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SPOTLIGHT ON OU

Modern Language Enrollment at Oakland University 1991-2001

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A recent article by David Maxwell and Nina Garrett, in the American Association for Higher Education's, *Change* magazine (*Meeting National Needs*, May/June 2002, page 23), expresses concern that "the United States has significant needs for communicative competence in languages other than English" and is "far from meeting those needs". They also point out that "the United States is virtually the only developed country in the world that places the real burden of language learning on the postsecondary system." Within that system, the percentage of undergraduate enrollment in language courses is extremely low (roughly 8%) and virtually unchanged for two decades. The distribution of this small population of language students nationally shows the majority in Spanish with declining enrollments in French, German and Russian and fewer than 10% in less commonly taught languages.

In the light of these concerns, this report summarizes enrollments in modern language studies at Oakland University from fall 1991 to fall 2001.

- Approximately 12% of undergraduate students at OU are enrolled in language courses. This is higher than the national average and has shown a positive trend over the past ten years, increasing from just under 10%.
- Between 1991 and 2001, undergraduate student enrollments in modern language courses increased by over 43%. Overall, undergraduate enrollments increased by 26% over the same period.
- As a percentage of total student enrollments, modern language increased by 0.5% from 3.7% in 1991 to 4.2% in 2001.
- The increase can be primarily attributed to increased enrollment in Spanish language courses (+ 95%), Japanese language courses (+ 74%), German (+31%) and Russian (+22%). Enrollment in French declined (-17%). Italian is offered every two years primarily as a service for Music majors.

- Currently over 50% of the students enrolled in modern language courses are studying Spanish, compared to 37% in 1991 (+13%). This trend mirrors the national data.

Table I: Undergraduate Enrollment in Modern Language Courses, 1991-2001

		% UG		% UG		% UG		% UG		% UG		% UG
	1991	Enroll	1993	Enroll	1995	Enroll	1997	Enroll	1999	Enroll	2001	Enroll
CHE	4		19		27		21		38		28	
FRH	374		325		272		297		336		311	
GRM	177		160		128		166		195		231	
IT	30		30		34		35		34		35	
JPN	88		100		109		97		126		153	
RUS	32		39		38		34		30		39	
SPN	416		425		547		678		724		810	
Total	1,121	3.7%	1,098	3.6%	1,155	3.7%	1,328	4.0%	1,483	4.3%	1,607	4.2%

- From 1991 to 2001 the percentage of undergraduate students majoring in a modern language has remained fairly stable at slightly less than 1% of the total undergraduate population (see table II).
- Over the same time period, Spanish has increasingly become the most popular foreign language major. In Fall 2001 more than half of all foreign language majors were in Spanish. In addition, during the last five years the number of German majors has almost drawn level with those in French. The number of majors in other languages remains very small.

Table II: Undergraduate Modern Language Majors, 1991-2001

	1991			2001		
	Majors	% of Lang Majors	% of All UG	Majors	% of Lang Majors	% of All UG
French	21	29.2%	0.2%	22	20%	0.2%
German	10	13.9%	0.1%	21	19.1%	0.2%
Russian	1	1.4%	0.0%	3	2.7%	0.0%
Spanish	29	40.3%	0.3%	58	52.7%	0.5%
Chinese	2	2.8%	0.0%	1	0.9%	0.0%
Latin American	3	4.2%	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%
Two Mod Lang	6	8.3%	0.1%	5	4.5%	0.0%
Total	72		0.7%	110		0.9%