



A World of Opportunity Which New Languages Davis Students Would Like to Study and Why

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At the request of Ms. Anita Poon, Student Affairs Coordinator for Asian American Studies, SARI conducted an exploratory survey of undergraduate students to learn more about languages that students would take if offered by UC Davis. The languages most often cited were those from the Asian Rim, and the reason that students wanted to study a foreign language was most often cultural. Practical benefits of foreign language study, such as future business opportunities or professional uses, were seldom mentioned.

Background

California is a true melting pot of cultures. Each year, more immigrants come to California than any other state - 27.4% of all U.S. immigrants in 2002.¹ With the immigrants come new cultures, practices and ideologies. To prepare the students of UC Davis for the global mixing of societies, the university set forth a goal in which the student develops a global perspective. Specifically, the university strives to give the student a "... broad intellectual and cultural experience through active engagement, an understanding of the interactions among the individual, society, and the natural world".² To this end, SARI carried out a survey that inquired about new languages the students want the university to offer.

The survey consisted of two questions, and was conducted from 10/12/2003 to 10/16/2003. The first question asked if there was a language not currently offered by UC Davis in which the student would enroll if it were offered. The follow-up question asked for that language and for a reason why that language was preferred. We received 2476 responses. Of those, 945 (32%) said that they would like to enroll in a language not currently offered at UC Davis.

Of the 945 students who said they would enroll in a new language class if it were offered, 755 respondents identified a new language. Of the top ten requested languages, seven – Korean, Tagalog, Punjabi, Hindi, Arabic, Vietnamese, and Farsi - are spoken by five of the ten countries from which California receives the most immigrants.³

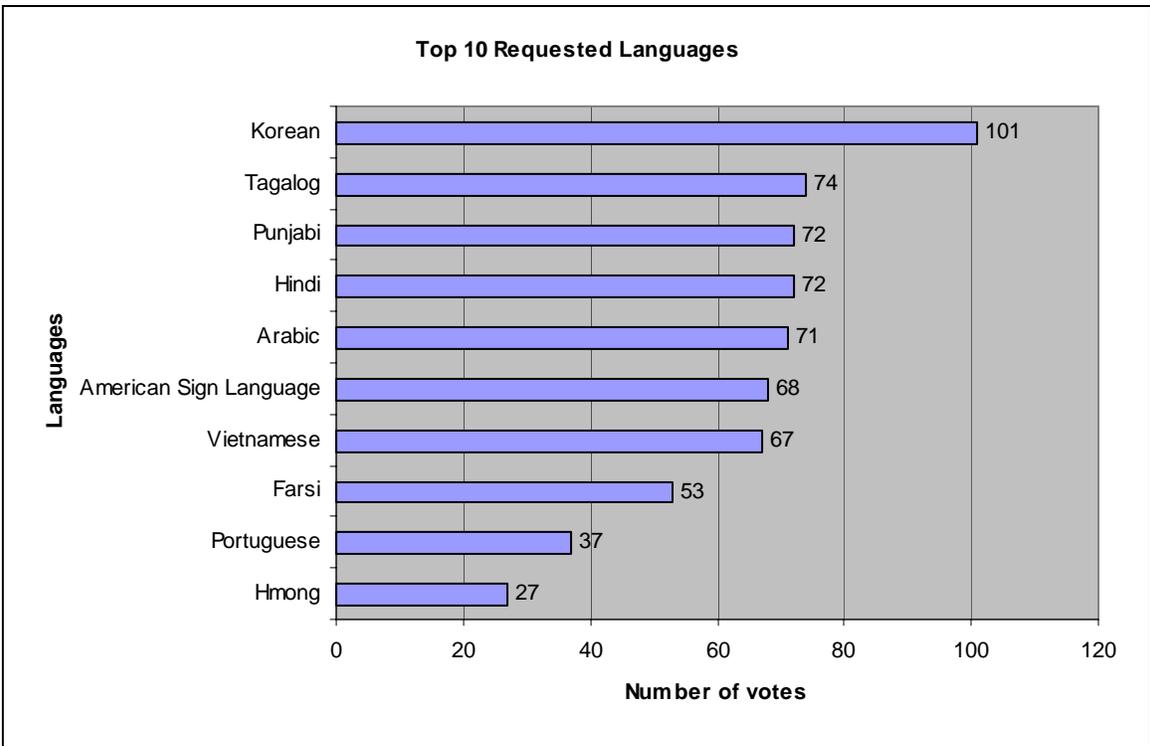
In addition to specifying a new language, students were asked why they wanted to learn that language. The most popular explanation was personal cultural (own heritage, family, native language). About 39% responded this way. An additional 23% said that the language would be of general utilitarian value to them (important on world front, in science, help on GRE, help when traveling, etc.). All other reasons were listed by 7% or less, including business/professional use of a language – debunking the idea of global capitalism or personal gain as the predominant reason for learning another language.

The most surprising results were the proportions identifying Korean and American Sign Language. Korean was the most frequently requested new language even though the Korean undergraduate population of UC Davis is only 626 (2.7% of all undergraduates). The languages of other, larger ethnic groups like Vietnamese, Filipino, and East Indian/Pakistani were mentioned less often than Korean. American Sign Language was frequently listed but is only available from surrounding community colleges that have a transfer agreement with UC Davis.

1. California Dept. of Finance, *Legal Immigration to California in 2002*, page 1; Sacramento: Dept. of Finance, 2003.

2. UC Davis, Office of the Vice Provost, *Educational Objectives for Students*, page 1; Davis: Office of the Vice Provost.

3. *Legal Immigration to California in 2002*, page 2.



Reason to Study a Language Not Currently Offered at UC Davis

