology	8.8	9.3	9.3	10.3	10.3	10.3	10.3	9.6
Economics	9.7	11.0	11.2	11.8	12.6	12.3	12.6	12.6
Foreign languages, literatures, and linguistics	28.0	32.7	32.9	33.5	36.2	35.8	35.8	36.8
Philosophy and religious studies	20.0	21.0	20.8	21.2	21.9	21.8	22.4	22.1
Area, ethnic, cultural, and gender studies	19.2	22.7	26.0	26.8	27.9	28.6	28.3	28.6

Table 3

Sum of First and Second Majors in Select Disciplines, 2001–08

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Education	111,111	112,095	111,561	112,873	112,572	114,920	113,909	110,276
Psychology, general	72,225	75,325	78,386	82,242	85,800	88,446	90,102	92,488
Visual and performing arts	63,668	69,601	74,486	80,440	84,528	86,975	89,080	91,546
Communication, journalism, and related programs	60,050	65,186	70,494	73,899	75,859	77,199	78,168	79,773
English language and literature/letters	53,392	55,480	56,749	57,322	57,741	58,651	58,770	58,801
Liberal arts and sciences, general studies and humanities	38,594	40,125	41,030	43,016	44,566	45,797	45,065	47,897
Political science and government	30,610	32,612	36,717	39,663	42,793	44,245	44,808	44,855
History	27,193	28,428	30,224	32,506	34,716	36,567	37,832	37,906
Sociology	27,575	27,654	28,644	29,790	31,500	31,471	32,044	31,679
Economics	21,354	23,266	25,640	26,970	27,330	26,780	26,980	28,487
Foreign languages, literatures, and linguistics	20,782	21,708	22,598	23,800	25,155	26,508	27,680	28,828
Philosophy and religious studies	10,292	11,289	12,533	13,540	14,151	14,624	14,672	14,982
Area, ethnic, cultural, and gender studies	7,533	8,056	8,357	9,107	9,688	10,133	10,517	10,865

Table 4

Number of Bachelor Degrees Awarded in English, by Speciality, 2001–08

a. Bachelor Degrees Awarded to First Majors	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
General	38,869	39,440	40,729	41,404	42,243	43,064	43,326	43,076
English composition	377	417	510	512	501	504	442	461
Creative writing	1,254	1,287	1,420	1,800	1,841	1,950	2,097	2,263
Speech and rhetorical studies	8,570	9,625	9,573	8,829	8,375	8,074	7,830	7,786
Technical and business writing	311	381	419	472	459	454	480	518
English language and literature/letters, other	1,226	1,284	1,085	1,015	1,012	1,099	1,004	1,005

b. Bachelor Degrees Awarded to Second Majors	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
General	2,256	2,353	2,306	2,601	2,665	2,755	2,863	2,933
English composition	18	52	67	67	65	81	80	71
Creative writing	117	163	236	220	232	287	304	333
Speech and rhetorical studies	278	373	315	309	253	278	245	259
Technical and business writing	17	14	14	14	23	19	17	13
English language and literature/letters, other	99	91	75	79	72	86	82	83

Table 5
Number of First Majors and Second Majors in Foreign Languages, by Language, 2001–08

a. Number of First Majors	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Romance languages, literatures, and linguistics	10,014	10,070	10,449	10,862	11,206	11,712	12,004	12,395
Linguistic, comparative, and related language studies and services	2,716	2,747	2,985	3,221	3,308	3,544	3,871	4,084
Classics and classical languages, literatures, and linguistics	918	1,005	1,014	1,097	1,078	1,181	1,303	1,303
Germanic languages, literatures, and linguistics	1,184	1,128	1,145	1,162	1,220	1,240	1,168	1,197
East Asian languages, literatures, and linguistics	603	678	756	722	815	955	1,036	1,082
Slavic, Baltic, and Albanian languages, literatures, and linguistics	387	307	309	353	349	340	378	367
American Sign Language	110	130	97	175	218	246	251	251
Middle/Near Eastern and Semitic languages, literatures, and linguistics	85	70	87	78	107	128	189	199
Foreign languages, literatures, and linguistics, other	207	218	151	137	152	157	162	172
African languages, literatures, and inguistics	0	0	1	0	4	2	2	6
Modern Greek language and literature	0	0	1	2	0	2	2	5
South Asian languages, literatures, and linguistics	8	8	10	3	3	8	4	4
Celtic languages, literatures, and linguistics	0	0	5	3	7	3	2	3
Southeast Asian and Australasian/Pacific languages, literatures, and linguistics	0	0	0	2	2	0	5	3
American Indian / Native American languages, literatures, and linguistics	0	0	0	16	0	0	0	0
Iranian/Persian languages, literatures, and linguistics	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

b. Number of Second Majors	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Romance languages, literatures, and linguistics	3,287	3,869	4,118	4,403	4,839	5,032	5,231	5,419
Linguistic, comparative, and related language studies and services	271	349	378	455	503	527	546	709
Classics and classical languages, literatures, and linguistics	212	255	242	261	307	343	365	405
Germanic languages, literatures, and linguistics	470	504	482	503	535	543	585	596
East Asian languages, literatures, and linguistics	156	171	194	166	239	246	272	316
Slavic, Baltic, and Albanian languages, literatures, and linguistics	112	138	130	114	169	187	188	181
American Sign Language	1	1	4	8	7	5	10	8
Middle/Near Eastern and Semitic languages, literatures, and linguistics	14	27	20	38	61	83	74	100
Foreign languages, literatures, and linguistics, other	23	28	12	16	17	19	24	18
African languages, literatures, and inguistics	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1
Modern Greek language and literature	0	0	1	1	2	3	3	3
South Asian languages, literatures, and linguistics	4	5	6	2	5	2	4	1
Celtic languages, literatures, and linguistics	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Southeast Asian and Australasian/Pacific languages, literatures, and linguistics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
American Indian / Native American languages, literatures, and linguistics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Iranian/Persian languages, literatures, and linguistics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

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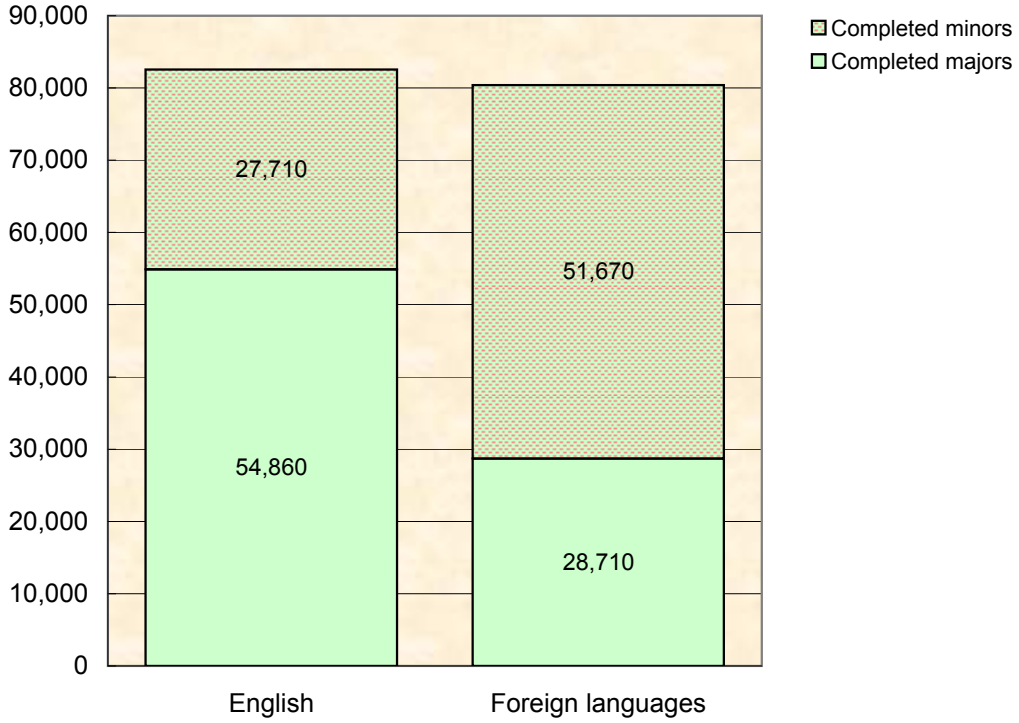
Fig. 3
Completed Majors and Completed Minors, 2006–07