

Highlights of the MLA's 2013 Survey of Enrollments in Languages Other Than English

Aggregate enrollments in all languages decreased by 6.7% between 2009 and 2013.

Enrollments increased in the following languages: Korean (44.7%), American Sign Language (19.0%), Portuguese (10.1%), and Chinese (2.0%).

Spanish and French still led as the two most studied languages. American Sign Language continued to experience remarkable growth, especially in undergraduate enrollments, and was the language with the third most enrollments, displacing German, now fourth.

Spanish enrollments fell at every institutional level for the first time in the history of the survey. In absolute numbers, nearly half of the drop was at the two-year level. Nevertheless, total enrollments in Spanish continued to surpass enrollments in all other languages combined, 790,756 to 771,423.

Among the top fifteen languages, only enrollments in Korean rose at every institutional level between 2009 and 2013: 27.6% in two-year institutions, 45.3% in four-year institutions, and 86.6% in graduate programs.

Six languages steadily increased the percentage of advanced to undergraduate enrollments between 2006 and 2013 (American Sign Language, Arabic, Chinese, Biblical Hebrew, Modern Hebrew, and Japanese); between 2009 and 2013, the percentage also increased for three additional languages (Ancient Greek, Russian, and Spanish).

Advanced classes made up 20% or more of all undergraduate enrollments in four languages (Chinese, Biblical Hebrew, Portuguese, and Russian).

Although most of the commonly taught languages showed double-digit declines in graduate enrollments, graduate enrollments grew in American Sign Language (216.3%), Chinese (9.7%), Korean (86.6%), Portuguese (18.4%), and Russian (0.8%). The number of bachelor's degrees in these languages, as reported by the United States Department of Education, also increased in 2013.

Eighty-four more institutions in 2013 reported enrollments in Chinese than did in 2009, 26 more in American Sign Language, 23 more in Arabic, 19 more in Korean, and 17 more in Portuguese.

Despite national declines in total enrollments and decreases in enrollments in eleven of the top fifteen languages, numerous individual programs reported stability or gains in 2013.

- Arabic enrollments fell 7.5% nationally, but 53.3% of all Arabic programs recorded either stable or increased enrollments.
- French and German enrollments fell nationally by, respectively, 8.1% and 9.3%, but 48.4% of all French programs and 46.4% of all German programs reported either stability or gains.
- Russian enrollments decreased nationally by 17.9%, but 48.7% of all Russian programs reported either stability or growth in 2013.

Offerings in less commonly taught languages (LCTLs) can be fragile and transitory: 63 LCTLs with enrollments in 2013 did not show enrollments in 2006 or 2009, whereas 56 LCTLs offered in either one or both of the two previous surveys were not offered in 2013. Many LCTLs were offered at multiple institutions across the country, but 104 were taught in only one reporting institution.