

A Faint Sign Of Cultural Health

A writer at The Atlantic on language instruction in American colleges:

“Another challenge emerges when looking at the languages these students are learning, too. In 2013, roughly [198,000 U.S. college students](#) were taking a French course; just 64, on the other hand, were studying Bengali. Yet, globally, [193 million people speak Bengali](#), while 75 million speak French. “

Apparently the author is unaware that America is a child of Europe, to which it owes its language, its literature, its art, its legal system, its tradition of individual freedom and skepticism, and that there was a time, to borrow the title of one of Marc Fumaroli's books, “when the world spoke French.” Teaching French, and continuing to offer French, is a sign of such recognition. But if you are not interested in cultural or literary significance, but only in mere head-counting of native speakers, then French should be jettisoned and Bengali put in its place. And why stop there? How many people in the world today have read and found pleasure in Shakespeare, and how many have watched and found pleasure in Rocky Part II or Batman Part III? Why not make decisions as to what should be in the curriculum according to the interests of the young? Then there would be courses on movies replacing courses on books, and the philosophy of hip-hop replace courses on the history of Western philosophy. And that could never happen in a celebrated institution of higher learning, could it?