

# From the Editor

NAMED by President Bush in fall 2005, the Commission on the Future of Higher Education has been meeting throughout the year with Margaret Spellings, secretary of education; in September, a pre-publication version of the report was made available (*Test*). In her inaugural speech, Secretary Spellings pointed out that federal dollars, including funds for research, make up about one-third of the United States investment in higher education, as compared with ten percent of total federal spending in K–12 education. But according to Spellings, unlike the situation in K–12 education, there is little monitoring of the results of federal funding in higher education. Hence the commission has been charged to examine how federal investments in higher education can best be monitored and maximized, how higher education can be made accessible and affordable, how students can be prepared for the twenty-first century workforce, and how America can maintain its position as a world leader in innovation and research. The recommendations of the commission could have major consequences, not only for students and parents, but also for the way faculty members teach and conduct research. On 20 May 2006, the *New York Times* reported that Charles Miller, a private investor and former head of the University of Texas Board of Regents, who chairs the commission, said that “he hoped the commission’s report would galvanize the Bush administration and Congress to legislate broad reforms in the nation’s system for financing and regulating higher education” (Dillon). As expected, the report of the commission suggests raising faculty productivity, the implementation of new forms of accountability, and the use of uniform instruments of assessment. All these actions could have an immediate impact on curriculum, the distribution of faculty time, and the educational process itself.

In 1986, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages released the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines to provide a common scale for measuring performance in speaking, reading, writing, and listening in a second language. This in turn led to the publication in 1996 of *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*. Summed up as the five Cs of foreign language study—communication, communities, cultures, comparisons, and connections—and based on a communicative model, the ACTFL stan-

dards evaluate knowledge principally through oral performance. Available for grades 4, 8, and 12, the standards have become a strong presence in numerous K–12 classrooms where they set the goals for the attainment of oral proficiency and are often used to gauge the performance of school districts. They are meant not to dictate course content or the curriculum per se but to guide the teaching of foreign languages. In Nebraska, Kentucky, and Virginia, however, the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages has adopted as its project the implementation of another assessment tool, based on the model of the Common European Framework of References for Languages and called *LinguaFolio* ([www.ncssl.org/links/index.php?linguafolio](http://www.ncssl.org/links/index.php?linguafolio)). Designed to connect United States standards and performance guidelines to those developed by the European Community, the *LinguaFolio* concept profiles a person’s abilities, achievements, and cultural experiences in foreign languages throughout life. *LinguaFolio* includes a description of formal schooling, course grades, and results of tests and examinations in foreign languages and goes beyond these data to list diverse forms of intercultural experiences such as travel, community work, and heritage language. While mostly used in early and secondary education, the ACTFL standards and *LinguaFolio* are starting to appear in higher education in what is now often referred to as K–16. While foreign language faculty members are cognizant of the instruments and models of language teaching, those in literature and culture need to be informed as well, so that they can adapt their courses to students’ abilities and when necessary remedy the lacunae of their preparation for upper-level programs. As an illustration of the pedagogical and methodological questions at stake, see in this issue of the *ADFL Bulletin* “Assessing Target Cultural Literacy: The Buffalo State Experience,” by Mark K. Warford. His article presents the recent history of the assessment movement and recalls some of its debates before proposing as a potential model the Buffalo State program implemented in his department for upper-level courses in French and Spanish.

The educational process, far from being a romanticized pure and untrammelled ideal, is in fact rooted in the cultural needs of communities and thus dependent on and responsive to governmental pressures and local demands. Other articles in this issue address through different lenses and in a variety of disciplinary fields issues of interconnectivity between institutions of higher learning and perceived needs at the national and local levels. Michael Holquist, in “Language and Literature in the Globalized College/University,” calls our attention to the curious and vexing fact that as universities are gearing up for the challenges of a global world, scholars of foreign cultures who should be at the center of such change are actually being marginalized and regarded, along with the humanities, as irrelevant and passé. In “The Situation of the Humanities,” Elaine Tuttle Hansen argues for the relevance, nay the importance, of a liberal arts education in a global world. For it is precisely because such an education “trains you for nothing and prepares you for everything,” she writes, that in a fast-changing world, where people have extended productive lives, the skills acquired through the humanities are essential for adapting to change and adjusting to the future.

A cluster of articles on teaching and learning Spanish brings the inside-outside arguments to the level of the academic department. Carlos J. Alonso suggests that since Spanish is a second national American language, it may be time to make United States Spanish—that is to say, not Spanish in its multiple cultures and ethnicities but home-grown American Spanish—a department that would occupy a place in academe analogous to that of English. In contrast to Alonso’s ideological argument, Carol A. Klee in “An Unforeseen Consequence of the Boom in Spanish: Who Is Teaching the Majors?” calls our attention to how the expansion of Spanish has affected the education provided to students on and off campus, the composition of the faculty, and the structure of departmental programs. These two articles make a strong case for opening a debate in the profession and more especially among faculty members in Spanish concerning needed organizational, programmatic, and curricular changes.

Whereas Alonso argues for separating Spanish from foreign language departments, Elizabeth Starcevic in “The CUNY Council on Foreign Language Study: In Unity There Is Strength” presents an opposite argument for languages other than English and, in view of my preceding paragraph, other than Spanish as well. Thus, instead of acting as iso-

lated entities on their individual campuses, departments of languages in the City University of New York, a large urban system, have created a consortium to unite their efforts. Whether it is better for a department or a section within a department to secede, engage in individual action, or practice coalition politics is a decision dictated by time, place, and needs, as well as by the limitations and possibilities existing in the particular institution.

As Melissa Fitch makes clear in “Directing Study-Abroad Programs in a Changed World: Five Lessons Learned from the Madrid Bombings,” global politics can affect our lives as teachers and scholars wherever we are. Fitch was directing a study-abroad program near Madrid when several bombs were detonated at the Alcalá de Henares train station killing 191 people and wounding 1,500. Fortunately none of her students was hurt, but the experience was traumatic for them, as well as for the author, who found herself called on to lend support to her students in new and unexpected ways. Perhaps some training in crisis management could be provided for occasional directors of study-abroad programs; in any case, it is a question well worth raising by those who serve in this capacity.

Although Arabic is prominently listed as a critical language for national security needs, the resources provided for the teaching of Arabic on United States campuses are still not a match for what Mahmoud Al-Batal describes as the crisis in teaching Arabic. Despite increasing student demand, Arabic is most often taught by native speakers who hold degrees in disciplines other than language teaching and who are employed in non-tenure-track positions. Moreover, the number of graduate students trained in Arabic language, literature, and linguistics continues to decline. The teaching of Arabic exemplifies the long-term problems created by years of neglect and the absence of a national agenda for foreign language study that is not simply reactive to times of crises.

Of special interest to new chairs and likely to elicit knowing nods of more experienced chairs is a group of articles that focus on the nuts and bolts of departmental administration: “Institutional Finance and the Role of the Foreign Language Department Chair as Financial Manager and Financial Leader,” by Constancio K. Nakuma; “How to Lobby (and How Not to Lobby) Your Dean,” by Michael R. Katz; and “Ten Things I Wish I’d Known,” by Charles J. Stivale. Finally, of equal interest to all chairs is

part 3 of Natalia Lusin's study across institutions, "The ADFL Chairs' Compensation Survey."

Nelly Furman

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## Works Cited

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