

Statement by Gisela Hoecherl-Alden

I am sure you have received numerous statement papers on SUNY Albany etc. and the fact that the University of Maine is also suspending German and Latin at a time when we need to teach more rather than fewer languages if our graduates are to remain competitive in the global economy. I would like to point out one little tidbit that has apparently been lost in the SUNY Albany debate: This round of cuts is just one round, German was cut years ago at SUNY Albany. So, since the original plan to cut all languages at UMaine was not put in to action, I can only assume that UMaine is proposing a staggered plan for eliminating languages. German and Latin first and French and Spanish in a few years?

Jane Smith, chair of Modern Languages and Classics, has asked that you post statements made in defense of all languages. I appreciate that the university is in dire financial straits, but I find it very short sighted to cut Latin and German. With regards to German, the cut is especially ironic in view of the Sustainability Solutions Initiative at UMaine. Since the system is also proposing the elimination of German at USM, that would leave the state of Maine with out any meaningful instruction in German at a public institution. I attended a conference at the Maine International Trade Center two weeks ago, which hosted German companies who specialize in renewable energy and are expanding in to New England. The CEOs of the companies expressly stated that they wished to work with universities in New England to create internships and jobs. Clearly, you do not have to be fluent in speaking German to work for a multi-national company, but you do have to understand basic cultural conventions and it does help if you can converse about general subjects in the employer's language. The CEOs also expressly stated that successful business connections boil down to good interpersonal relations. If you look at UMaine's recent graduates, German majors have landed prestigious Fulbright and other scholarships because they were double majors, with German as one of their major fields of study. Some of them are embarking on illustrious careers and will become the kind of alumni you would like to cultivate for future donations. Eliminating German, which enabled them to engage in life-changing study and work opportunities abroad, will undoubtedly leave them less inclined to support their alma mater.

I hate to limit myself to the "business argument", but this might speak best to the corporate mindset and bottom-line argument that currently seems to prevail in higher education. I would also like to point out that the affected parties in Latin and German were never asked if they could develop alternate models for helping the UMaine system maintain the language majors.

As for the value of language study in the 21st century, I could go on, but I believe that you, as a fellow European, understand best, since we both function professionally in English, a language that was not our own. I believe that Russell Berman, George Petsko and others have stated it much better than I can. In case you haven't already received these statements, I am pasting them below.

Thank you so much for offering to post statements of support.

All best,

Gisela Hoecherl-Alden

(Posting of additional statements pending permission)