

RUSSIAN  
Language, Literature, and Culture  
at Macalester College and in the United States  
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Since 1960, Russian, often referred to as one of the less commonly taught languages (LCTL), has in fact always been one of the eight most commonly taught languages in colleges and universities in the US. Over the past three decades, Russian has been displaced from the fourth most popular language, after Spanish, French, and German, by the increased enrollments in Italian, Japanese, and Chinese, which all stabilized in the 1990s. By 1995, Russian had dropped below Latin, which has been very stable the past two decades, into eighth place and 2% of total language enrollment, from a high of 3.8% in 1990.<sup>1</sup> Since 1990, Spanish has overtaken all other languages combined, for about 55% of total language enrollment. At the secondary school level, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) reports that Spanish accounts for 68.8% of total foreign language enrollment, with Russian at .2%.<sup>2</sup> More high school students are studying languages (43.8%), and more of those students study Spanish, with declines in French and German. To round out the big picture, at the college and university level, lower enrollments in commonly taught languages (with over 4,000 students annually) other than Spanish are accompanied by growth in the variety of languages studied, especially the less commonly taught languages. The total number of college students studying language at any one time has held steady at around 8% of all students since 1977 (Brod and Welles 25).

The Modern Language Association (MLA) has just completed its twentieth survey of foreign language enrollments in US colleges and universities since 1958.<sup>3</sup> "The most recent enrollment survey for fall 2002 shows a marked change; registrations are up in all the fifteen most commonly taught languages. Increases are particularly notable for American Sign Language, Arabic, and Italian; and the downward trends for German, French, and Russian were reversed."<sup>4</sup> According to this survey, which the MLA will give us next week, Russian enrollment is up by a modest .5%. More important, in a survey by us this fall of Russian departments at our comparison schools (see Appendix A), enrollment in first-year Russian and other courses is up by an average of 13%, and since 2000, by nearly 70%. In this context, the dramatic increase in enrollment from the previous three years at Macalester, by almost 100%, may be less an aberration than the beginning of a new upswing in Russian enrollments.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Brod and Elizabeth B. Welles, "Foreign Language Enrollments in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 1998," *ADFL Bulletin*, 31.2 (Winter 2000) 26.  
<http://www.adfl.org/resources/enrollments.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Jamie B. Draper and June H. Hicks, "Foreign Language Enrollments in Public Secondary Schools, Fall 2000," *ACTFL*, May 2000, 1. <http://www.actfl.org/public/articles/Enroll2000.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> This was the magic year for Russian and other languages, because the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in 1957 and made Russian a critical language.

<sup>4</sup> David Goldberg, Natalia Lusin, and Elizabeth B. Welles, "Successful College and University Foreign Language Programs 1995-99: Part 2," *ADFL Bulletin*, 34.3 (Spring 2004) 1. We have an advance copy of this report and have permission to use it internally: "Draft – Not for Quotation and Duplication in Published Form." Next week we will have a copy of the actual survey through Fall 2003, which lists all Russian programs by school, which we will compare with our survey.

This brief overview serves to make the case before the faculty for the continued robustness, despite fluctuating enrollments, of the serious Russian program that we have built with your support since Gitta Hammarberg came to Macalester College in 1983. We look at our program and its history in the context of Russian and foreign languages more generally nationally, among four-year institutions, and especially at our comparison schools. All of our 15 comparison schools (see Appendix A) have Russian programs that combine language, literature, and culture, as do 22 the 24 schools above Macalester College in the *US News* college rankings.<sup>5</sup> However, a handful of our comparison schools have no Russian Studies programs.<sup>6</sup> The top three schools, Williams, Amherst, and Swarthmore have all gone through the same questions about their Russian programs that face the Macalester faculty and they retained Russian. As we think ahead and attempt to both follow and avoid trends, it helps to know what those trends are.

It seems reasonable that EPAG's and the faculty's discussion of the current Russian program should be part of the faculty's general curricular discussion throughout this year, especially as we focus on internationalism, area studies, languages, and the language requirement. In other words, the decision about the future shape of the Russian program should be made at the end, rather than the beginning of this process. As part of this larger curricular discussion, we have presented scenarios to EPAG for a Russian department with 3 FTE, a Russian Studies interdisciplinary department with 2 FTE, and find it difficult to imagine a structure with 1 FTE. We hope to explain the differences in learning outcomes between a 3 and a 2 FTE scenario, and why 2 FTE, to say nothing of 1 FTE, may not be good enough for Macalester students.

### **Fluctuating Enrollments**

Given the justifiable concern of Macalester's administration over Russian's fluctuating enrollments, what in fact constitutes robust enrollments today? In other words, even though our enrollments are up, what does that mean, since they have also gone down from the highs of 1988 to 1992, as we followed national trends to the highest levels ever for Russian (Brod and Welles 26)? In a project funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the MLA has responded to concerns everywhere about dropping enrollments in foreign languages in two reports (2001, 2004) that assess declines, increases, and stability in enrollments based on a survey from Fall 1999. A third MLA study (2000), based on Fall 1998 enrollments, had already concluded that declining programs, including French and Russian (but not German), had stabilized "with less than 4% variation from the previous survey." (Brod and Welles 22). By 1999, "the combined percentage of stable and growing enrollments is higher than the percentage of decreasing enrollments."<sup>7</sup> And now all languages are increasing enrollments again.

In particular, the 2000 MLA report concludes that in contrast to other commonly taught languages, "Russian shows great variability, declining steeply in the 1970s and 1990s but growing during the 1960s and 1980s" (Brod and Welles 25). Russian at the high school level has the same volatility as at the college level. The MLA report does not

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<sup>5</sup> Claremont McKenna sends students to Pomona College, and Harvey Mudd College is a science institution. Davidson College, with 1.2 FTE, and Occidental, with 1 FTE, do not offer Russian majors.

<sup>6</sup> Amherst, Barnard, Bowdoin, and Swarthmore do not offer Russian Studies.

<sup>7</sup> David Goldberg and Elizabeth B. Welles, "Successful College and University Foreign Language Programs, 1995-99: Part 1," *Profession 2001*, 174. [http://www.adfl.org/projects/Prof2001\\_goldberg.pdf](http://www.adfl.org/projects/Prof2001_goldberg.pdf)

correlate high school enrollments with college enrollments, but putting these statistics together suggests that trends in high schools are felt with some delay at the college level. From its peak in 1968, Russian declined in the 1970s by half, and then again by half in the 1980s, only to double by 1990 and again decline steeply by 2000, although three states (Alaska, Oregon, and Washington) with traditionally strong Russian enrollments did not respond for this last survey (Draper and Hicks, 1, 5).

Thus each decade of decreases has been followed by a decade of increases. After a decade of decline and stabilization, our colleagues at comparison schools are optimistic. Tom Hodge at Wellesley points out that, "in 2002-03 we had our most enrollments (186) in a single post-Cold-War Academic year;" Elizabeth Cheresh Allen at Bryn Mawr sees their Russian department as "pretty stable" and predicts that "the upturn in enrollments" will have a positive effect on the applicant pool to their Russian graduate program; even Amanda Ewington at Davidson (the smallest Russian program at 1.2 FTEs) conveys that "Russian might eventually become its own separate unit"—for now, they are hiring a new adjunct (September 2003 e-mails to Gitta).

It may come as a surprise that for actual enrollments at the college and university level, Russian is most comparable to Chinese and Latin, each with around 24,000 students nationally (Brod and Welles 22, 26). In contrast, enrollments in Japanese are double those in Russian nationally, and enrollments in German – to which Russian is often unfairly compared because as at Macalester, Russian is often put into a department with German – are nearly four times those in Russian. According to these ratios, if we were to use Russian as the standard (18), then this year first-year Chinese at Macalester should have 18 (they have 18), Japanese should have about 40 students (they have 42) and German, 80 students (they have 27) – to give some idea of the continued robustness of Russian at Macalester relative to some other languages. For the total enrollments at Macalester from 1980-2004, see Appendix B and Chart A.

Despite fluctuations, Macalester's program performs solidly within the range of that of our fifteen comparison schools (see Appendix A). The average current FTE for our peer institutions is 3.1 (2.4 tenure-track faculty and 0.7 non-tenure track faculty). Six schools are at 3 FTE, four have more and 5 has less. Macalester falls around the median with 3 FTEs. In relation to our comparison schools in elementary language enrollment we are this year at the average. We lagged behind in the last couple of years, though with decent steady numbers even then. At the advanced level and in numbers of majors, we have performed at the top range for our peer institutions. Overall we have consistently had more majors than the average, and that is even without counting majors from St. Catherine and St. Thomas, which never enter Macalester's Institutional Research reports.

The solid performance of Macalester's program in relation to our comparison schools is indeed surprising given the unstable faculty situation we have experienced recently. Since 1994, with the exception of 1996-7, one or two faculty have been away every year as faculty raked in a half dozen prestigious national grants for research leaves, directed the ACM study abroad program in Russia, and took on administrative roles for the college.<sup>8</sup> Faculty excellence in research and administration should not jeopardize our existence.

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<sup>8</sup> Since 1983 Russian faculty has received prestigious national research grants from SSRC (twice), NEH (twice), National Humanities Center, IREX (several times), Fulbright, Mellon, and the Davis Center for Russian Studies at Harvard. We have been appointed to the editorial boards of the two major Slavic

### Advanced-Level Language Enrollment

Upper-level language courses typically bring down enrollment and are of particular concern to us as well as the administration. Even if Macalester's enrollments at this level are better than those of our peers, if numbers everywhere are low, what do these enrollment numbers really mean? It turns out that they are significant when compared to enrollments in introductory courses and to majors. Even the authors of the MLA 2001 were surprised by their conclusion that overall, students in the introductory courses of more difficult languages such as Russian, Japanese, and Chinese were much more motivated to continue on to advanced courses and to become majors than students in easier languages (Goldberg and Welles 177). The MLA 2004 study shows that at four-year colleges, students of Russian language are the most dedicated to continued language study at the advanced level: nearly one out of every two introductory students continues (2004, 4). Moreover, one out of every 3.7 introductory students becomes a major and one out of every 2.3 advanced students (2004, 4).

#### Ratio of Number of Students at Four-Year Schools by Language, Fall 1999

LANGUAGE	Intro: Adv	Intro:Majors	Adv:Majors
Chinese	2.4	3.7	2.0
French	2.8	6.7	2.5
German	2.5	6.0	2.5
Italian	4.9	14.5	2.9
Japanese	2.8	4.0	1.8
Russian	2.1	3.7	2.3
Macalester	<b>1.8/1.5</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>1.83</b>
Spanish	3.1	8.7	2.5

At Macalester, the ratio between enrollments in introductory and advanced Russian courses in Fall 1999 was 1.8 while in Spring 2000 the ratio was 1.5 (see Chart B). The ratio of introductory courses to Russian majors for fall 1999 was 3.33 (actually majors who graduated in spring 2000). Similarly, Macalester performs above the average when we compare advanced enrollments to number of majors for fall 1999 (majors graduated in spring 2000) with a ratio of 1.83. These ratios indicate that our student retention is well above average. Over the past two decades, these ratios have improved dramatically, and this is especially evident after the language requirement was introduced in 1991 (see Chart B and actual numbers in Appendix B). This suggests that statistically, the language requirement has turned out to be an extremely efficient way of improving student proficiency in Russian.

The full picture suggests that ironically, it is the very languages that require more study (Japanese, Chinese, and Russian) that are more at risk of not having advanced courses, most likely because of low enrollments and the staffing problems in small

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journals, *SR* and *SEEJ*. We've published with major presses (Cambridge UP, Indiana UP, Northwestern UP, Random House, Northern Illinois UP). We've served the profession as VPs for AATSEEL, as delegates to various sections of the MLA, presidents of national organizations of specialists ECRSA, not to mention services we've performed for ACTC, ACM, Global Partners, and the like, and we've presented papers annually at virtually every national and many international conferences.

programs. According to the MLA, 76% of four-year institutions that offer introductory courses also offer courses at advanced levels, and Russian stands at 76.1% (2004, 3).

#### **Programs in Four-Year Institutions Offering Introductory and Advanced Courses**

	Introductory Courses only	Advanced Courses as well	Introductory and Advanced programs
Chinese	110	81	73.6%
French	769	660	85.8%
German	604	494	81.8%
Italian	243	153	63.0%
Japanese	215	123	57.2%
Russian	188	143	76.1%
Spanish	819	772	94.3%

The importance of upper level language classes, especially for Russian and other difficult languages, despite their drag on enrollments, cannot be overstated. The U.S. State Department Foreign Service Institute's (FSI) table for the number of classroom hours necessary to achieve oral proficiency levels depends on the difficulty of the language. Russian is in category 3, with only Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean as more difficult, in category 4.<sup>9</sup> For excellent college students of Russian, it takes 720 to 1,320 hours of classroom instruction to attain level 2/2+ proficiency on the Interagency Language Roundtable scale, defined as "limited functional proficiency," or intermediate level skills on the ACTFL scale.<sup>10</sup> In Spanish and French (group 1), and in German (group 2), it takes 480 to 720 hours, and for group 4, 1,320 hours. Macalester language students spend 135 hours a year in language class with a 4.5 hour/week schedule, 3 hours with regular faculty and 1.5 hours with Native Speakers. Even with every advantage, including immersion study abroad, the result is often intermediate rather than advanced skills.

The specific weakness of small Russian programs is highlighted in a report co-authored by Benjamin Rifkin, currently president of the American Association for Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages (AATSEEL): "the critical fourth-year, post-study abroad course is often not available; this leaves students without a viable **language** course after the study abroad experience."<sup>11</sup> This gap at the fourth-year level was highlighted in the 1996 outside review of Macalester's Russian program, which resulted in the redesigning our fourth-year language course. The reviewers'

<sup>9</sup> Alice Omaggio Hadley, *Teaching Language in Context*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 2001) 26.

<sup>10</sup> Available on-line at <http://www.icls.com/FLD/ILRlevels.htm> and <http://www.actfl.org/public/articles/details.cfm?id=17>.

<sup>11</sup> Margaret E. Malone, Benjamin Rifkin, Donna Christian and Dora E. Johnson, "Attaining High Levels of Proficiency: Challenges for Foreign Language Education in the United States," ERIC/CLL News Bulletin, Spring 2003, 3. <http://www.cal.org/ericcl/news/2003spring/attain.html> and [http://www.cal.org/ericcl/news/2003spring/CLLNewsBulletin\\_Sp03.pdf](http://www.cal.org/ericcl/news/2003spring/CLLNewsBulletin_Sp03.pdf)

recommendation for an additional content-based course in Russian at the fourth-year level was implemented by varying the content of our senior seminar and opening it up to other students with sufficient language skills for a course conducted entirely in Russian, who then repeat it in their senior year if they are Russian majors. This has been a successful and efficient solution.

### **Enrollment History and Staffing**

The Russian program evolved dramatically in the 1990s from primarily a language program to one that combines on average an annual eight language courses and six literature and culture courses that serve the college's needs more broadly. For most of its history since 195?, we have served mainly students' language needs at the introductory level. Staff was typically one FTE plus one to three PTE. Beginning in 1983, Gitta reinvigorated and restructured the language program, primarily building introductory Russian enrollment. When Gitta went on leave in Spring 1988, an army of six PTE took over. Until Jim's hire in 1988, the only three regular Russian courses besides language were a 19<sup>th</sup> and a 20<sup>th</sup> c. survey and a course on culture and civilization. The program has slowly added interdisciplinary, cross-listed courses, beginning with Russian History through Literature, team-taught with History in 1987, Soviet Mass Culture in 1989, and after Rachel's hire in 1992, we added Revolution and Culture in 1995, the Russian Religious Experience, Orientalism and Empire, and Translation as Cross-Cultural Communication in 1996, and Nature Writing Russia/America in 1997. A course on Russian Film was added in 2003. All these courses were only possible because the heated enrollments in introductory Russian slowed down. See Chart D for the ratio of language to literature and culture enrollments since 1980, which clearly shows the evolving profile of the departmental curriculum.

By now it should be clear that moving from a 3 FTE Russian language, literature and culture department to a 2 FTE interdisciplinary Russian Studies Department means hard choices. Two faculty with ten courses between them can offer at most eight language courses and two literature and culture courses, which would not provide enough of the latter for disciplinary distribution. Reducing low-enrollment advanced language courses to provide more literature and culture courses is an even more difficult decision. Both are a step backwards in the wrong direction if we want our students to graduate with real, usable linguistic skills. In fact, with the latter scenario, we would be repeating a past pattern in language at Macalester College that the current foreign language requirement was instituted in 1991 to correct. It might be worth reminding ourselves how we got there in the first place. To quote the inestimable Ellis Dye from his October 22, 1984 memo to Dan Balik: "One substantive point. You are right that it is encouraging that three-fourths of Macalester students are exposed to a foreign language while here. On the other hand, nearly three-fourths also leave the college having taken no more than three courses, which means that probably a sizeable majority never achieves proficiency in a foreign language. Clearly, we have much to accomplish."

### **Future Enrollments**

What are the prospects for future enrollments given fluctuations in enrollment and staffing? We and the MLA share the Provost's and EPAG's concerns. In its two reports (2001 and 2004) funded by Mellon, the MLA identified significant correlations

between successful programs and their curricula. They found that the features of language programs that strongly affect increasing enrollments in Russian, particularly at the advanced level, include: study abroad, enrollment options (major, double major, and minor), a language house, assessment of incoming students, a media center, support for faculty study abroad, interaction with the local community (all of which we have), a language coordinator (which we used to have) and a pre-semester program. It is probably no surprise that Macalester has most of these features in place, which bodes well for the overall future of foreign languages here. However, all of these educational activities are labor intensive and place a huge burden on faculty time, and in practice, on the time of permanent faculty rather than temporary hires, which in turn puts an additional burden on small programs.

Furthermore, “the foreign language graduation requirement is strongly associated with growth in advanced enrollments,” and this is particularly true for German and Russian (2004, 14). The 2001 MLA survey finds that at all levels of college education, the number of institutions with a foreign language requirement for entrance and for graduation has increased from 1995 levels; for four-year colleges, 26% have an entrance requirement and 71% have a graduation requirement (Goldberg and Welles 182-3). Macalester has a graduation requirement and we should keep these correlations in mind for future discussions.

In addition to having many of the features associated with growing enrollments in Russian and foreign language programs more generally, we have developed a particular curriculum that seems to be the right thing. At four-year institutions, over half emphasize literary texts and the canon, with some non-canonical literature at the advance level (2004, 22). But for Russian (and German), there is a strong correlation for increased enrollments at the introductory level with “an emphasis on non-canonical literature” (Goldberg and Welles 199). At the advanced level however, there is a strong correlation between increased enrollment and “grounding in the literary classics, often in combination with contemporary approaches that deal with race, class, gender, as well as non-canonical and nonliterary texts”(2004, 23). In addition to the interdisciplinary courses listed above, our courses in the classics, aside from the two surveys, include Dostoevsky and Gogol, *War and Peace*, and Nabokov.

### **“Enrollments and the Body: Our Majors”**

Our majors graduate with usable language skills, for a number do in fact get professional and academic jobs using their Russian and several have received prestigious grants. Since 1990, there has been an explosion in interesting jobs connected with Russia and the former Soviet Union that combine Russian language with work in government agencies, NGOs, companies, professions, and institutions. Some examples show that our students, trained with double and triple majors in Russian, RCEES, and IS, not only do well, but do good in careers that embody the best of Macalester’s civic and global aspirations for our students. Some examples:

Grants: • Owen Kohl ’02 received both a Fulbright (declined) and a Watson fellowship to continue his studies on hip hop in Russia-Mongolia-Croatia-Senegal-France  
• Elizabeth Eagen ’02 received a Fulbright to Georgia, and •Eric Olson ’85 was one of Macalester’s very occasional Rhodes scholars. After a stint working on US-Soviet trade

development, Eric moved into business and environmental issues, promoting sustainable business practices at The Natural Step Service Group.

Journalism: • Quinn Martin '02 writes for *The Moscow Times* and on-line magazines that deal with Central and Eastern Europe, after writing for the *Kyiv Post* and interning at Human Rights Watch in Moscow • Joy Ziegwied '01 interned at the National Democratic Institute in Moscow and then got a job as assistant arts editor for *The Moscow Times* • Jake Rudnitsky '99 writes for *The eXile* in Moscow • Chris Pascone writes for *The St. Petersburg Times* while studying literature at St. Petersburg University • Jed Sunden is the publisher of the *Kyiv Post* in Ukraine.

Professions: • Greg Luloff '99 is now at Northwestern University Law School after two years in Novosibirsk in the Peace Corp and a job in St Petersburg with a Jewish organization • Wendy Guyot '97 is at the School for Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins, in the International Development Department continuing to study Russian, after joining the Peace Corp for three years in the Russian Far East in Birobodzhan • Heidi Lowrey '95 worked for Moscow's first AIDS clinic before becoming a medical doctor • Rebecca Hanson '95 got a RCEES MA at Georgetown, worked as an analyst for the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence, then as Associate Director for Afghanistan at the National Security Council and is now a law student at the University of Chicago (and was featured in Macalester's full-page ad in *The New York Times* on September 28, 2003) • Duana Grage '94 studied law at Hamline and in Prague, and now works locally and is a board member for Minnesota Women Lawyers • Jenny Abel '93 studied and managed programs in sustainable farming in Siberia, Russia, and Senegal • David Miller '9? has moved back to Moscow to practice law with Hogan & Hartson.

Academics: • David Brandenberger '92 is assistant professor of history at University of Richmond with a PhD from Harvard '99, where he is a postdoctoral fellow at the Davis Center this year, and has just published *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Harvard UP 2002) • Ingrid Summers '91 received a full five-year fellowship to study anthropology at Columbia University and completed a year of field research on an IREX grant in Kamchatka Peninsula and Siberia • Randi Barnes completed her PhD in Russian history at Indiana University and is Associate Professor at Steven F. Austin State University • Laura Adams '90 is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for Eurasian, Russian and East European Studies in the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University with a sociology PhD from Berkeley '99 and works on Uzbekistan.

## Conclusions

Without Russian, we lose Russian, Central and East European Studies, International Studies loses one of its cores for the Humanities track, and there will be one less language on campus to meet the IS three-year language requirement. The ACTC will lose their *only* advanced Russian language courses and *all* Russian literature and culture courses. Though ACTC schools have cut back and eliminated their Russian programs because they could rely on us, we cannot do the same and rely on the University of Minnesota for either adjunct faculty or places for our students. They have rising enrollments too and a recent visit to their web schedule indicates that virtually all their language courses are full and closed, while their literature courses are meager and

culture courses non-existent. We should not be in the business of exporting students to weaker programs.

Going to 2 FTE or staying at 3 FTE requires difficult decisions with significant drawbacks for the program at 2 FTE. However with less than two tenure-track FTE it would be impossible to maintain the high quality education with the balanced set of courses and the many features above that Macalester offers for foreign languages. It would put Russian in a category of lesser excellence than other languages at Macalester. It has taken us a long time and significant effort and support to build up a nationally recognized program in language *and* literature and culture that is worthy of Macalester. These factors need to be considered if we contemplate adding other languages to our curriculum.