

Careers for Foreign Language Majors

Foreign Language graduates pursue careers in business, education, government, and the non-profit sector, and some pursue advanced degrees. Future career options may be determined not so much by the choice of your college major, but by your interests, skills, values, and types of work experiences acquired during college. Regardless of your career aspirations, increase your marketability to employers through internships, related work experience, good grades, advanced coursework, and involvement in campus activities. Many careers do not require a specific major, but rather a wide range of demonstrated skills, accomplishments, and related work experience while in school.

Such a degree would also provide a pre-professional major for certain fields. Linguistics has been recognized as a valuable pre-professional major, for example, for law, not only because it is methodologically varied, employs rigorous means of analysis, and develops critical thinking, but also because linguistics has contributed to: the evaluation of voice-print evidence, interpreting the complex language of statutes and contracts, analyzing ambiguity and presuppositions (e.g., in testimony or in cross-examination), elucidation of attitudes toward language, and attempting to interpret and make uniform different states' laws covering the same area.

It also provides preparation for advanced study in fields such as Anthropology, Business, Communications, Computer Science, Education (Language Arts and Language teaching), Journalism, Neurosciences (for the study of, e.g., dyslexia and aphasia), Speech and Hearing Sciences, Philosophy, and Psychology.

Along with preparing students for further study, the major would also prepare students for careers in fields where the knowledge of linguistics has proven essential. We give just a couple of examples here.

- Second language teaching in general and teaching English as a second language (TESOL) in particular.
- Communication between humans and machine using natural (including spoken) language (a task central to artificial intelligence and robotics). Jobs could involve the following types of tasks: Evaluation, selection, implementation, and training of others in use of commercially available linguistic tools for word processing, e.g., spelling checkers/correctors, grammar/style checkers; using and training others to use commercially available speech processing devices, including text-to-speech synthesis, automatic speech recognition systems; constructing dictionaries, and glossaries for specialized purposes; computer aids for the disabled (blind, paralyzed, deaf).
- You could also work for sales and management training programs in business and industry. Students with this degree compete favorably with those from other humanities and social science disciplines for entry-level positions in public relations, commerce (e.g. banking), publishing (e.g., editing, lexicography), and other fields requiring analytical, communication, and research skills, e.g., technical writing, translation, government and non-profit language research organizations, social service groups.

Career Strategies

1. Spend a year or semester abroad.

An immersion experience will hone your language skills and allow you to familiarize yourself with the target culture first-hand. Visit our Office of International Education in HAL 306 and see our list of books about studying abroad in the Career Library. Additional information can be found online:

2. Take advantage of summer, semester, or year-long internship opportunities.

These are a good way to establish contacts and get relevant job experience before you graduate. Oftentimes a successful internship can lead to a long-term position. These may include work training experiences overseas or internships in your home country in which your language skills may be viewed as valuable.

For example, THE CONGRESS-BUNDESTAG YOUTH EXCHANGE FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS is a year-long work/study scholarship program to Germany. The program offers the opportunity for young professionals between the ages of 18-24 to immerse themselves in different aspects German culture and daily life. Currently in its 23rd year, the program is funded by the German Bundestag and U.S. Congress through the Department of State. No prior German language skills are required to participate. The program year consists of two months of intensive German language instruction in Germany, four months of classroom instruction at a German university or vocational school, a five-month internship in the participant's career field and housing with a German host family or in a shared apartment. Candidates for the program must be U.S. citizens or permanent residents, be between 18 and 24 years old at the start of the program, have a high school diploma, have clear career goals and some work experience, a strong interest in international affairs and Germany while maintaining a strong American identity and demonstrate flexibility, independence, and diplomacy. Participants must fund personal expenses (\$300-\$350 per month). The application deadline is Dec. 1. For more information on the program and to request an application, visit <http://www.cdsintl.org/cbyx>, e-mail cbyx@cdsintl.org or call (212) 497-3522.

- **CDS International**: Summer and short-term (up to 18 months) internships. A variety of practical training opportunities for young professionals, students, educators, as well as labor, business and government representatives. <http://www.cdsintl.org/>
- **International Cooperative Education**: Provides American college and university students with the opportunity to gain practical work experience in summer internships in Europe, Australia, Asia, and South America. Internships are available in a range of employment fields including retail sales, hospitals, banking, education and engineering. <http://www.icemenlo.com/index.shtml>
- **Interexchange**: Promotes international understanding through affordable intercultural and educational work/training programs. It places participants in the United States and abroad through cooperation with international partner organizations and government agencies. <http://www.workingabroad.org/>
- **Institute for Experiential Learning**: Provides Washington, D.C.-based, substantive, academic creditworthy internships to college students from the U.S. and abroad. Programs include The Capital Experience, Embassy and Diplomatic Scholars Program, and Building Democracy. <http://www.ielnet.org/>
- **U.S. Intelligence Agencies**: Describes the many internship and fellowship opportunities in the Intelligence Community, many of which culminate in full-time employment within an Intelligence Agency. Of particular interest to language learners is the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program

(PRISP), the objective of which is training and recruitment of analysts and linguists in certain critical areas. http://www.intelligence.gov/0-student_opps.shtml

- **USAID Internships:** USAID offers student volunteer intern positions in its efforts to extend assistance to countries recovering from disaster, trying to escape poverty, and engaging in democratic reforms. <http://www.usaid.gov/careers/studentprograms.html>
- **Student Jobs in Government:** One-stop shop for information on government agencies with student employment opportunities. <http://www.studentjobs.gov/>
- **Association for International Practical Training:** AIPT creates global training and cultural exchange experiences by arranging on-the-job training programs both from and to the United States and provides program support before and during the international assignment. http://www.aipt.org/prog_index.htm
- **Idealist:** Thousands of volunteer opportunities in 165 countries. <http://www.idealists.org>

3. Declare a double major.

Today's global and rapidly changing job market demands employees who are flexible and who possess a broad range of skills. Combine your language major with something that is complementary and that fits your skills and interests. A double major will undoubtedly give you the best possible chances at employment.

4. Research occupations in languages.

Educate yourself about the various careers in languages. Not only will you learn which of these best fit your interests, but you will also learn what additional skill sets you might need to obtain. Contact professional associations related to your areas of interest and request information. Use our Alumni Directory and contact alumni in careers that interest you and interview them and perhaps even shadow them for a day.

- *Occupational Outlook Handbook:* Find out about the nature of the work, working conditions, earnings, training, and job outlook for an array of occupations. <http://www.bls.gov/oco/>
- *USA Jobs Career Center:* Assess your skills and interests and match them to suitable jobs. <http://career.usajobs.opm.gov/>
- *American Translators Association:* Learn about the translation and interpreting professions.
- *TESOL Careers:* Find out about careers in teaching English as a second language. <http://www.tesol.org/careers>
- *International Careers:* A series of articles about working abroad as a career choice.
- *GoingGlobal:* Information about finding a job in 23 different countries, cultural information, relevant news, lots of articles and resume tips. <http://www.goinglobal.com>

5. Browse job postings online.

Check online job databases like MonsterTrak.com or The Chronicle of Higher Education to familiarize yourself with the types of positions that require foreign language skills. This will give you a feel for the qualifications and experience that employers are seeking and will help you take measures to better prepare yourself for your entry into the job market.

6. Volunteer your language skills.

There is probably no better way to gain some experience for your resume than to offer your language skills to non-profit or community organizations or in local hospitals or schools. There are also many short- and long-term international volunteer opportunities that require the ability to speak another language. Develop new programs on campus through groups like Alpha Mu Gamma.

- *Volunteer International*: Search by country or by field for volunteer opportunities throughout the Americas. <http://www.volunterinternational.org>
- *CIEE Volunteer projects*: Search by country or by field for unique volunteer opportunities in 30 countries. Volunteers live in a camp and work with locals and other international volunteers. <http://www.ciee.org/volunteer.aspx>

7. Connect with the culture.

Your language ability is a great asset as an important conduit to the culture and people who speak that language. Make sure you keep up on happenings in the target language culture: Read a foreign language newspaper, subscribe to a foreign language news service online, connect with alumni overseas via our Alumni Directory, or get an international pen pal. These language contacts will keep you in the know on current issues and they will also help you keep your language skills current.

8. Join a professional association.

There are myriad professional associations for foreign language majors. Student membership is relatively inexpensive, and the benefits are big! Membership can provide many benefits – a better understanding of what working in the profession is really like; notification opportunities for additional training and certification; inclusion in a directory that potential employers might use for hiring purposes (and you can use for locating organizations); and access to actual job listings and referrals. A sample list of professional associations are included on pp. 9-10 of this handout.

9. Visit Career Services.

Meet with a counselor in Career Services for advice on career and grad school options. Schedule an appointment by calling us at X3371 Consult with your advisor early and frequently to ensure you are getting the best possible combination of courses. Especially when choosing electives, you will want to choose courses that complement each other.

Typical Career Paths

Interpreters and translators enable the cross-cultural communication necessary in today's society by converting one language into another. However, these language specialists do more than simply translate words—they relay concepts and ideas between languages. They must thoroughly understand the subject matter in which they work so that they are able to convert information from one language, known as the source language, into another, the target language. In addition, they must remain sensitive to the cultures associated with their languages of expertise.

Interpreters and translators are often discussed together because they share some common traits. For example, both need a special ability, known as language combination. This enables them to be fluent in at least two languages—a native, or active, language and a secondary, or passive, language; a small number of interpreters and translators are fluent in two or more passive languages. Their active language is the one that they know best and into which they interpret or translate, and their passive language is one of which they have nearly perfect knowledge.

Although some people do both, interpretation and translation are different professions. Each requires a distinct set of skills and aptitudes, and most people are better suited for one or the other. While interpreters often work into and from both languages, translators generally work only into their active language.

Interpreters convert one spoken language into another—or, in the case of sign-language interpreters, between spoken communication and sign language. This requires interpreters to pay attention carefully, understand what is communicated in both languages, and express thoughts and ideas

clearly. Strong research and analytical skills, mental dexterity, and an exceptional memory also are important.

The first part of an interpreter's work begins before arriving at the jobsite. The interpreter must become familiar with the subject matter that the speakers will discuss, a task that may involve research to create a list of common words and phrases associated with the topic. Next, the interpreter usually travels to the location where his or her services are needed. Physical presence may not be required for some work, such as telephone interpretation. But it is usually important that the interpreter see the communicators in order to hear and observe the person speaking and to relay the message to the other party.

There are two types of interpretation: simultaneous and consecutive. Simultaneous interpretation requires interpreters to listen and speak (or sign) at the same time. In simultaneous interpretation, the interpreter begins to convey a sentence being spoken while the speaker is still talking. Ideally, simultaneous interpreters should be so familiar with a subject that they are able to anticipate the end of the speaker's sentence. Because they need a high degree of concentration, simultaneous interpreters work in pairs, with each interpreting for 20- to 30-minute segments. This type of interpretation is required at international conferences and is sometimes used in the courts.

In contrast to simultaneous interpretation's immediacy, consecutive interpretation begins only after the speaker has verbalized a group of words or sentences. Consecutive interpreters often take notes while listening to the speakers, so they must develop some type of note-taking or shorthand system. This form of interpretation is used most often for person-to-person communication, during which the interpreter sits near both parties.

Translators convert written materials from one language into another. They must have excellent writing and analytical ability. And because the documents that they translate must be as flawless as possible, they also need good editing skills.

Translators' assignments may vary in length, writing style, and subject matter. When they first receive text to convert into another language, translators usually read it in its entirety to get an idea of the subject. Next, they identify and look up any unfamiliar words. Multiple additional readings are usually needed before translators begin to actually write and finalize the translation. Translators also might do additional research on the subject matter if they are unclear about anything in the text. They consult with the text's originator or issuing agency to clarify unclear or unfamiliar ideas, words, or acronyms.

Translating involves more than replacing a word with its equivalent in another language; sentences and ideas must be manipulated to flow with the same coherence as those in the source document so that the translation reads as though it originated in the target language. Translators also must bear in mind any cultural references that may need to be explained to the intended audience, such as colloquialisms, slang, and other expressions that do not translate literally. Some subjects may be more difficult than others to translate because words or passages may have multiple meanings that make several translations possible. Not surprisingly, translated work often goes through multiple revisions before final text is submitted.

The way in which translators do their jobs has changed with advancements in technology. Today, nearly all translation work is done on a computer, and most assignments are received and submitted electronically. This enables translators to work from almost anywhere, and a large percentage of them work from home. The Internet provides advanced research capabilities and valuable language resources, such as specialized dictionaries and glossaries. In some cases, use of machine-assisted translation—including memory tools that provide comparisons of previous translations with current work—helps save time and reduce repetition.

The services of interpreters and translators are needed in a number of subject areas. While these workers may not completely specialize in a particular field or industry, many do focus on one area of expertise. Some of the most common areas are described below; however, interpreters and translators also may work in a variety of other areas, including business, social services, or entertainment.

Conference interpreters work at conferences that involve non-English-speaking attendees. This work includes international business and diplomacy, although conference interpreters also may interpret for any organization that works with foreign language speakers. Employers prefer high-level interpreters who have the ability to translate from at least two passive languages into one active (native) language—for example, the ability to interpret from Spanish and French into English. For some positions, such as those with the United Nations, this qualification is mandatory.

Much of the interpreting performed at conferences is simultaneous; however, at some meetings with a small number of attendees, consecutive interpreting also may be used. Usually, interpreters sit in soundproof booths, listening to the speakers through headphones and interpreting into a microphone what is said. The interpreted speech is then relayed to the listener through headsets. When interpreting is needed for only one or two people, the interpreter generally sits behind or next to the attendee and whispers a translation of the proceedings.

Guide or escort interpreters accompany either U.S. visitors abroad or foreign visitors in the United States to ensure that they are able to communicate during their stay. These specialists interpret on a variety of subjects, both on an informal basis and on a professional level. Most of their interpretation is consecutive, and work is generally shared by two interpreters when the assignment requires more than an 8-hour day. Frequent travel, often for days or weeks at a time, is common, an aspect of the job that some find particularly appealing.

Judiciary interpreters and translators help people appearing in court who are unable or unwilling to communicate in English. These workers must remain detached from the content of their work and not alter or modify the meaning or tone of what is said. Legal translators must be thoroughly familiar with the language and functions of the U.S. judicial system, as well as other countries' legal systems. Court interpreters work in a variety of legal settings, such as attorney-client meetings, preliminary hearings, depositions, trials, and arraignments. Success as a court interpreter requires an understanding of both legal terminology and colloquial language. In addition to interpreting what is said, court interpreters also may be required to translate written documents and read them aloud, also known as sight translation.

Literary translators adapt written literature from one language into another. They may translate any number of documents, including journal articles, books, poetry, and short stories. Literary translation is related to creative writing; literary translators must create a new text in the target language that reproduces the content and style of the original. Whenever possible, literary translators work closely with authors in order to best capture their intended meanings and literary characteristics.

Tips for Typical Career Paths

If you are interested in working as a **TRANSLATOR / INTERPRETER**, you should not only hone your translation skills, but also have a broad knowledge of the languages and cultures with which you will be dealing. You should take courses in language, literature and culture in your major, then focus on advanced grammar, conversation & composition courses, and any course that may expand your vocabulary in specialized areas. Joining professional associations like the American Translators Association ([www. Atanet.org](http://www.Atanet.org)) opens up additional opportunities, including that of becoming credentialized. These organizations not only provide the opportunity to network with colleagues at national, international, or regional meetings.

If you are interested in **TEACHING**, think about what kind of students you would like to serve. For the elementary school language teacher, the minimum educational requirements would be a bachelor of education degree with certification appropriate to the state. Because certification requirements are constantly changing, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics (www.cal.org) for a comprehensive discussion of state certification requirements. The Academic Employment Network website (www.academicemploy.com) provides a convenient mechanism for checking certification requirements for most states. Be sure to verify the certification information you find on any website. In addition the Modern Language Association (www.mla.org) recommends that individuals spend time in the country of interest, develop an awareness of foreign language pedagogy, have a supervised teaching experience, have course work beyond the generic education classes, and that their skills in the use of foreign language be formally assessed.

If you are interested in working as a **PROFESSOR OF LANGUAGES**, you should take all language, literature and culture classes in your language. You should supplement your major with courses that develop public speaking, critical thinking and academic writing skills. After the Bachelor of Arts degree, you would then enter Graduate School and complete a Master of Arts and a Ph.D. in your language to be able to teach on the university-level.

Also, consider the possibilities in educational administration. You could work as a student affairs coordinator for a study abroad office, international education office, or Office for International Student and Faculty Services. Look for volunteer or work/study opportunities at our Office of International Education.

If you are interested in working as a **REGIONAL OR AREA SPECIALIST**, it is a good idea to take as many civilization and contemporary culture courses in your major as possible. You should also supplement your major with geography, political science, and history courses that focus on the country or region of interest.

If you are interested in working in **INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS**, you can supplement your degree in languages with a Business minor. In addition to taking classes in Global Studies like International Manners and Mores, you can also take courses in Economics like ECON 303 (International Economics and Finance). Or you can take courses in Communication Studies like COMM 459 (Organizational Communication), COMM 225 (Intercultural Communication), COMM 300 (Public Relations), COMM 235 Journalism and COMM 135 Writing for New Media. You may also want to consider taking classes in Political Science in Comparative/International Relations (POLS 104, 301, 302, 303, 323, 333, or 342).

Major Employers of Foreign Language Majors

The government (including the **FBI, CIA, Customs Service** and the **Library of Congress**) is one of the largest employers of people with foreign language skills. Foreign language majors can also go into arts and entertainment by working at **museums, book publishers, university presses, and film companies**, or into commerce and work at American firms abroad or **international firms** in the U.S.

Travel, tourism, service and education are also popular industries for foreign language graduates. Try to become as accustomed to the culture of the language(s) you're studying as possible, in any way possible, from studying or working abroad to renting foreign language movies and books.

Government Agencies

Agency for Int'l. Development	National Security Agency
Bureau of Export Admin.	NJ Governor's Commission on International Trade
Bureau of Intelligence & Research	State Int'l. Trade Division

Bureau of Int'l. Labor Affairs	State Travel & Tourism Division
CIA/FBI	Office of Int'l. Affairs
Defense Intelligence Agency	Office of Int'l. Coop. & Development
Department of Defense	Office of International Education
Drug Enforcement Admin.	Office of Intern'l Policy & Programs
Foreign Agricultural Service	Peace Corps/AmeriCorps
Foreign Commercial Service	Telecommunications Satellite Organization
Foreign Service	US Customs Service
Immigration & Naturalization Service	US Department of State
International Trade Admin.	US Information Agency
Library of Congress	Voice of America
National Endowment for the Humanities	

Private and Non-profit Organizations

Advertising Agencies	Libraries
Airlines/Airports	Manufacturing Firms
American Friends Service	Newspapers/Magazines
American Schools Abroad	Pan American Health Organization
Amnesty International	Project Hope
Banks	Red Cross International
Book Publishers	Retail Stores
CARE, Inc	School Systems
Civic Organizations	Social Service Agencies
Clinics	Television/Radio Stations
Colleges & Universities	Travel Agencies
Consulting Firms	United Nations
Hospitals/Clinics	World Health Organization
Hotels/Restaurants/Resorts	YMCA/YWCA
International Exchange Programs	

Potential Titles and Organizations	
Account Coordinator, Ketchum Public Relations	Expediter, CPS International
ADL Staff, Easter Seals Society	Financial Services Trainee, Crum & Forster
Assistant Director of Marketing, Hyatt Hotels	Language Analyst, National Security Agency
Assistant English Teacher, Japan Exchange	Legal Assistant, Baker & McKenzie
Assistant Researcher, Princeton Survey Research Association	Management Trainee, Chase Manhattan Bank
Associate Promotion Specialist, AT&T Network Systems	Mortgage/Loan Associate, Roma Savings Bank
Bilingual Counselor, Monmouth County Social Services	Pay/Receive Clerk, Banco di Sicilia
Communications Coordinator, Wella Corporation	Principle Accounting Clerk, Vineland Public Health
Corporate Management Trainee, Hyatt Hotels	Receptionist, Banque Francaise

Director, Pioneer Youth Center	Sales Representative, Procter & Gamble
Editorial Assistant, Community Life News	Teacher, New Brunswick Public Schools

Adjunct Professor, Rutgers School of Law-Camden (JD)	
Advisory Instructor, Teradata Corporation	Manager, Reg. Market Planning, Sprint Intern'l. (MSIS)
Asst. Deputy Public Defender, Public Defender's Off. (JD)	Online Editor, Hachette Filiapacchi Magazines
Attorney, IBM (JD)	Owner, Film & Video Production Co.
Author/Freelance Copywriter, Don & Sue, Inc.	President, Fintex Capstone Group, Inc. (MBA)
Branch Manager, NJ Savings Bank	Quality Administrator, NJ Bd of Accountancy (MBA)
Certified Financial Planner, Insurance Planning Assoc.	Research Assoc., Heidnick Consultants (EEC-Economics)
Conference Interpreter, Self Employed (Certificate)	Researcher, Hill & Knowlton Publishers (MA Italian)
Consulting Education Analyst, NCR/Teradata (MA)	Sales Representative, NCR Corp.
Curator, Walt Whitman House (MA History)	Senior Advisor, Canadian Geoexchange Coalition, (MBA)
Dir. of Education, World Vision (MA Stud. Pers.)	Senior Cataloger, Baker & Taylor Co. Headquarters (MLS)
Employee & Labor Relations Specialist, IRS Office of Chief Counsel, (MA French)	Senior Editor, KPMG PEAT MARWICK LLP
Executive Director, The Work-Family Connection	Senior Marketing Specialist, Federal Express (MBA International Business)
Export Regional Manager, AMETEK, Inc. (MBA)	Social Worker, Hardyston Twp School (M.Ed. Social Work)
Financial Analyst, Lockheed Martin Corporation	Special Asst. to Deputy Dir., Smithsonian Inst. (MA French)
Human Resources Representative, JP Morgan	Store Manager, Caswell-Massey

Professional Associations & Organizations:

Foreign Language Associations (links to associations):

http://www.discoverfrance.net/France/Language/DF_lang_assn.shtml

American Translators Association: <http://www.atanet.org/>

Modern Language Association: <http://www.mla.org/>

American Association for Applied Linguistics: <http://www.aaal.org/>

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages: <http://www.actfl.org/>

American Society of Interpreters

P. O. Box 9603
Washington, DC 20016
(703) 998-8636

Foundation for International Human Relations
P. O. Box 18206
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 659-5552

Contact Information

Dr. Jennifer Scott
Associate Director of Career Services
Assistant Professor of Communication Studies
Grove City College
Tel: 724-458-2158
E-mail: jascott@gcc.edu