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# Latin and Greek Enrollments in America's Schools and Colleges

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THE resurgence of interest in Latin in the United States that began more than two decades ago continues and has accelerated, according to several recently published reports and other indicators. Although data collected by the Modern Language Association indicate that college Latin enrollments declined between 1990 and 1998 (along with enrollments in French, German, Japanese, and Russian; see Brod and Welles), the 1998 figure is nevertheless the second highest in the past thirty years, and there is evidence of growth since 1998. Public school Latin enrollments, which dropped precipitously throughout the early 1960s and mid 1970s, have been increasing since 1976, with dramatic gains seen during the 1990s; between 1990 and 1994, according to figures gathered by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL; see Draper and Hicks), Latin enrollments rose more than 15% in grades 9-12, 34% in grades 7 and 8, and 113% in grades K-6 (see [table 1](#)). Other indicators, such as participation rates in the National Latin Exam and the Advanced Placement Vergil and Latin Literature Exams, suggest that enrollments have continued their upward spiral through the 1998-99 school year ([table 2](#)). Greek enrollments, while considerably lower than Latin enrollments, appear to have remained stable since 1990 in both the schools and the colleges, where there had been a 50% drop since 1974.

Following a period of steady decline from the late 1960s through the mid to late 1970s, foreign language study overall in the United States has been rising for the past fifteen to twenty years. The recommendations of President Carter's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies (Commission) and numerous subsequent education reports, which focused on political and economic considerations, as well as the restoration of college foreign language requirements (LaFleur, "Classical Languages" and "Foreign Language"; Brod and Huber, "MLA Survey"), were important factors in the renaissance of language study generally. Latin enrollments, for example, had dropped by nearly 80% in the public secondary schools between 1962 and 1976 and by nearly 40% in the colleges. But a heightened public awareness of the subject's benefits, including enhanced English language skills and broadened historical and multicultural perspectives, contributed much to the quickening resurgence seen over the past two decades, as did the development of new, more effective texts, classroom resources, and methodologies and concerted promotional efforts by the American Classical League (ACL) and other professional organizations (LaFleur, *Teaching*, "Enrollments," "Latin," *Latin*). This article summarizes and briefly analyzes the latest ACTFL and MLA surveys, as well as more recent reports published by ACL, the American Philological Association (APA), the College Board, and other professional groups.<sup>1</sup>

## Colleges and Universities

In its survey of fall 1998 college foreign language registrations (Brod and Welles), the MLA reported an overall increase of 4.8% (from 1,138,772 to 1,193,830), with Latin increasing by 1% (from 25,897 to 26,145; see [table 1](#)) and ancient Greek remaining stable (up by 0.8%, from 16,272 to 16,402). Several commonly taught languages dropped, however--French by 3.1%, German by 7.5%, Japanese by 3.5%, and Russian by 3.8% (with 23,791 enrolled, Russian was surpassed by Latin for the second consecutive time since 1980 among the most commonly taught languages). Despite these declines, the 1998 total college foreign language enrollment figure is the highest ever recorded by the MLA since its surveys began in 1958. The largest percentage gains were in biblical Hebrew (up 61.1%, to 9,099), Korean (up 34%, to 4,479), and Arabic (up 23.9%, to 5,505).

Spanish showed the greatest gain in total numbers, up 8.3% to 656,590, further solidifying its position as the language most widely studied in college. American Sign Language rose by 165.3%, to 11,420.

Notably, of the 26,145 Latin registrations reported for 1998, 840 were in two-year colleges, up 92.2% from 437 in 1983. The status of classical studies in two-year institutions has been the focus of an APA committee for the past several years, and a useful survey of the growth of Latin instruction in community colleges appeared in *Classical Outlook* in 1994 (Searles; see also Pascal). Of the 25,305 Latin registrations in four-year institutions for 1998, 894 were graduate registrations (1,040 in 1995, 958 in 1990, 817 in 1986, 894 in 1983) and the remainder undergraduate. The 26,145 total Latin registrations represent 0.179% of the estimated total college and university population, down from 0.204% in 1990 ([table 1](#)). Modern foreign languages, by contrast, increased as a percentage of the total college population, from 7.7% in 1995 to an estimated 7.9% in 1998 (Brod and Welles, table 3). As a percentage of total college foreign language registrations, Latin has continued a slow decline from 3.1% in 1968, to 2.7% in 1980, 2.5% in 1986, 2.4% in 1990, 2.3% in 1995, and 2.2% in 1998 (Brod and Welles, table 5).

Total college Latin enrollment had seen its greatest gain in a generation during the late 1980s, rising 12.5% from 25,038 in 1986 to 28,178 in 1990; the 1995 and 1998 figures, though down somewhat, are still among the highest in the last thirty years. A previous analysis of classical language enrollments (LaFleur, "Enrollments" 121) had projected a potential negative effect from two sources, the recession of the early 1990s and the continued growth of the LCTLs (the "less commonly taught" languages). Both of these, it may be surmised, were significant factors in the loss of college Latin enrollments between 1990 and 1995. Enrollments in the category of "other" languages rose by 42% over these four years, and languages designated by the MLA as LCTLs tripled between 1968 and 1995, increasing 84% between 1986 and 1995 alone (Brod and Huber, "Enrollments" 60). Many college and university classics departments lost faculty lines as a consequence of the recession during this same period of the early 1990s, as evidenced by, inter alia, the depressed job market for classics PhDs.

There is, however, some evidence of an upturn during the late 1990s. Membership in the APA (see [table 2](#)), which is one indicator, albeit imperfect, of growth in classical language teaching at the college level, after fluctuating in the 2,800-3,100 range between 1974 and 1994, rose to 3,378 in 1997 (a record high) and 3,276 in 1998. Moreover, the number of positions advertised through the APA's placement service rose about 20% between 1992 and 1999 (from the 120s to the 140s), and the number of jobs actually filled appears to have increased at an even higher rate (see Tompkins 18; Hubbard; Vaughan).

### **The Secondary Schools, Grades 9-12**

According to the most recent ACTFL survey, published by Jamie Draper and June Hicks in 1996 (plans for the next survey have not yet been finalized), public secondary school Latin enrollments rose 15.2% between 1990 and 1994, from 163,923 to 188,833, the greatest percentage increase since the 1950s and the highest total number since 1970. For the first time since 1976, Latin had dropped between 1985 and 1990, the previous ACTFL reporting period, but that was in significant measure a product of the declining high school population; in fact, Latin has continued its steady growth as a percentage of the total public secondary school population from 1.1% in 1976 to 1.6% in 1994 (see [table 1](#)). Moreover, other data that in combination have proved to be fairly reliable indicators of Latin enrollment suggest further growth through the 1998-99 academic year ([table 2](#)). Participation in the National Latin Exam has continued to rise, with the number of applications up more than 22% between 1994 and 1999, from 94,000 to 115,000, while between 1994 and 1999 the number of Advanced Placement Latin exam participants increased over 49%, from 3,768 to 5,624 (Howard). Membership in the National Junior Classical League, an organization for high school Latin students, rose by 2% during the period 1994 to 1999, from 54,363 to 55,482, and the number of ACL members, predominantly secondary school Latin teachers, also grew slightly between 1994 and 1999, from 3,964 to 4,017.

Private school data are not systematically collected by ACTFL or any other national agency and can only be estimated. A 1993-94 survey of 4,400 private schools conducted by June Hall and Ed Phinney under the auspices of the National Committee for Latin and Greek and the National Latin Exam Committee reported over 45,000 Latin students enrolled in grades K-12. The response rate to the survey was low (about 25%), however, and the actual numbers are doubtless considerably--possibly as much as two to three times--higher. The results of a survey of over 24,000 1994 graduates from a representative sampling of 340 public and private high schools around the country showed that, while 3.6% of public school students had studied Latin at some point in grades 9-12, 5.8% of Catholic school students and 21.1% of private secular school students had done so (Finn, esp. app., table 2A). Such groups as the Association of Classical and Christian Schools (see their Web site at <<http://www.accsedu.org/>>) are now requiring two years of Latin or ancient Greek, growing numbers of home-

schoolers are opting for Latin (many of them using Waldo Sweet's *Artes Latinae* program, reissued a few years ago by Bolchazy-Carducci and available now in CD-ROM format), and others are availing themselves of Internet tutorials (see, e.g., the Web site for Escondido Tutorial Service at <http://www.gbt.org/>), which offers Latin courses by Wesley Callihan, WCall@turbonet.com).

Secondary school Greek enrollments continue to be very low, though the numbers reported by ACTFL did increase from 255 in 1990 to 928 in 1994 (see Davis 47); again the figures are for public schools only, excluding the Association of Classical and Christian Schools and thousands of other private schools around the country. As indicated in a previous analysis (LaFleur, "Enrollments"), the 1990 ACTFL public secondary school figure was itself clearly low, since 934 students participated in ACL's National Greek Exam that year, including 345 public secondary school students and 442 in private schools, as well as 147 in colleges). As seen in [table 2](#), National Greek Exam participation rates varied little throughout the 1990s, remaining in the 800-1,000 range.

### **The Middle Schools, Grades 7 and 8**

Middle school Latin enrollments, which increased 55.2% between 1985 and 1990, from 12,179 to 18,897, rose by another 34.1% to 25,349 in 1994. Even these figures may be low, because of inconsistencies in the reporting of traditional Latin 1 and 2 numbers versus (more often underreported) Latin exploratory courses. The rapid growth of middle school Latin is due in significant measure to the proliferation of excellent new classroom materials and texts aimed at this age group (such as *The Cambridge Latin Course*, *Ecce Romani*, *First Latin*, *Latin Is Fun*, *Phenomenon of Language*, and *Salvete*; see Osburn), the efforts of professional groups (including the Natl. Committee for Latin and Greek and ACL's Task Force on Latin in the Middle Schools), and the carryover of interest from Latin in grades K-6, which has also grown dramatically over the past decade (see below and [table 1](#)). Other factors affecting enrollments in K-8 are inclusion of Latin as a requirement in the Edison Project curriculum for grades 6-8 and adoption of the Alexandria Project curriculum by many Montessori schools in grades 4-8.

Combined Latin enrollments in grades 7-12 totaled 214,182 for 1994, up 17.2% from 182,820 in 1990, compared with only a 3.9% increase in the grades 7-12 enrollment from 1990 to 1994 for all foreign languages combined (Draper and Hicks 303). Again, it should be noted that these ACTFL figures include public schools only; private school data would boost the number considerably. Of all students enrolled in foreign language classes, grades 7-12, in fall 1994, 3.5% were studying Latin, following only German with 6.1%, French with 22.3%, and Spanish with 64.5%.

### **The Elementary Schools, Grades K-6**

Following a steady rise is FLES programs (Foreign Language in the Elementary Schools), ACTFL first gathered and reported statistics for grades K-6 in its 1990 survey (Draper; LaFleur, "Enrollments"). For that survey twenty-two states reported that 548,000 (4.2%) of their 12.9 million elementary school youngsters were receiving foreign language instruction, including 2,001 students enrolled in Latin as reported by only four states (MN, NY, SC, WI). For the 1994 survey twenty-four states indicated that 5% of their 13.6 million K-6 students were taking foreign language. A total of 4,265 K-6 pupils were reported to be studying Latin, a 113% increase over 1990, with only seven states responding: California (123 students), Kentucky (267), Louisiana (12), Maryland (1,355), Missouri (519), New York (1,921), and Ohio (68). While it is gratifying to note the dramatic increases for Latin both in raw numbers and percentages, it is clear that once again, with only twenty-four states responding altogether, the figures are grossly underreported for all languages.

For Latin, as noted in a previous analysis (LaFleur, "Enrollments"), the data are especially susceptible to underreporting, since FLES Latin is very often taught as part of the language arts curriculum, with the result that enrollments are frequently not recorded at all. In an informal survey conducted in 1997, I was easily able to identify FLES Latin programs in public schools in fourteen states not accounted for in the ACTFL survey, including, for example, Pennsylvania, where approximately 8,000 elementary school youngsters were receiving Latin instruction from itinerant teachers with the materials first developed by Rudolph Masciantonio in the 1970s (see Polsky).

Certainly FLES Latin continues to rise, again as a result of the publication of new texts and classroom resources, growing popular interest, and the successful efforts of professional organizations--especially ACL, with its Elementary Teachers of Classics group, their Classics Teaching Packets and recently revived newsletter *Prima*, the Task Force on Latin in the Elementary Schools, and the publicity packets, exemplary programs materials, and textbook database developed by the National Committee for Latin and Greek. Again, from information directly received from individual schools and districts in states that did not respond to ACTFL and from sales of

textbooks such as Marion Polsky's *First Latin* and Ed Phinney's *Salvete* and of materials for FLES Latin distributed by ACL's Teaching Materials and Resource Center, as well as other anecdotal evidence, it is clear that the ACTFL figure constitutes only a fraction of the actual total number of K-6 pupils studying the language and culture of ancient Rome. The near tripling of participation in the Elementary Teachers of Classics National Mythology Exam over the ten years since its inception in 1990 (see [table 1](#)), while it cannot be directly correlated with the study of Latin in grades K-6, is nevertheless one further indication of the rise of interest in classical culture generally in the elementary schools.

Clearly, for teachers of classical languages and their students, the news is generally good. Greek continues to hold its own, and Latin, although it declined slightly in the colleges between 1990 and 1998, is rising overall at a quickening pace, particularly in grades K-12. The public's fascination with the ancient world of Greece and Rome remains a powerful one indeed--witness the widespread appeal of several recent translations of the classics (notably Robert Fagles's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*), television's top-rated *Xena: Warrior Princess*, and even the \$30 million miniseries *The Odyssey* (which, with all its shortcomings, surely kindled a new awareness of Homer among countless hundreds of thousands of Americans who might otherwise have never recognized the name).

Popular interest in the Latin language itself is evidenced not only by the increased enrollments and other data examined above but also by the success of Jukka Ammond's "Latin Elvis" CD and such coffee-table books as Eugene Ehrlich's *Amo, Amas, Amat and More: How to Use Latin to Your Own Advantage and to the Astonishment of Others* and its sequel *Veni, Vidi, Vici: Conquer Your Enemies, Impress Your Friends with Everyday Latin*, Henry Beard's *Latin for All Occasions* and *Latin for Even More Occasions*, and of course Alexander Lenard's perennial Latin Milne, *Winnie Ille Pu* (in print continuously since 1960, save for a short hiatus in the late 1970s). Articles proclaiming and analyzing Latin's resurgence continue to appear frequently both in the popular media (e.g., Hardy; Flaherty; Barnard; Hill) and in such publications as *Lingua Franca* and the *Economist* (Damrosch; Wooldridge).

Despite these bright lights, Latin is still studied by only a tiny fraction of America's high schoolers, and college Greek and Latin, while relatively stable in terms of raw numbers, continue to decline as a percentage of the total college and university population. The accelerating growth of Latin in grades K-12 is certainly encouraging and is bound to have a positive effect on the study of classics in college, but there are continuing problems and challenges in the academy that must be addressed (see esp. Galinsky; Damrosch; Wills; Hanson and Heath; LaFleur, "Latin"). Fortunately, teachers of classical languages are continuing and intensifying their efforts in developing and employing new, livelier, and more effective methods and resources, in constantly reinterpreting the classics for an ever-changing audience, in promoting classical studies among the public at large, and in networking and collaborating not only with other classicists but also with their colleagues in modern language teaching and at all educational levels from grade school to graduate seminar.

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## Note

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**Table 1 Classical Language Enrollments in United States Public Schools and Public and Private Colleges and Universities, 1960-98**

Year	Enrollments, Grades 9-12 <sup>a</sup>	Latin, Grades 9-12 <sup>a</sup>	Latin as a Percentage of Enrollments, Grades 9-12 <sup>a</sup>	Latin, Grades 7 and 8 <sup>a</sup>	Latin, Grades K-6 <sup>a</sup>	College Enrollments <sup>b</sup>	Latin, College <sup>b</sup>	Latin, as a Percentage of College Enrollments	Ancient Greek, College <sup>b</sup>	Greek, as a Percentage of College Enrollments
1960	8,649,495	654,670	7.6			3,789,000 <sup>c</sup>	25,700 <sup>d</sup>	0.678	12,700 <sup>d</sup>	0.335
1961	9,246,925	695,297	7.5							
1962	9,891,185	702,135	7.1							
1963	10,750,081	680,234	6.3							
1964	11,075,343	590,047	5.3							
1965	11,611,197	591,445	5.1			5,920,864	39,600 <sup>e</sup>	0.669	19,500 <sup>e</sup>	0.329
1968	12,721,352	371,977	2.9			7,513,091	34,981	0.466	17,516	0.233
1970	13,301,883	265,293	2.0			8,580,887	27,591	0.322	16,697	0.195
1972						9,214,820	24,398	0.265	20,584	0.223
1974	13,648,906	167,165	1.2			10,223,729	25,167	0.246	24,391	0.239
1976	13,952,058	150,470	1.1							

1977							11,285,787	24,403	0.216	25,843	0.229
1978	13,941,369	151,782	1.1								
1980							12,096,895	25,035	0.207	22,111	0.182
1982	12,879,254	169,580	1.3	8,389	170,756 <sup>f</sup>						
1983							12,464,661	24,224	0.194	19,350	0.155
1985	12,466,506	176,841	1.4	12,179	189,509						
1986							12,503,511	25,038	0.200	17,608	0.141
1990	11,099,648	163,923	1.5	18,897	182,820	2,001	13,818,637	28,178	0.204	16,401	0.119
1994	11,847,469	188,833	1.6	25,349	214,182	4,265					
1995							14,261,781	25,897	0.182	16,272	0.114
1998							14,590,000 <sup>c</sup>	26,145	0.179	16,402	0.112

<sup>a</sup>Source: Draper and Hicks.

<sup>b</sup>Source: Brod and Huber. Includes two-year and four-year colleges and universities, public and private.

<sup>c</sup>Estimated by United States Department of Education (see Brod and Welles).

<sup>d</sup>Estimated by MLA.

<sup>e</sup>Rounded to the nearest hundred by MLA.

<sup>f</sup>Grades 7 and 8 and 9-12 totals do not always equal grades 7-12 totals because of variances in ACTFL projections.

**Table 2**

**Classical Language Exam Participants and National Classical Association Memberships, 1960-99**

Year Applied	National Latin Exam <sup>a</sup>		Advanced Placement Latin Exam <sup>b</sup>					Scholastic Aptitude Test II: Latin Subject Test <sup>b,c</sup>	Other Exams			Memberships		
									National Greek Exam Registrants <sup>a</sup>	National Mythology Exam Registrants <sup>a</sup>	National American Classical League <sup>a</sup>	National Junior Classical League <sup>a</sup>	National American Philological Association <sup>d</sup>	
														Catullus/ Vergil
1960	-	-	-	-	-	-	208	10,048	-	-	4,622	72,280	-	
1961	-	-	-	-	-	-	352	13,474	-	-	5,497	84,070	-	
1962	-	-	-	-	-	-	439	16,980	-	-	5,613	101,416	1,568	
1963	-	-	-	-	-	-	677	17,788	-	-	5,936	105,238	1,685	
1964	-	-	-	-	-	-	862	20,244	-	-	6,252	107,086	1,784	
1965	-	-	-	-	-	-	885	22,297	-	-	6,120	101,810	1,855	
1966	-	-	-	-	-	-	984	20,670	-	-	6,064	106,990	2,053	
1967	-	-	-	-	-	-	882	19,561	-	-	5,855	98,201	2,175	
1968	-	-	-	-	-	-	971	18,462	-	-	5,812	88,727	2,355	
1969	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,208	15,920	-	-	5,209	51,437	2,468	
1970	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,046	12,777	-	-	4,465	52,339	2,586	
1971	-	-	-	-	-	-	975	7,460	-	-	4,118	43,741	2,770	
1972	-	-	-	-	-	-	853	5,425	-	-	3,872	39,772	2,765	
1973	-	-	-	-	-	-	705	4,231	-	-	3,444	36,890	2,837	
1974	-	-	-	-	-	-	611	3,049	-	-	3,562	31,918	2,861	
1975	-	-	-	-	-	-	624	1,433	-	-	3,469	28,894	2,900	
1976	-	-	-	-	-	-	745	1,555	-	-	2,970	30,532	2,928	
1977	-	-	-	-	-	-	841	1,734	-	-	2,814	28,870	-	

1978	-	8,000	-	-	-	-	880	1,725	-	2,771	28,010	2,864
1979	-	16,497	-	-	-	-	1,016	1,649	-	2,890	31,152	2,855
1980	22,654	20,710	-	-	-	-	1,122	2,060	-	2,880	32,026	2,847
1981	29,950	27,602	-	-	-	-	1,261	2,258	310	3,006	33,924	2,932
1982	36,000	33,336	-	-	-	-	1,311	2,587	415	2,995	37,017	3,025
1983	38,000	35,604	-	-	-	-	1,529	2,455	597	2,980	40,574	3,025
1984	50,700	46,565	-	-	-	-	1,704	2,685	545	3,061	44,452	3,087
1985	57,685	53,505	-	-	-	-	1,929	2,865	639	3,088	48,350	3,093
1986	65,385	60,026	-	-	-	-	2,104	3,140	752	3,472	49,489	2,890
1987	67,273	60,758	1,800	747	-	-	2,547	3,835	957	3,649	46,902	2,925
1988	70,000	63,750	1,796	844	-	-	2,640	3,617	813	3,626	48,416	2,970
1989	76,000	69,205	1,929	759	-	-	2,688	3,452	779	3,896	51,320	3,018
1990	78,000	71,457	1,890	825	-	-	2,715	3,447	795	3,208	52,562	2,965
1991	85,000	76,659	2,153	916	-	-	3,069	3,482	934	5,417	54,059	3,020
1992	83,000	77,194	2,190	971	-	-	3,161	2,999	843	7,708	52,904	3,132
1993	87,000	78,355	2,312	1,030	-	-	3,342	2,898	1,010	7,613	53,447	3,079
1994	94,000	86,113	2,357	908	354	149	3,768	3,097	1,114	6,080	54,363	3,110
1995	97,000	89,454	2,608	846	465	154	4,073	3,174	974	6,365	55,603	3,208
1996	102,000	94,326	2,770	781	707	176	4,434	2,696	964	6,732	54,817	3,270
1997	107,000	98,435	2,935	817	715	218	4,685	2,699	847	7,617	56,028	3,378
1998	113,000	103,454	3,311	824	933	298	5,366	2,805	899	8,726	55,709	3,276
1999	115,000	104,076	3,409	886	1,063	266	5,624	3,348	869	8,930	55,482	-

<sup>a</sup>Source: American Classical League (annual reports).

<sup>b</sup>Source: The College Board (see Crooker and Rabiteau; Howard).

<sup>c</sup>Previously the Latin Achievement Test.

<sup>d</sup>Source: American Philological Association.

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