

The French Review

From the Editor's Desk

Good news is always welcome! In its report, "Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in the United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 2006," posted on 13 November 2007, the Modern Language Association (Nelly Furman, David Goldberg, and Natalia Lusin) announced that overall enrollments in languages other than English rose by 12.9% from 2002, an increase of 180,557 enrollments (2). As might be expected, the most dramatic increases were in Arabic (126.5%) and Chinese (51%). However, with the exception of Biblical Hebrew, all languages have shown increased enrollments since 2002. Amazingly, in spite of the wave of Francophobia which swept the United States after the French refused to join the United States in its war on Iraq in the spring of 2003, French enrollments at the university level have increased. The increase of 2.2% over 2002 translates into 206,426 enrollments as opposed to 201,979 in 2002, 199,064 in 1998, and 205,351 in 1995. French remains the second most taught language in the United States with more than twice the enrollments of German. It has about one-fourth the enrollments of Spanish (823,035). It is also true that French peaked, as did German, in 1968 with 388,096 enrollments.

Nationally there were 8.6 enrollments in modern language courses per 100 students attending postsecondary institutions. This was also a modest increase from the 8.1 figure of 2002. The enrollments in 1960 and 1965 were 16.1 and 16.5 per hundred. Nonetheless, Modern Language enrollments (if not French enrollments) have grown fairly consistently since 1983 (2). French also grew by a larger percentage in 2006 than in 2002. The percentage increase in Spanish was 10.3%.

On the down side, French (down 20.4% since 1986), like German, Russian, Latin, Hebrew, and Ancient Greek lost enrollments in two-year colleges after gains in 2002 (3). This is something that the AATF is looking into. French, like Spanish and German, has also lost ground as a percentage of total Modern Language enrollments between 1960 and 2006. While Spanish remains at about 50%, French has fallen to 13.1% in 2006 from 34.4% in 1968 (3). Another good sign is that French enrollments in upper-division French classes seem to be remaining steady at a ratio of 1 upper-division enrollment to every four lower-division enrollments.

Although it is true that French had the smallest percentage of growth (2.2%) of all the languages, we should see this recent growth as a particularly positive development when the wave of Francophobia is taken into account. Had this not happened, I believe that we would have seen higher numbers. It is unfortunate that we are not able to collect statistics on high school enrollments and must depend on anecdotal accounts. A further hopeful sign is that Franco-American relations seem to have improved since Nicolas Sarkozy was elected President of France in April 2007. There is little doubt that former French Ambassador to the United States, Jean-David Levitte, has had a hand in this turnaround. The new French Ambassador, Pierre Vimont, will only add to this improved climate through his own initiatives and good will.

Now it is up to us as teachers, scholars, administrators, and good will ambassadors ourselves to redouble our efforts (as I suggested in my February 2008 editorial) to take advantage of the current good news and positive climate.

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