

EPAG's Argument for Eliminating the Russian Language Major:

Russian Discussion in Perspective

Change is an essential fact in the life of an organization.

Organizations that resist or ignore this fact, never succeed in doing so.

Rather, they undergo the ultimate transformation: They simply cease to exist or are otherwise dramatically altered. The question before the faculty is how change and forces that precipitate change are to be managed.

Before the Faculty are three options:

1. Faculty can manage the process of making programmatic choices.
2. The administration and or the trustees (as is done in most colleges and universities) can make these decisions.
3. We can do nothing and wait for the external forces precipitating change to manage us.

Costs/Benefits of Options 1-3:

(in reverse order:)

Option 3, Do nothing: This is the least desirable option. It is also the easiest. Most of the faculty won't experience any consequences during the remainder of our careers if we choose option 3. The costs of option 3 are the highest however. We lose control of our destiny. Organizations that do not change, cannot thrive, rather they die a slow and inevitable death.

Option 2: Let the administration decide: This is very easy, in a sense, for the faculty in the near term. It is inconsistent with Macalester's culture of faculty governance; however. The costs of such an option however are high as we expend the scarce political capital of the Administration and the trustees. Given our current situation, the administration and the trustees have better things to do. Approximately 60 percent of the \$55 million of last capital campaign came from trustees. We are expecting the President to begin laying the groundwork for the next capital campaign. This is of highest priority for the institution. Not fighting parochial battles.

Challenge and Opportunity: Option 1

The Challenge we face is engaging option 1: Faculty manage the process of change.

Costs: it is difficult for the faculty to make hard choices affecting the lives of our colleagues. Additionally, at the end of this process we will still need to speak to each other.

Opportunity:

We demonstrate to the community –students, staff, trustees and administration--that we have mechanisms within our own governance structures that can engage hard choices. This frees up resources in the administration to do what we need most, demonstrates to the trustees that we worthy of their trust and investment, and clearly positions the faculty as the guiding force of the institution. Finally if the faculty can rise to the challenge of making hard programmatic choices it sets precedent for making difficult choices throughout the institution, i.e, re-deploying staff, changing budgetary allocations etc.

II. Specifics on the Russian Language Issue:

Members of EPAG have heard much in the last month. We have heard form Russian language faculty at Macalester, at other institutions, alumni and students. Members of EPAG are confident that they have listened and have heard all sides. EPAG moves that the Faculty eliminate the Russian language major.

This position is arrived at based on the following reasoning:

The Curricular imperative: The first and most important criterion EPAG considers is the curricular imperative of a program. Some programs are absolutely central to the liberal arts: Others are less central to the core mission of a liberal arts college.

EPAG unequivocally believes languages and language instruction are absolutely central to the liberal arts curriculum The question before the

faculty is not Languages. The question is which languages? Admittedly, Russian contributes in significant ways to the curriculum and members of EPAG recognize these important contributions. However, Russian is not central to the mission of the liberal arts, in that eliminating Russian eliminates "languages". EPAG is also highly supportive of area studies. In a constrained environment the question is which area studies? We can not do everything we must make choices.

The second criterion EPAG looks at are numbers.

1. No matter how one looks at the numbers in Russian. Russian is at the absolute bottom of the College in terms of enrollments per faculty member, number of majors per faculty member, and average class size. Moreover, Russian enrollments/majors/class sizes show no discernible upward movement. According to the modern languages association Russian is the only major language to show no growth in enrollment in the past 5 years.

In terms of enrollments per faculty member Russian is two standard deviations below the mean. An average Macalester faculty member serves about 80 students a year, an average Russian Faculty member enrolls 48 students on a ten-year average and 43 for the most recent 4 year period. In other words a Russian language faculty member teaches slightly more than half as many students as an average Macalester faculty member each year (based on the 4yr average). Table 1 summarizes the numbers in the Russian Language department.

Table 1: Russian Enrollment, Class Size and Majors

	Enrollment per FTE		Average Class Size*		Majors Per Full time Faculty	
	10 Yr Average	4 Yr Average	10 yr Average	4 Yr Average	10 yr average	4 yr average
College Average	83.47	79.75	16.98	16.58	6.37	6.29
Std Deviation	17.72	16.95	3.98	3.13	2.69	2.87
1 std dev below mean:	65.75	62.80	13.00	13.45	3.68	3.42
2 st dev below mean:	48.02	45.85	9.02	10.32	0.99	0.55
Russian	48.01	43.90	9.75	9.725	2.6	1.77

* includes German Studies

The interpretation of the rows in table 1 is as follows: The first row in the table is the college-wide average of enrollment, class size and majors. The second row is the standard deviation of these same indicators. Generally speaking, two standard deviations from the mean is considered statistically significant. The third row provides an indicator of what enrollment, class size and majors would be one standard deviation below the college wide average, the next row is two standard deviations for enrollment, class size and majors. The last row in the table contains the averages for Russian language majors. Note that for enrollment and class size Russian language courses are two standard deviations below the mean. Moreover, the distance between Russian and the next department is large. There is no close second for many indicators.

In only four instances in the last ten years has enrollment in a Russian class equaled the average class size of the college (approximately 18 students). Noteworthy is the fact that the largest classes in Russian are courses taught in translation (English) that are also often (not always) cross-listed with HCS and IS. Generally speaking, Russian language courses rarely have more than 10 students per section. Eliminating the Russian language major will not eliminate the relatively highly enrolled Russian courses taught in English as the faculty members currently teaching these courses are tenured and will remain in the faculty in some capacity.

3. The Future: The Third Criterion EPAG examines is the potential in the near future.

A prognosis suggests that Russia is likely to become less, not more, interesting as an area of student interest than it has been in the immediate post cold war era. If the Russian language program from 1993 to 2003, one of the most interesting periods in Russian history, with three exceptional faculty can not attract student interest, it is less, not more, likely to do so in the period 2004 to 2014. The most recent data from the Modern Languages Association do not provide reason for optimism. As college enrollments are up across the country it is not surprising that as a whole language enrollments have increased substantially and all languages tracked by the MLA show increases, except Russian which has remained flat since 1998. See http://www.aatg.org/member_services/2002_Enrollments_MLA.pdf

Conclusion:

EPAG must weigh the curricular value of Russian against the fact that although, highly valuable, few students enroll in Russian courses. Based on the fact that Russian language that Russian enrollments/majors and class sizes are way below college averages, and that there is no obvious reason to expect an improvement based on current trends EPAG concludes that it is in the best interest of the institution to eliminate the Russian language major.

Passage of this motion will not eliminate all things Russian at Macalester. Two tenured members of the faculty with Russian language, literature and cultural expertise will continue to offer courses in Russian literature and culture and, depending on their interests, in Russian languages as well. Looking outside the Russian language department, Faculty in history, economics and international studies have teaching and research interests in the area which will be sufficient to offer a strong interdisciplinary concentration in Russian area studies. EPAG does not envision passage of this motion precluding other options that might be considered such as a Russian area studies program that might offer some sort of interdisciplinary concentration or possibly major. EPAG expects to take the issue of what do with the Russian area studies program once the issue of the Russian language major is settled.