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How Foreign Language Study Can Enhance Career Possibilities. ERIC Digest.

Proficiency in a foreign language, especially when combined with knowledge of and skills in another professional area, is highly desirable in the marketplace. While fields such as librarianship, government and politics, and some areas of education, seek employees who possess foreign language proficiency in addition to expertise in their particular discipline, it is business that places the greatest emphasis on both foreign language capability and knowledge of specific subject areas like management, tourism, or finance.

HOW DO INTERNATIONAL BUSINESSES VIEW FOREIGN LANGUAGE SKILLS?

A number of studies have shown that American multinational firms rely overwhelmingly on technical or professional ability as the primary criterion for selecting managers for international assignments (Inman, 1979). The ability to adapt to a new environment, along with previous international experience, is viewed as of secondary importance, while foreign language capability in and of itself ranks far below the other attributes as a selection factor. In contrast, a number of Japanese companies require a specified proficiency level in a foreign language, generally English, before an employee may be sent abroad. In other cases, notably in European companies, proficiency in English may be a hiring criterion (Inman, 1983).

Once U.S. employees have been selected for overseas assignments, a majority of employers provide (or at least make available) language and intercultural training. In most cases, proficiency in a foreign language is not required. It is generally considered "desirable but optional." Language training is ordinarily viewed as a pre-assignment or on-assignment benefit, with attendance usually voluntary. Employees themselves are often responsible for arranging for the instruction, although the employer may provide financial support. The amount of time available for language training is often severely limited, as training must compete with the press of other activities and obligations in the time available before departure.

The level of proficiency attainable in corporate-sponsored language training programs is also limited. Most companies sponsor approximately 100 hours of instruction, and only limited progress can be anticipated with exposure this brief. The underlying assumption of this kind of policy is that business matters will be handled in English; foreign language skills will be used primarily in social situations or for getting along in everyday activities like shopping, asking directions, or requesting information. In contrast, proficiency in English is frequently required of non-native English-speaking corporate employees,

whether the company operations are in the United States or abroad. Training programs in English (as a second or foreign language) of 500 to 1000 hours and one to two years in length are common.

Many corporate executives cite the extensive use of English in international settings as the basis for their companies' policies. Some note that the initial excitement of their employees is followed by discouragement and even frustration as they become fully aware of the magnitude of the effort required to develop any meaningful proficiency in another language. Other executives state that ideally their representatives would speak local languages. Actual practice, however, has shown that it is a "rare occasion when professional capability, language capability, and a job assignment all come together at the same time" (Inman, 1979).

WHAT MATERIAL BENEFITS ARE THERE FOR THOSE WITH FOREIGN LANGUAGE SKILLS?

An employee possessing a solid combination of language and business/managerial skills can have a competitive edge over others without language capability. Bilingual individuals, often those for whom English is a second language, are in great demand. A majority of companies meet their translation and interpreting needs through employees whose major responsibilities are not language-related. In a few cases, proficiency in a foreign language may result in a pay differential of up to 10% (Inman, 1985). For example, the U.S. Army recently adopted a policy of providing a supplement ranging from \$25 to \$100 per month to personnel with foreign language skills. The specific amount of compensation the Army provides is based on the language known, the individual's proficiency level, and the importance of language skill to the person's work assignment (Carney, 1987).

WHAT PROBLEMS CAN RESULT FROM NOT KNOWING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE?

While improvements in the business climate have been documented when individuals with foreign language and cross-cultural skills have been employed, countless blunders and inefficiencies have also been recorded (Ricks, Fu, and Arpan, 1974). For example, senior staff members of foreign firms attempting to enter the complex Chinese market often have no Chinese language proficiency, nor even a rudimentary knowledge of the social customs or economic system of the country. They are soon confronted with an unfamiliar bureaucracy and many frustrating delays.

Managers admit that miscommunication occurs fairly frequently in international business settings. In business dealings, details and nuances of meaning are often missed or misinterpreted by individuals lacking real proficiency in the language being used, although all parties may believe that their overall business and daily operations run more smoothly with employees who are proficient in the foreign language. They also know that communication problems mean more time required for negotiations and other business dealings. As a result, efficiency suffers, and decisions are often made on the basis of

incomplete data. Managers also report difficulty in establishing rapport with their foreign counterparts, as well as limited opportunities for social interactions due to their lack of language proficiency.

Perhaps even more significant than a lack of foreign language capability, however, is cross-cultural misunderstanding. Corporate leaders note that difficulties often occur when "methods of analysis and motivation differ." Of special concern are the "different approaches to solving problems, getting cooperation, and achieving agreement," even when all communication takes place in the same language, notably English.

Although it is difficult to place a monetary value on missed opportunities or unsuccessful business dealings which result from communication problems, some companies have documented problem situations their employees have encountered for use in subsequent training sessions.

HOW HAVE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS RESPONDED TO THE NEED FOR PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE TRAINING?

To meet this need, many colleges and universities, and even secondary schools, have developed and offered nontraditional, interdisciplinary foreign language courses. These programs have resulted not only from the demand of the job market, but also from the dissatisfaction of both foreign language students and employers with traditional foreign language courses that have provided learners with inadequate preparation for professional use of their foreign language skills. Foreign language curricula, therefore, have expanded in scope from being predominantly literature-oriented to incorporating career training or professional education. Some nonlanguage fields, especially international business, have also begun to systematically include foreign language study in their requirements. In these programs, the content of nonlanguage courses is frequently presented in the foreign language, thus mutually reinforcing the two disciplines. A period of study and work abroad is also a common feature of such integration.

Economic interdependence among nations and renewed American interest in other cultures and peoples have led to increasing enrollments in foreign language courses, particularly in Pacific Rim languages. An emphasis on cross-cultural concerns is implicit in these kinds of courses. In addition, student and faculty exchanges figure prominently in most international programs.

The integration of career and foreign language studies contributes significantly to both the business community and the foreign language education profession. It fills a critical need in both disciplines and is leading to increasingly successful global interactions.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Berryman, S. E. FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES SPECIALISTS: THE MARKETPLACE AND NATIONAL POLICY. Report prepared

by the Rand Corporation for the National Endowment for the Humanities, 1979. ED 188 486.

Carney, L. "6,800 Soldiers to Receive Language Proficiency Pay." ARMY TIMES, Sept. 14, 1987, 1, 61.

Edgerton, M. F., Jr. COMPETENCE IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: A VALUABLE ADJUNCT SKILL IN THE EIGHTIES. Paper presented at the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1980. ED 191 306.

Inman, M. FOREIGN LANGUAGES, ENGLISH AS A SECOND/FOREIGN LANGUAGE, AND THE U.S. MULTINATIONAL CORPORATION. (Language in Education series no. 16.) Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, 1979. ED 179 089.

Inman, M. "Interethnic Communication in the International Business Environment." SOUTHWEST JOURNAL OF LINGUISTICS 6 (1983): 133-44.

Inman, M. "Language and Cross-cultural Training in American Multinational Corporations." MODERN LANGUAGE JOURNAL 69 (1985): 247-55.

Ricks, D.A., M.Y.S. Fu, and J.S. Arpan. INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS BLUNDERS. Columbus, OH: Grid, 1974.

Ristau, R. A. PRESENT AND FUTURE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE: A STUDY OF EMPLOYMENT NEEDS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND EMPLOYER EXPECTATIONS IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE--AN EXAMINATION OF POSITIONS IN BUSINESSES WITH BILINGUAL REQUIREMENTS. Paper presented at the Eastern Michigan University Conference on Spanish for Bilingual Careers in Business, 1982. ED 224 305.

Waltz, L. E. INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS: STUMBLING THROUGH THE COMMUNICATIONS CORRIDOR. Paper presented at the Eastern Michigan University Conference on Spanish for Bilingual Careers in Business, 1982. ED 224 301.

Weatherford, H. J. "Personal Benefits of Foreign Language Study." ERIC Digest, 1986. ED 276 305.

Some websites about foreign language careers:

About Court Interpreting: <http://www.najit.org/faq.html>

A Career in Teaching ESL:

http://www.tesol.org/s_tesol/seccss.asp?CID=232&DID=1703

Careers in Foreign Languages: <http://www.iupui.edu/~flac/FLCareers.html>

Careers in Foreign Languages: http://www.rollins.edu/Foreign_Lang/careers.html

Careers in Foreign Language: <http://www.samford.edu/schools/artsci/wlc/career.htm>

Career Opportunities for Modern Foreign Languages:

<http://clem.mscd.edu/~career/modern.htm>

Interpreters and Translators: <http://bls.gov/oco/ocos175.htm>

Foreign Languages and Careers

ERIC/CLL Minibib, December 1995

Compiled by Craig Packard

Articles

- EJ 499 380 **Meara, Paul. "What Should Language Graduates Be Able to Do?"** *Language Learning Journal*; n9 (Mar 1994) p36-40.
A survey assessing student concepts of an ideal graduate linguist vis-...-vis actual language ability revealed little agreement about necessary or prerequisite skills. The survey also showed a high level of complacency about respondents' own abilities.
- EJ 368 413 **"Foreign Languages and Your Career and English and Your Career and Social Studies and Your Career."** *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*; v31 n4 (Win 1987) p20-28.
A three-article combination discusses the relevance of course work in foreign languages, English, and social studies to specific occupational areas, along with jobs that make primary or secondary use of skills gained from such course work.
- EJ 364 962 **Elling, Barbara. "National Trends: Implications for Graduate Student Training and Career Placement."** *ADFL Bulletin*; v19 n2 (Jan 1988) p45-48.
Discussion of problems facing doctoral degree foreign language graduates in their career searches touches on aspects of the employment market and job search process.
- EJ 339 943 **Gould, John W. "For Doing Business Abroad, How Much Foreign Language Proficiency is Enough?"** *Bulletin of the Association for Business Communication*; v49 n3 (Sep 1986) p26-28.
Business communication students learning a foreign language are encouraged to work on conversational skills more than reading in order to be better able to interact well with foreign clients.
- EJ 305 529 **Livingston, Kriemhilde I. R. "The Translator-Interpreter: A Special Breed."** *ADFL Bulletin*; v16 n1 (Sep 1984) p48-50.
Translation courses added to the average college curriculum equip students with the training, background, and tools to deal with such work as nonfiction, scientific, technical, medical, legal, business-commercial, and journalistic translation.

EJ 288 293 **Arnold, Don; And Others.** "Counseling Students for Business Careers that Require Foreign Language Training: Three Perspectives." *ADFL Bulletin*; v15 n1 (Sep 1983) p15-26.

A presentation of the viewpoints of a high school foreign language teacher/career counselor, a French professor/translator-interpreter, and a business professor on business careers and language training includes a bibliography and notes places that list employment opportunities.

Documents

ED 375 660 **Adelman, Clifford.** *What Employers Expect of College Graduates: International Knowledge and Second Language Skills. Education Research Report.* Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Washington, DC. July 1994. 6pp.

Eight major US-based international corporations, when surveyed, described expectations and preferences of recent graduates. While the value placed on second-language proficiency is rising, prospective employees tend to overvalue and overclaim skills and knowledge, thereby forcing continuing reliance by corporations on local expertise overseas.

ED 355 777 **Lambert, Richard D; Moore, Sarah Jane, Eds.** *Foreign Language in the Workplace.* American Academy of Political and Social Science Annals; v511 (Sep 1990) 232pp.

The theme issue of this journal contains articles devoted to such topics as language use in international research, foreign language needs of US- and UK-based corporations, foreign language use among international business graduates, federal government foreign language needs, the translation profession in the United States today, interpretation in the United States, and bilingualism in the workplace.

ED 348 855 **Bryan, Lynn B.** *An Uncommon Internship: Exploring Options in Careers Enhanced by Foreign Language Skills.* 1991. 12pp.

The internship program described, instituted at Macon College (Georgia), provides about 140 hours of on-the-job experience. Students research and develop a project related to their interests and incorporate foreign language skills while reviewing and practicing those skills.

ED 345 540 **Hammond, Deanna Lindberg.** *The Translation Profession.* ERIC Digest. ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, Washington, DC. Apr 1992. 2pp.

Translators-demand for whose services is at an all-time high-work with written language either in-house for a business, translation agency, or other institution, or as free-lancers. Translators must be able to express ideas (formulated by someone else) in the target language, usually requiring

subject-specific terminology, awareness of grammar and style, regional language, and language nuances. Further discussion covers recommended qualifications, skills, and typical training courses.

- ED 342 234 **King, Ann; Thomas, Gareth, Eds. *Languages and Careers: An Information Pack*. Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research, London (England). 1989. 183pp.**
This set of materials-for teachers, students, administrators, and counselors-concerns the relationship between second language knowledge and careers. It contains 1) a set of essays for teachers on languages and careers; 2) answers to students' questions about language study and careers; 3) facts sheets on standardized test programs, financial aid opportunities, professionals associations, etc.; 4) promotional posters; 5) booklets for both secondary and college students about careers and second languages; and 6) a student guide to working and studying in Europe.
- ED 332 490 **Torbert, Eugene C. "Books on Foreign Languages and Careers." *Illinois Foreign Language Association Newsletter*; Sum 1989 p2-6.**
The 10 books in the annotated bibliography discuss careers vis-a-vis second language skills, addressing such specific career areas as intelligence, international trade, and world affairs. Some of the books offer a general focus on career awareness and language training.
- ED 314 935 **de Jongh, Elena M. *Court Interpreting: Anatomy of a Profession*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (San Antonio, TX, Aug 10-14, 1989). 16pp.**
The legal interpreter must master specific memory and language skills and command various interpretation modes-simultaneous, consecutive, summary, and sight translation. Appropriateness of each mode is contingent on the situation, facilities, number of persons needing the service, and equipment availability.
- ED 295 490 **Leaver, Betty Lou. *Government Jobs and Careers in Foreign Languages*. 1988. 12pp.**
The many diverse opportunities for foreign language students in government employment are sometimes hard to locate or are advertised only selectively. Civil service jobs and both paid and unpaid internships are available. A list of 40 Federal agencies notes typical job slots and offers an outline of the application process.

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Careers in Foreign Languages

<http://www.longwood.edu/modernlanguages/Careers.htm>

Knowledge of foreign languages and cultures may be the key to a job you want or to eventual promotion in your career field. Multinational business and finance is becoming more and more the rule (over thirty per cent of American companies now have multinational connections). Advanced communications technology is bringing all parts of the world into closer contact. Careers in public service (police, health professionals, social services professionals, teachers) increasingly require the knowledge of other languages to serve the many people of other cultures with whom they work. Even lawyers and doctors are finding it useful, if not necessary, to have experience communicating in other languages and with people of other cultures. Consider the ability to speak, read, write and understand a foreign language as a supplementary job skill to be added to your major career area: take as many language courses as you can fit in; take advantage of the opportunities for specialized language training--(for example, Longwood offers specialized courses in the areas of business, health professions, law enforcement, arts, teaching)--after you have learned the basics, and go from there; work your way up to a minor; don't shy away from considering a second major in the language of your choice.

The following websites contain information on the kinds of careers available to those who speak a foreign language, the preparation you need for certain careers, and the kinds of abilities needed.

Websites with foreign language career information

[What can I do with a Foreign Language degree?](#)

(Very practical info., including strategies for now and when you graduate. pdf. file, compiled by University of Tennessee, Knoxville)

[Why Learn Another Language? brochure](#)

[Longwood University Career Center Foreign Languages Site](#)

[International Job Search Info](#)

[UNC Wilmington Foreign Language Career site](#) (contains lots of useful info and more links!)

[Indiana University-Purdue University list of careers by field](#)

[Georgia Southern University's site](#) (contains good info on what to do with languages)

[Skidmore's site containing employment links](#)

[Rutgers site](#)

[Harding University site](#) (good orientation to careers and languages)

[CIA Foreign Language Career site](#)

[CIA Language Positions site](#)

[U.S. Department of State Career as a Foreign Service Officer](#)

[National Security Agency Foreign Language Careers](#)

[MonsterTrak Majors to Career converter](#) (pretty cool)

[MultilingualVacancies.com](#)

Associations related to various careers in foreign languages

[The American Association of Language Specialists](#)

[American Translators Association](#)

[The American Literary Translator's Association](#)

[The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages](#)

[Links to many Foreign Language Teaching Associations](#)

[Linguistic Society of America](#)

[Foreign Policy Association](#)

[Women's Foreign Policy Group](#)

[American Foreign Service Association](#)

[International Association of Political Consultants](#)

[The Society for International Development](#)

[World Affairs Council](#)

[NAFSA: Association of International Educators](#)

[United Nations](#)

[Employment at the United Nations](#)

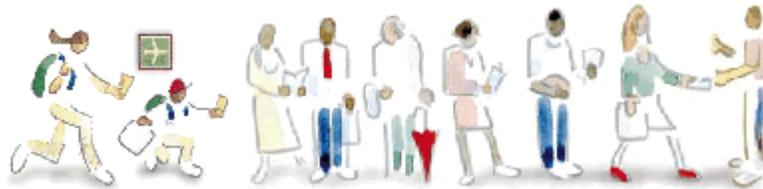
Foreign Language Facts for Career Planning

(from: Eastern Kentucky University's career site
<http://www.humanities.eku.edu/Careers.htm>)

- The USA's trade partners in the North American Free Trade Agreement are Canada (bilingual English/French) and Mexico (Spanish-speaking).
- Germany is one of the most important nations in the world economy, and is the third largest trade partner of the United States as well as a key ally.
- The largest market and economic bloc in the world today is the European Union-- the two major economic powerhouse nations within the EU are France and Germany. One of the EU nations with a rapidly-growing economy is Spain.
- For most scientists, a reading knowledge of German is essential.
- Government agencies and businesses that deal with Hispanic immigrants are looking for personnel, ranging from lawyers to health professionals to librarians, who speak Spanish.
- France has the second greatest aeronautical industry in the world and is a leader in computer technology, telecommunications, and medical research.
- Professional-level jobs are opening up in Spanish-speaking Mexico for American college graduates.

*The above-mentioned foreign languages are all taught
at Longwood University.*

Why Learn Another Language?



Knowing Other Languages Brings Opportunities

Learn Another Culture! Get Ahead! Get a Better Job!

[The world is full of languages.](#)

How far do you have to go from your front door to know that this is true? Think about how many more people and places you could really get to know, newspapers and books you could read, movies and TV programs you could understand, Web sites you could visit, with another language!



**Give Yourself a
Competitive Edge**



[Did you know that studying a second language can improve your skills and grades in math and English and can improve entrance](#)

exam scores — SATs, ACTs, GREs, MCATs, and LSATs?

Research has shown that math and verbal SAT scores climb higher with each additional year of foreign language study, which means that the longer you study a foreign language, the stronger your skills become to succeed in school. Studying a foreign language can improve your analytic and interpretive capacities. And three years of language study on your record will catch the eye of anyone reading your job or college application.

If you've already learned a language other than English at home, expanding your knowledge of its vocabulary, grammar, culture, and literature — at the same time you are learning English — will also improve your chances for success in school and in your career.



The Job Advantage in a Global Economy

More and more businesses work closely with companies in other countries. They need many different kinds of workers who can communicate in different languages and understand other cultures. No matter what career you choose, if you've learned a second language, you'll have a real advantage. A technician who knows Russian or German, the head of a company who knows Japanese or Spanish, or a salesperson who knows French or Chinese can work successfully with many more people and in many more places than someone who knows only one language.

There are lots of Americans who speak languages other than English. If you've ever thought of being a nurse, a doctor, a police officer, a judge, an architect, a businessperson, a singer, a plumber, or a Web master, you will multiply your chances for success if you speak more than one language. A hotel manager or a customer-service representative who knows English and Spanish or English and Korean may look much better at promotion time than one who knows only English.

Professionals who know other languages are called on to travel and exchange information with people in other countries throughout their careers. Knowing more than one language enhances opportunities in government, business, medicine and health care, law enforcement, teaching, technology, the military, communications, industry, social service, and marketing. An employer will see you as a bridge to new clients or customers if

you know a second language.



**Learning Other Cultures:
Your World and Beyond**



Discover new worlds! Get an insider's view of another culture and a new view of your own.

Connect with other cultures. Knowledge of other cultures will help you expand your personal horizons and become a responsible citizen. Your ability to talk to others and gather information beyond the world of English will contribute to your community and your country.



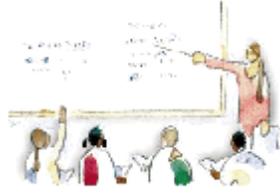
**Going for the Excitement:
New Ways of Language
Learning**

What can you expect? You will learn a second language in exciting new ways using technology and focusing on communication (speaking). Learning a language is not just learning grammar and vocabulary. It is learning new sounds, expressions, and ways of seeing things; it is learning how to function in another culture, how to know a new community from the inside out.

How much can you learn? Depending on how long you study, you can gain different levels of fluency. You will probably not sound like a native speaker. Don't worry; you're not expected to. To a greater or lesser degree you will, however, be understood, get where you want to go, read magazines or books for information or pleasure, and meet and talk with a whole new group of people. You can't imagine what a great experience that is. Of course, it doesn't happen overnight. Like math, English, or other subjects, language learning takes time.

Should you continue language study after high school? Yes! Don't waste your investment of time and effort; whatever you have learned is a foundation for further study. Stick with it. Use your second language on the job, seek out opportunities to use it in your community, or, in college, take more courses, study abroad at intersession or for a summer, a semester, or a year. Some

programs teach languages in conjunction with engineering, business, nursing, or journalism. And you might decide to start still another language — when you study language, you learn about how to learn languages, so learning the next one is easier.



**Which Language
Should You Learn?**

There's no one answer. Here are the twelve most likely to be offered in your high school or college: Spanish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Russian, Hebrew, Greek, Chinese, Arabic, and Portuguese. Swahili, American Sign Language, and Navajo — and 121 other languages — are also taught in American high schools, colleges, and universities. **Whatever language you choose, learning it will make a difference in how you see the world and in how the world sees you.**

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[Longwood University Modern Language Program](#)



Why Learn a Second Language?

Learn about another culture! Get ahead! Get a better job! The world is full of languages. How far do you have to go from your front door to know that this is true? Think about how many more newspapers and books you could read, movies and TV programs you could understand, websites you could visit, people and places you could really get to know with another language!

Did you know that studying a second language can improve your skills and grades in math and English and can improve entrance exam scores — SATs, ACTs, GREs, MCATs, and LSATs? Research has shown that math and verbal SAT scores climb higher with each additional year of foreign language study, which means that the longer you study a foreign language, the stronger your skills become to succeed in school. Studying a foreign language can improve your analytic and interpretive capacities. And three years of language study on your record will catch the eye of anyone reading your job, college, or graduate school application.

If you've already learned a language other than English at home, expanding your knowledge of its vocabulary, grammar, culture, and literature — at the same time you are learning English — will also improve your chances for success in school and in your career. More and more businesses work closely with companies in other countries. They need many different kinds of workers who can communicate in different languages and understand other cultures.

No matter what career you choose, if you've learned a second language, you'll have a real advantage. A technician who knows Russian or German, the head of a company who knows Japanese or Spanish, or a salesperson who knows French or Chinese can work successfully with many more people and in many more places than someone who knows only one language.

There are lots of Americans who speak languages other than English. If you've ever thought of being a nurse, a doctor, a police officer, a judge, an architect, a businessperson, a singer, a plumber, or a Webmaster, you will multiply your chances for success if you speak more than one language. A hotel manager or a customer service representative who knows English and Spanish or English and Korean may look much better at promotion time than one who knows only English.

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Whatever language you choose, learning it will make a difference in how you see the world and in how the world sees you.

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Visit entirely new worlds! Get an insider's view of another culture and a new view of your own. Connect with other cultures. Knowledge of other cultures will help you expand your personal horizons and become a responsible citizen. Your ability to talk to others and gather information beyond the world of English will contribute to your community and your country.

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