Modern Language Association MLA

Report to the Teagle Foundation on the Undergraduate Major in Language and Literature

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Executive Summary

In 2006, the MLA responded to the Teagle Foundation's invitation to disciplinary associations to think about "the relationship between the goals and objectives of undergraduate concentrations in their disciplines and those of a liberal education." The association brought together a working group of leaders in English and modern foreign languages, including college presidents and deans, as well as distinguished members of the legal and medical professions and visiting consultants. Working over a period of eighteen months, the group studied new ways of organizing English and language programs within the general parameters of a liberal arts education. The group also explored ways to strengthen majors in our fields and attract new generations of students to a traditional core of liberal study: language, literature, and culture.

The group concluded that the arts of language and the tools of literacy are key qualifications for full participation in the social, political, economic, literary, and cultural life of the twenty-first century. It affirmed the centrality of literature and reading to undergraduate education. Interpretation, translation, and cross-cultural communication are essential in today's world. To meet the demands of technological innovation, globalized societies, and the explosion of disciplinary knowledge, we recommend four basic elements in the baccalaureate degree program in English and other languages: a coherent program of study, collaborative teamwork among faculty members, interdepartmental cooperative teaching, and the adoption of outcome measurements.

To create a structure that aligns the goals of English and language departmental majors with the goals of general education, institutions need to be encouraged to invest in the interdisciplinary capacities of their faculty members through support for team teaching and faculty development. Faculty teams working collaboratively can shape programs of study with purposeful organization across courses and semesters to give students multiple educational experiences in their undergraduate major.

Modern Language Association White Paper

In 2006, the Modern Language Association (MLA) responded to the Teagle Foundation's invitation to disciplinary associations to think about "the relationship between the goals and objectives of undergraduate concentrations in their disciplines and those of a liberal education." In recent years, faculty members in English and modern foreign languages have affirmed that students often "lack the requisite background and skills" for study in the department, as well as "a clear understanding of the expectations and goals of the major," perceptions reported in the Teagle Foundation's request for proposals and attributed to faculty members in many disciplines. The leadership of the MLA and its affiliated associations for chairs of English (ADE) and foreign language (ADFL) departments felt that students, faculty members, academic units, and the cause of liberal education all stand to benefit from a reexamination of discipline-based baccalaureate programs. A general sentiment among the over thirty thousand members of the MLA is that a greater share of the undergraduate student population should major in a liberal arts discipline and that students who receive bachelor's degrees in arts and sciences specializations should exemplify what liberal education accomplishes in developing students as critical thinkers, problem solvers, and writers. We know that today's students are less likely to choose language and literary study as majors than they were thirty-five or even fifteen years ago, and we wanted to explore ways to strengthen majors in our fields and attract new generations of students to what has been the traditional core of liberal study.

Without language there is no communication, speculative thought, or community; without literature, there is no in-depth understanding of narratives that lead to the discovery of other cultures in their specificities and diversity and to the understanding of other human beings in their similarities and differences.

During an eighteen-month period there were four formal meetings of a working group of leaders of English and modern foreign languages, including college presidents and deans, as well as distinguished members of the legal and medical professions and visiting consultants. The meetings of the working group were marked by lively debate. In some ways, the group functioned like a faculty interdisciplinary seminar that enacted the object of our study: new ways of organizing English and languages within the general parameters of liberal learning. We clashed over specific issues (for example, whether there has been a decline in literacy skills among young people), and we declined to write a formula for the ideal undergraduate major in disciplines whose boundaries had grown ever wider. We proposed readings and background materials (see the appendix for a list), and individual members of the group wrote position papers to guide our thinking.

Throughout our discussions, there was general agreement on what constitutes the core of our profession, the factors that provide our raison d'être, and the source of what we offer to students—that is, our commitment to language and to literature. Without language there is no communication, speculative thought, or community; without literature, there is no in-depth understanding of narratives that lead to the discovery of other cultures in their specificities and diversity and to the understanding of other human beings in their similarities and differences.

Language and Literature in a Liberal Arts Education

Study in language, literature, and culture has long been a defining feature of education in the liberal arts. Speaking, reading, and writing, whether in the vernacular or the learned languages, have traditionally stood at the heart of education because the arts of language and the tools of literacy are key qualifications for full participation in social, political, economic, and cultural life. Today the hallmarks of a liberal arts education—communication, critical analysis, and creativity—are more important than ever as prerequisites for success in life. A college education should develop students' abilities to think critically and analytically and to communicate knowledge and understanding effectively. The skills underlying these abilities require constant practice and should form the base of the undergraduate experience across all disciplines:

- to write clearly
- to speak articulately
- to read closely
- to evaluate and present evidence accurately
- to use quantitative data precisely
- to apply reasoning correctly
- to engage with artistic creation and expression imaginatively
- to work both independently and collaboratively

In the course of a college education, students should also develop historical and comparative perspectives by studying the development of societies, cultures, literatures, and philosophies over time and across multiple disciplinary approaches. To become informed global citizens, students need to meet the broad educational objectives that undergird liberal education:

- to engage with people across a range of languages, histories, traditions, and ways of seeing
- to experience people and places that are different and distant from those of their families or home communities
- to apply moral reasoning to ethical problems
- to understand environmental challenges

While literacy is the foundational core of all educational and scholarly projects, it is the particular focus of study in departments of languages and literatures, and the twenty-first-century knowledge commons puts specific forms of literacy at a premium: the ability to communicate effectively and persuasively with others through *cross-cultural literacy*, to work with new forms of media through *technological literacy*, to understand language and culture in context through *historical literacy*, and to analyze, organize, and make sense of the information through *information literacy*.

After much deliberation, we recommend an approach to structuring baccalaureate degree programs in English and other languages that combines four constitutional elements:

- a coherent program of study
- teamwork among the instructional staff members
- interdepartmental cooperative teaching
- empirical research to assess the successes and shortcomings of the program

At once structured and flexible, the major in language and literature should follow an integrative, synergetic model responsive to the demands of technological innovation and the realities of globalized societies. The major also needs to accommodate the explosion of disciplinary knowledge that, in language and literature as in other fields of study, creates daunting challenges while giving rise to new opportunities. In this context, the work of curriculum demands collaborative teamwork among faculty members to give the major coherence and structure and administrative support to sustain points of articulation with other fields of study. The results of program changes need to be documented and evaluated empirically, through the adoption of outcome measurements. Faculty members rarely work together in the way we propose and often know little about their colleagues' course contents and methodologies.

The Major's Foundation

We firmly believe that language and literature need to remain at the center of what departments of English and languages other than English do. Intrinsically linked, reading and writing are not natural or instinctive skills but skills contingent on a lengthy learning process in which students practice reading and writing as an interrelated, complementary pair. Literacy means acquiring the necessary skills for reading and writing, and in exercising the mind to achieve literacy students develop the requisite functions to think abstractly. Recent work in neuroscience has made it clear that the brain is plastic and dynamic, and language is the most powerful means we know for forging links between existing neuronal maps and—especially important—for creating new ones. Contrary to popular misconception, the possibilities for learning languages are not confined to childhood, and the possibilities that engagement with language and language learning creates for personal growth and development persist into adulthood.

The role of literature needs to be emphasized. Sustained, deep engagements with literary works and literary language open perceptions of structure, texture, and the layering of meanings that challenge superficial comprehension, expand understanding, and hone analytic skills. The literary object offers itself to observation and deciphering through narrative techniques, internal clues, and external references that beckon the curiosity and intelligence of readers. As readers become cognizant of the complexities of the linguistic system—its codes, structures, and articulations—they become mindful of language and of languages as evolving, changing historical artifacts and institutions, intricately bound up with the cultures expressed through them. Students also become sensitive to narrative strategies, verbal manipulations, and linguistic seductions—in short, to communication in all its powers and limitations.

While we advocate incorporating into the major the study of a variety of texts, we insist that the most beneficial among these are literary works, which offer their readers a rich and challenging—and therefore rewarding—object of study. Our cybernetic world has brought us speed and ease of information retrieval; even where the screen has replaced paper, however, language still remains the main mode of communication. Those who learn to read slowly and carefully and to write clearly and precisely will also acquire the nimbleness and visual perceptions associated with working in an electronic environment.

The postsecondary educational level is where most students gain the riches that will be their intellectual capital for the rest of their lives. Both the global economy and our ethnically diverse society need citizens who understand the languages, traditions, and histories of other cultures as well as their own. The great strength of the humanities has always been its insistence on the value of considering the past, of examining our accomplishments and failures, and of teaching the patience, knowledge, and craft required to move beyond our insular selves. Delving into other languages and learning to read complex literary texts rank among the most powerful means available for accomplishing these goals of liberal education and contributing to students' personal and intellectual development.

Both the global economy and our ethnically diverse society need citizens who understand the languages, traditions, and histories of other cultures as well as their own.

Literary scholars explore how storytelling plays essential roles in all kinds of human comprehension. As students of literature learn about literary structure and form and the meanings of departures from established forms, they are acquiring the basic building blocks of understanding. At the same time, literature supplies an imaginative context through which readers gain insight into politics, history, society, emotion, and the interior life. Thus close reading of literary texts develops important analytic and interpretive skills that play central roles in complex human enterprises. What accomplished readers do with stories found in books—inhabit them, accept them provisionally as real, act according to their rules, tolerate their ambiguities, see their events from multiple and contradictory points of view, experience their bliss—informs what they can do with stories in the world at large. Storytelling holds a prominent place in everyday life, often playful, at times serious and challenging—in family gatherings, in the workplace, in law courts, in clinics, at scenes of accidents, in psychoanalytic treatment, in newspapers and other media outlets, in diplomacy, and in policy work. Students of language and literature bring important skills from their studies to other areas of study and work. The litigator, the minister, the manager, the journalist, and the evolutionary biologist all must listen to and tell stories as well as know something about what to do with them. Physicians who have studied literature as undergraduates command skills that serve them well in their clinical practices. Their understanding of narratives, their ability to listen to a patient's story and grasp its meaning, has been recognized in medical settings as a highly valuable skill. Beyond national borders, disciplinary containment, and professional use, literary works train students in cultural literacy, that is, in understanding societal customs and values, historical backgrounds, and narratives as conveyors of information and stratagems.

The study of language and literature provides special contexts for developing advanced skills in effective written and spoken communication—skills that are applicable to any professional life that depends on writing and working with others. The knowledge and skills these studies develop also hold value in the realm of participatory democracy, where the ability to understand and communicate how ideas about process and policy have been or should be framed are crucial elements of success. No consensus or majority is gained without dialogue. In the course of their education, language and literature majors attain proficiencies that make them prime candidates for positions that require excellence in communication skills.

The Integrative Major

The requirements for a major should amount to more than a list of courses, the prevailing model now at some institutions; requirements should form a series of course options that combine to fulfill curricular objectives. The aim should be to develop students' linguistic abilities, acquaint students with representative cultural examples through a designated body of works, and engage them with specific concepts, ideas, issues, cultural traditions, and traditions of inquiry. In addition to dispensing knowledge of the field, the course of study in English and other modern languages should also make improving writing and analytic skills two of its central tasks. Departments should conceive of the major with a focus on three objectives: an articulate sense of the scope of knowledge and kinds of inquiries characteristic of language and literature; competencies in well-defined, measurable skill sets; and structures that support a satisfying awareness of progression in knowledge and skill from earlier to more advanced parts of the program.

The formal study of language should be inherent to all courses across all languages; it is important to stress instruction in content and language from start to finish in the English major as well as in majors in foreign languages.

Students majoring in English or in a foreign language should have a structured experience. The curriculum of a major should present an integrated, progressive course of study with articulated goals for each course. Students should be able to enroll in courses that offer a clear sense of sequence, that move from less to more complex analytic projects, and that build on the knowledge and skills they have already acquired. They should be aware of the goals of each course and the aims of the major. Steady progress toward advanced proficiency in the language of the major is a primary objective. The formal study of language should be inherent to all courses across all languages; it is important to stress instruction in content and language from start to finish in the English major as well as in majors in foreign languages, something at which several institutions have excelled but which for most remains untried. Within the larger school institution, the department should create for its students a social community that provides continuous support and leads to a progressive understanding of the particularities of the specific language, literature, and culture being studied. The importance of study abroad is well established in this respect, since even a prolonged stay in an English-speaking country

will reveal to students how one is always part of a wider culture that needs to be studied and learned.

We strongly believe that all teaching faculty members, regardless of rank and status, are stakeholders in the educational mission of the department. All should be involved in the organization of the curriculum. Although the curriculum may in part reflect the research interests of faculty members in language or literature, the formulation of a major program should be a collaborative educational project that first and foremost addresses the needs of the students. Courses should be designed to teach specific contents in conjunction with developing specific abilities. During their years of study, students should confront texts from popular culture to literary masterpieces and from performance arts to visual images; they should also be taught the basic methodological and disciplinary approaches to these different media. Because the writing and reading skills developed in language departments extend to other disciplines, faculty members from all language departments, not just from English, should be engaged in general education. Moreover, to attract students to a major, departments should showcase their best and most experienced professorial-rank faculty members in general education courses and not reserve them for specialized courses only. Withholding professorial-rank faculty members from general education courses accentuates the disparity between non-tenure-line faculty members (including graduate assistants) who often teach first-year and general education courses and tenure-line professors who offer students a more integrated educational experience.

Revised historical understandings, new fields of scholarly inquiry, the effects of globalization, the proliferation of new media, vocational pressures on undergraduates, and professional pressures on faculty members and graduate students bring new challenges to the existing structures of higher education. The rise of digital media has ushered in new paths to the pursuit and attainment of knowledge, which requires universities and colleges to adapt to the challenges and opportunities presented by this technological revolution. The curriculum today faces multiple pressures: to speed up instruction, expand coverage, investigate new interests, use the resources provided by developing media, and meet benchmarks of achievement. But departments should resist the impulse to increase coverage at the expense of intensive engagement with great and complex works of literature. Most departments will feature courses that center on nonliterary texts, including but not limited to newspapers; film, digital, and other nonprint or print-plus media; and documents from law, medicine, and other professions. English and other language departments thus place their disciplinary specialty into a broader, extradepartmental framework from the outset of learning. They take care to create educational experiences that are effective both for students who plan to go from the academy immediately into the workforce and for students who wish to go on to graduate school.

Both categories of undergraduates will benefit from more curricular connection than has generally tended to exist between the study of literature and either second language acquisition or English composition. The study of language should be integral to the study of literature and should link reading and progress in reading to writing and progress in writing. Literature students would improve their skills in reading and their ability to write critical arguments if literature and composition courses were more closely

connected. Students of language would greatly profit from the challenges presented by literary works in addition to reading texts focusing on current events and popular culture.

English and other language and literature programs need to offer a variety of ways for students to progress in their knowledge of traditions, themes, periods, and cultures so that programs of study achieve depth and coherence. In every culture, literary studies are taught and learned through distinctive lenses, and we need to bring majors into the most enlivening past and present critical conversations in the literary fields, conversations that should help them better appreciate literary texts and become more articulate about them. As the trend toward involving undergraduates in research suggests, it is important to engage students with faculty scholarly interests and the issues and arguments debated in the discipline. Teaching students the vocabulary of disciplinary argument and inquiry is essential; although the specifics of particular arguments might be forgotten, the broader lesson of how arguments are conducted remains, and introducing the disciplinary vocabulary lets students see that the discipline is made up of conventions.

We believe that students who major in foreign languages should be required to have a good command of English and some knowledge of English and American literature; likewise, English majors should be required to learn another language and become familiar with literature in another language.

Furthermore, in an international context, curricula need to be designed to enhance students' knowledge of the methodologies and practices of disciplines in other countries and to expand their understanding of cross-cultural variables. Departments should therefore encourage the integration of languages other than English in courses and majors across the humanities, the social sciences, and the sciences. English and other modern language departments should support study abroad and be actively involved in such programs as Languages across the Curriculum in ways that enrich those programs' intercultural and international content.

Speaking a second language does not necessarily make one a sophisticated citizen of our contemporary world. We could imagine a curriculum, rich in international politics and economics, comparative religion, and discrete or specific social histories, that would have at least as compelling a claim to preparing citizens. While readings in translation of world literature can broaden understanding of other cultures, translations do not necessarily induce deep or subtle sensibilities toward the stranger within our community or far distant from our shores. Insofar as we use translations to engage students with global literatures and cultures, we should make sure that translation itself is rendered visible and made a pedagogical tool that will point students to other languages and cultures.

To develop insightful and sensitive cultural interpreters, the major in English and foreign languages from start to finish should be composed of courses that are intellectually stimulating, rich in the knowledge transmitted, and demanding in the oral and written presentation of arguments. Accordingly, we believe that students who major in foreign languages should be required to have a good command of English and some knowledge of English and American literature; likewise, English majors should be

required to learn another language and become familiar with literature in another language. Reaching advanced literacy and linguistic levels should be the expected outcome for all language majors, and there should be formal methods for assessing students' achievement levels. The pedagogical emphasis in recent decades on language for communication seems sometimes to entail the willingness to accept approximations of pronunciation, grammar, and syntax, so long as the intended idea is more or less conveyed. This notion of efficiency may be adequate for nonacademic language teaching programs. But for college students majoring in a language, in addition to basic communicative skills other concepts should be emphasized:

- the aesthetics of language, for which literature can be a primary source
- the correspondence between sharpness of thought and aptness of expression
- the usefulness of language for manipulating abstract ideas and understanding complex issues

The major should instill the value of intellectual and linguistic accomplishment instead of functionality and should stress language and literature as key to understanding human achievement.

A major in language and literature studies should offer students the opportunity to acquire tools and hone skills that expand their intellectual capacities, enhance their personal well-being, and appropriately serve their professional ambitions in today's society. It is our consensus that to serve these goals the curriculum of the major should include courses of the following types:

- courses that develop literacies in reading and writing
- at least one course devoted to slow reading and in-depth study of an artistically great work or works
- at least one small seminar to develop individuals' capacities to their fullest
- at least one team-taught or interdisciplinary class
- a course on disciplinary issues and scholarly debates
- the opportunity to study abroad

The Major's Place in the Academy Today

Increasingly, programs of humanistic study that were once prestigious and highly regarded are receiving waning public support and are treated as marginal in their home institutions. Discussions of the declining status of the humanities and liberal arts in the changing landscape of American higher education generate anguish, but personal testimony and apocalyptic scenarios often substitute for research and historical analysis. The time has come for concerted thought at the level of local faculties and departments about how to organize programs of study and itineraries of student course taking to retrieve the power and interest of academic study in language and literature, to reintroduce and reattract students to our disciplines and what we know about language and reading or the specialized ways professional academics have learned to read and observe across the linguistic and geographic breadth and depth of the cultural record.

Institutions of higher education differ in their goals and missions, their size, the special strength of their faculties, and the composition of their student bodies. Moreover,

majors leading to a bachelor's degree in the most commonly taught languages (English, Spanish, French, German, American Sign Language, Italian, Japanese, Chinese, Russian) or in less commonly taught languages will differ in literary, historical, and cultural content. Thus curricular models for the major have to be adaptable to objectives and possibilities that will vary from institution to institution and from department to department. Literary studies have properly freed themselves from a knowledge base adapted to the structural constraints of credit hours and semesters through devices such as a fixed, standard set of canonical or representative works. But as specialized inquiry and scholarship have progressed to produce a more realistic understanding of the total field of symbolic action, the problem of a knowledge base has not gone away. Faculty members in the field have mostly sought to avoid the question of how curricula represent a knowledge base—however contingent, open, fluid, and subject to change in its local particulars—through which newcomers, those who do not know what they do not know, put themselves in a position to enter the field, learn, and progress.

Disciplinary knowledge and inquiry have reached a state where, even at the level of subspecialization, the materials meriting attention have accumulated to an extent quantitatively beyond the grasp of any single student or scholar. The explosion of knowledge at the level of the field as a whole leads to a corresponding contraction at the level of the individual member of the field. Only as teams working collaboratively can faculties shape programs of study that will give student experience purposeful organization across the small number of courses and semesters available for an undergraduate major. This is the great challenge and opportunity for faculty members and programs of study in language and literature: only departments that can rely on enough noncontingent faculty members and on sustained resources can offer the curricular programs that best serve students and the academic community. It is hard to imagine a structural problem greater than the one we face today insofar as the composition of the academic workforce is concerned.

Only departments that can rely on enough noncontingent faculty members and on sustained resources can offer the curricular programs that best serve students and the academic community.

A singular aspect of the study of language and literature is that it imparts cognitive skills and knowledge that cut across boundaries separating departments and the languages, literatures, and cultures taught in them. Students trained in one national or community-based culture acquire knowledge and abilities in reading, writing, and communication that extend to other languages. But the synergetic character of study in language and literature remains abstract unless actualized through student experience in courses that cut across departmental and language boundaries. The mission statements and strategic planning documents of many institutions of higher education make prominent mention of interdepartmental initiatives, inter- or cross-disciplinarity, and collaboration. Interpretation, translation, and cross-cultural communication are areas of inquiry that reside in language and literature departments and also form part of the bedrock of liberal education. In our intellectual and theoretical work in language, literature, and culture programs, we articulate the value of crossing boundaries, traversing borders, and interrogating the intersections between our respective fields. When we

scrutinize the systems and structures in our institutions, however, we often find that they do not reflect or support these intellectual commitments. If we wish to align the goals of our departmental majors with the goals of general education, we must make it structurally possible to realize that alignment. Institutions need to be encouraged to invest in the interdisciplinary capacities of their faculty members through support of team teaching and faculty development. Departments need to see the creative advantages of loosening their hold on curricular property, and faculty members need to be acculturated to the broad mission of their colleges and universities. Since the nineteenth century, the disciplinary home of language study has been the language and literature department. For better or for worse, this has meant that the fate of language and literature as subjects of study and inquiry has been linked to the fate of the department as an institutional structure.

As knowledge expands, programs of study proliferate and course options multiply; students today have more choices than ever before. In addition, as the academy is asked to be responsive to the world outside, new pressures are put on departments and students to develop skills and reach benchmarks of achievement within four years. Among the demands brought about by internationalization are the value of learning languages and the importance of knowing world cultures. Multilingualism and multiculturalism have become a necessity for most world citizens. But in the American educational system multilingualism and multiculturalism have not yet attained the recognition commensurate with the needs created by world developments, nor have they been fully recognized for their reach in enhancing intellectual abilities. And yet those responsible for planning programs in language and literature know that the skills they teach (reading, thinking, analysis, expression) are among the most transferable. They are also the purveyors of linguistic, literary, and cultural contents that transmit cultural specificities and differences, historical information, aesthetic appreciation, and, with the possibility of self-knowledge, the impulse to reach out to others and learn the meaning of ethics.

A Mandate for the Future

We are committed to the notion that all students who major in our departments should know English and at least one other language. This is a radical stance, and it is not one with which students—and faculty members—can always comply with ease. Our political and social lives are not “English only” domestically or internationally. The value of fluency in multiple languages cannot be overstated in the twenty-first century, when the emergent conditions of life bring more of us more often into circumstances that, on the one hand, ask us to travel through the complex terrain of a globalized economy and, on the other, bring far-flung local parochialisms to our doors through the vastly expanded reach of new communications technologies. Students who study languages other than English are achieving not merely formal communication but also sophistication with the nuances of culture—both in the sense of culture as art, music, and poetics and the broader sense of culture as way of life. The translator, international lawyer, or banker who successfully conducts business in a language other than his or her native tongue shows

linguistic capacity and cultural understanding, something a university education in languages is uniquely capable of instilling.

The members of the Teagle working group are committed to seeing that the recommended changes for the English and foreign language majors develop beyond the confines of this publication and that they take effect in postsecondary institutions. There are today excellent models of literature departments that play a central role in general education and have developed innovative areas of focus that are coherent and compelling to undergraduate majors. We aim to create a national dialogue in which departments can learn from one another about both the challenges and the opportunities for the creative renewal we have described. To that end, members of the working group have been invited to appear at the annual meeting of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association (Oct. 2008); the MLA Annual Convention (Dec. 2008); the annual meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (Jan. 2009); and the ADE and ADFL joint meeting (June 2009), where the Teagle white paper will be the focus of a plenary session and small group discussions. Also in June 2009, a member of the Teagle working group will report to the chairs of foreign language departments at the ADFL seminar hosted by the University of Arizona, Tucson, and to chairs of English departments at the ADE seminar hosted by the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. As we explore the ideas presented here with the larger academic community, the MLA expects to undertake concrete projects based on our findings. We will consider our work a success if departments of English and foreign languages profit from our rationale for evolution by adapting our recommendations to the particular circumstances of their institutions. The MLA expects to assist the process through the new work we undertake, which will necessarily include data gathering and analysis of the ways in which the majors in our fields evolve.

In this exciting age whose novelty we all sense but still cannot name, the geography of learning is being remapped with unprecedented speed. The landscape of knowledge is changing dramatically. But the age-old human need to make sense of things by structuring relations in our minds and in the society we share remains a constant. Thus the importance of training in the language arts is, if anything, greater than before. As a profession, we acknowledge the mandate to evolve, and we look forward to the adventure of doing so.

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Appendix

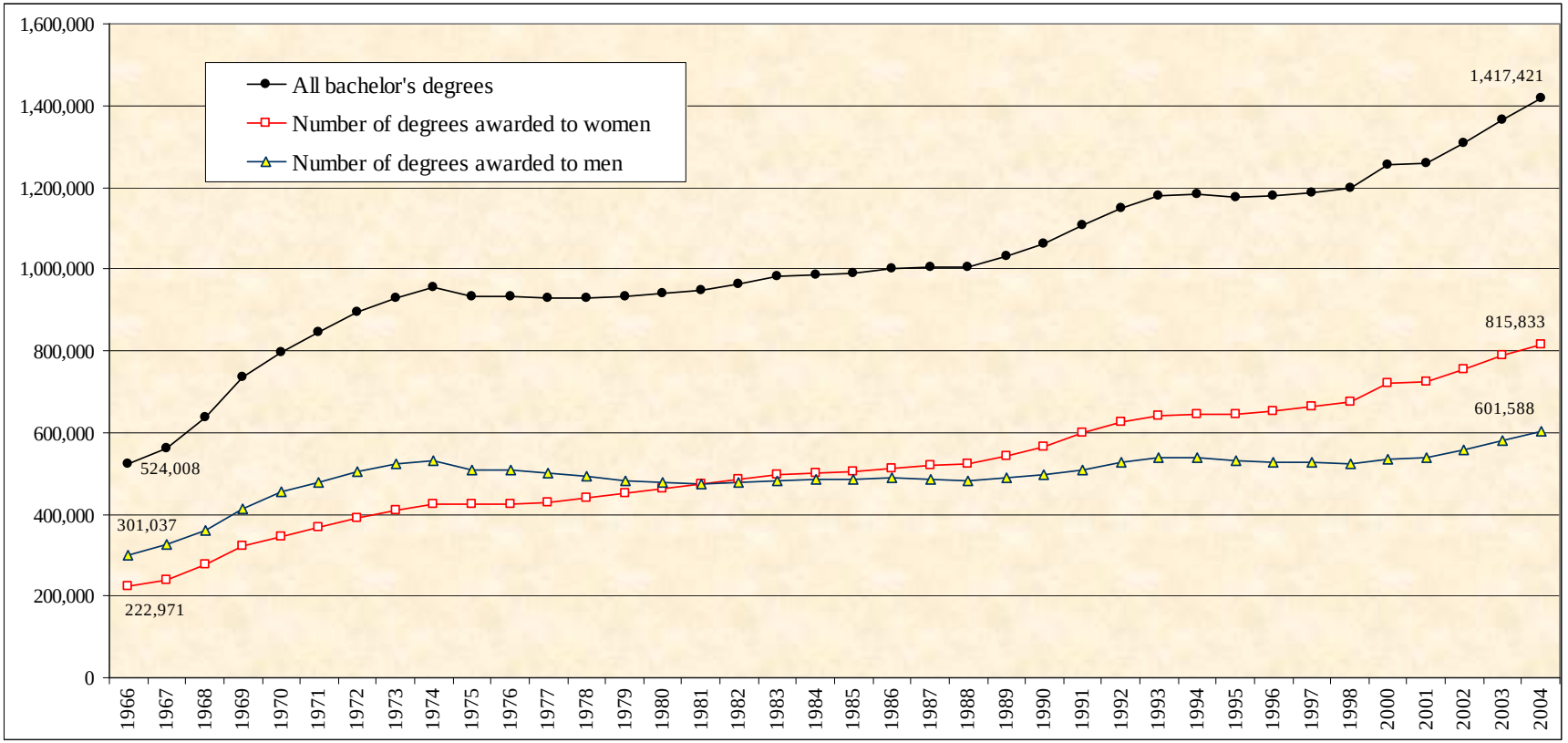
Bachelor's Degrees and Degree Recipients in Modern Languages, 1966 to 2005

A note on sources:
The information about bachelor's degree awards presented below is drawn from annual surveys conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the United States Department of Education.
A Web site maintained by the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Integrated Science and Engineering Resources Data System (known as WebCASPAR), provides easy access to time-series data about degree completions from 1966 through the academic year 2003–04. Information for 2004–05 comes from the 2004–05 data file in the degree completions survey series, as downloaded from the NCES Web site.
Information about graduates' postbaccalaureate degree attainment and employment comes from the 2003 National Survey of College Graduates (NSCG). The Science and Engineers Statistical Data System (SESTAT)—another Web site maintained by the NSF—provides an online interface for querying the NSCG data sets.

The history of bachelor's degree awards in the fields of modern languages and literatures provides evidence for both the continuing prominence of these studies in the liberal arts and their increasingly marginal status in the massive expansion of the population receiving bachelor's degrees over the past forty years.

Figure 1 shows how the number of bachelor's degree recipients grew more than two-and-one-half times between 1966 and 2004. Increases of 200,000 degrees or more occurred in the late 1960s, again in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and most recently in the years since 1998.

Fig. 1. Trends in the Number of Bachelor's Degree Awards, by Gender, 1966–2004

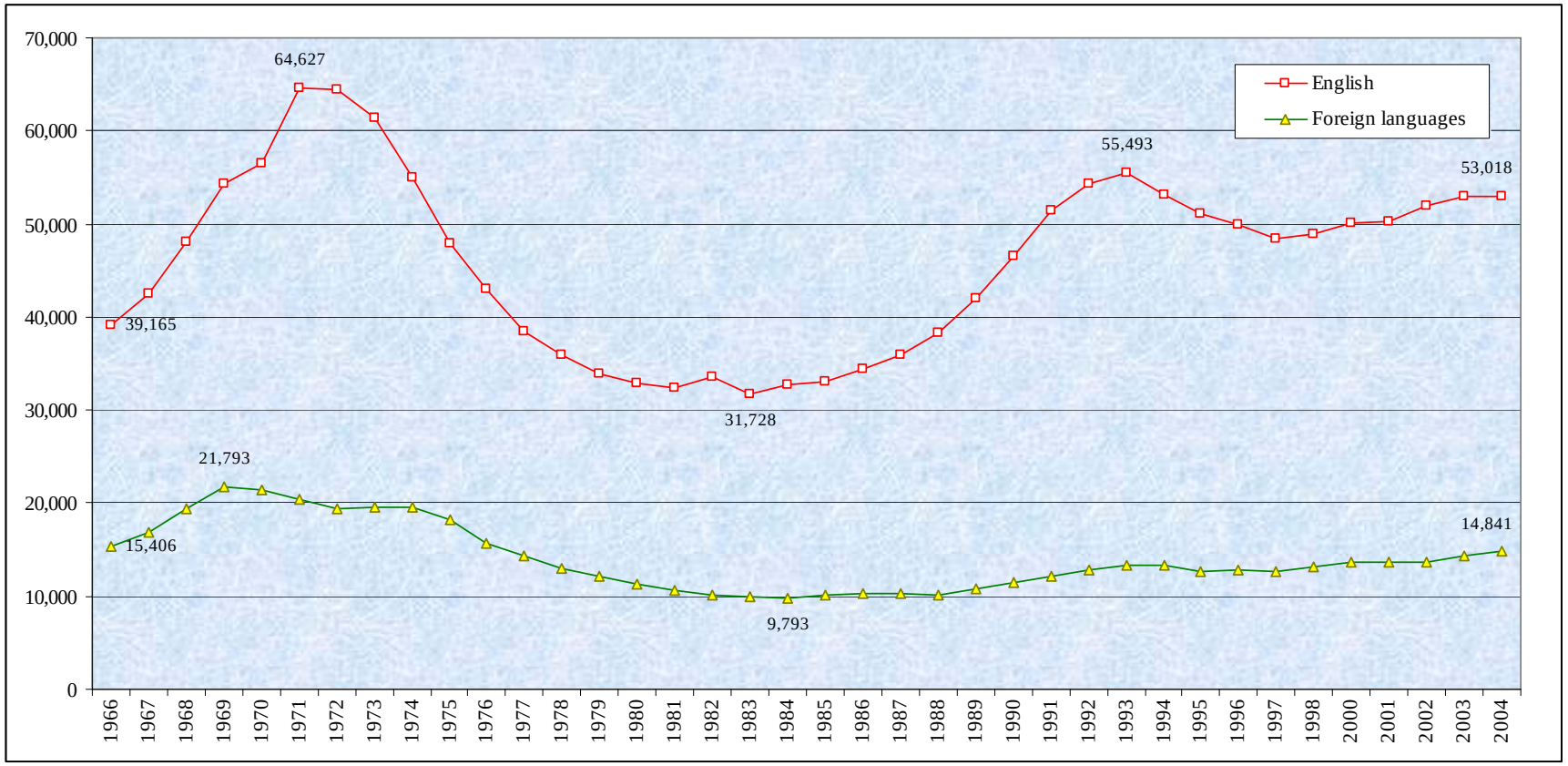


Source: NCES data on bachelor's degree awards, WebCASPAR

As the number of bachelor's degree recipients grew in the late 1960s, degree awards in English and foreign languages followed suit at first. Then, as shown in figure 2, over the dozen years between 1972 and the mid-1980s, degrees in English and foreign languages suffered a wrenching contraction, plummeting 51% in English and 55% in foreign languages. In the late 1980s, bachelor's degree awards substantially recovered, especially in English, and over the two decades since have sustained levels of about 50,000 degrees annually in English and 13,000 annually in foreign languages (foreign language degrees increased to almost 15,000 in 2004).

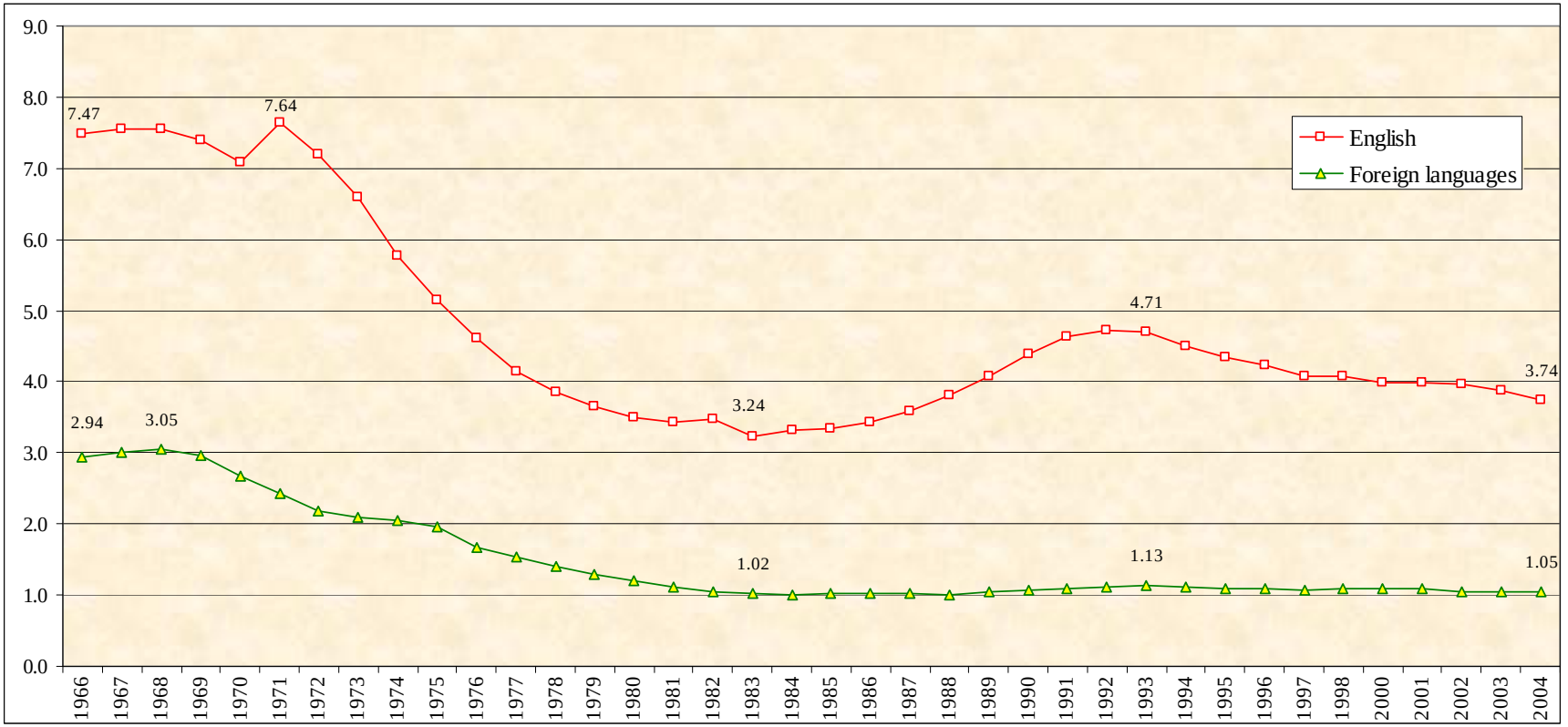
Even with the recovery, as of 2004 the absolute number of bachelor's degree recipients remained 27% below the high-water mark for foreign languages, reached in 1969, and 18% below the historic high for English, reached in 1971. The overall trend, shown in figure 3, has thus been a marked decline in the number of English and foreign language bachelor's degrees awarded per 100 bachelor's degree awards. By 1982, English bachelor's degrees had declined from more than 7 of every 100 bachelor's degrees to from between 3 and 5, while foreign languages declined from about 3 to 1. This market share of bachelor's degree awards has remained relatively stable for more than two decades; that is, since 1982, the absolute number of all bachelor's degrees and the numbers in English and foreign languages have increased more or less in tandem.

Fig. 2. Number of Bachelor's Degrees in English and Foreign Languages, 1966–2004



Source: NCES data on bachelor's degree awards, WebCASPAR

Fig. 3. Degrees in English and Foreign Languages per 100 Bachelor's Degrees, 1966–2004

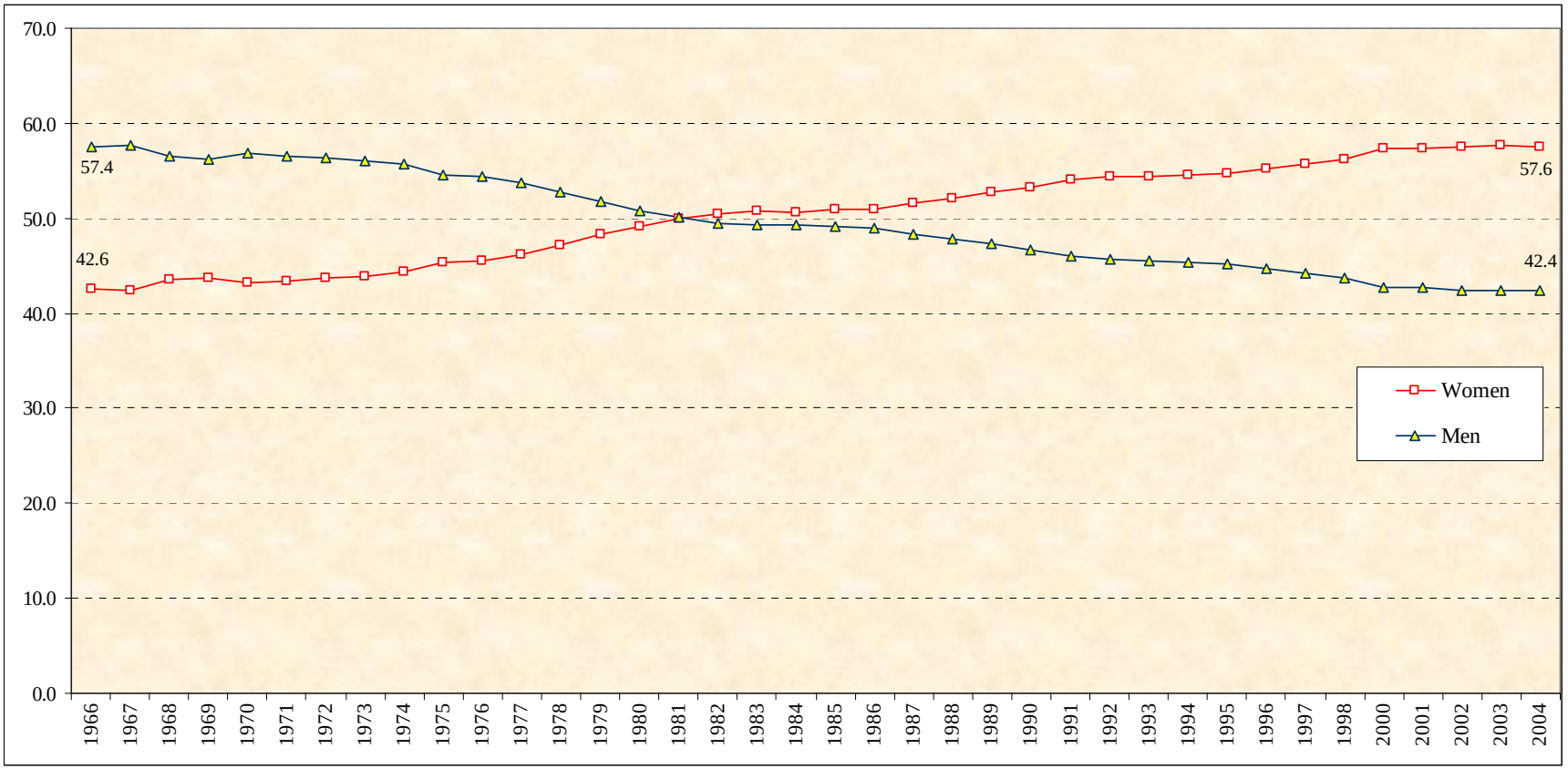


Source: NCES data on bachelor's degree awards, WebCASPAR

The interesting, and less well understood, story these data have to tell concerns the changing dynamics of bachelor's degree awards to men and women, especially the marked and continuing increases in the number and percentage of women going to college and receiving bachelor's degrees and the way women's choices of undergraduate majors have changed. Between 1966 and 2004, the percentage of bachelor's degrees awarded to men and women reversed: in 1966, 57.4% of all bachelor's degrees were awarded to men; in 2004, 57.6% of a much larger number of bachelor's degrees were awarded to women. The two trend lines are shown in figure 4.

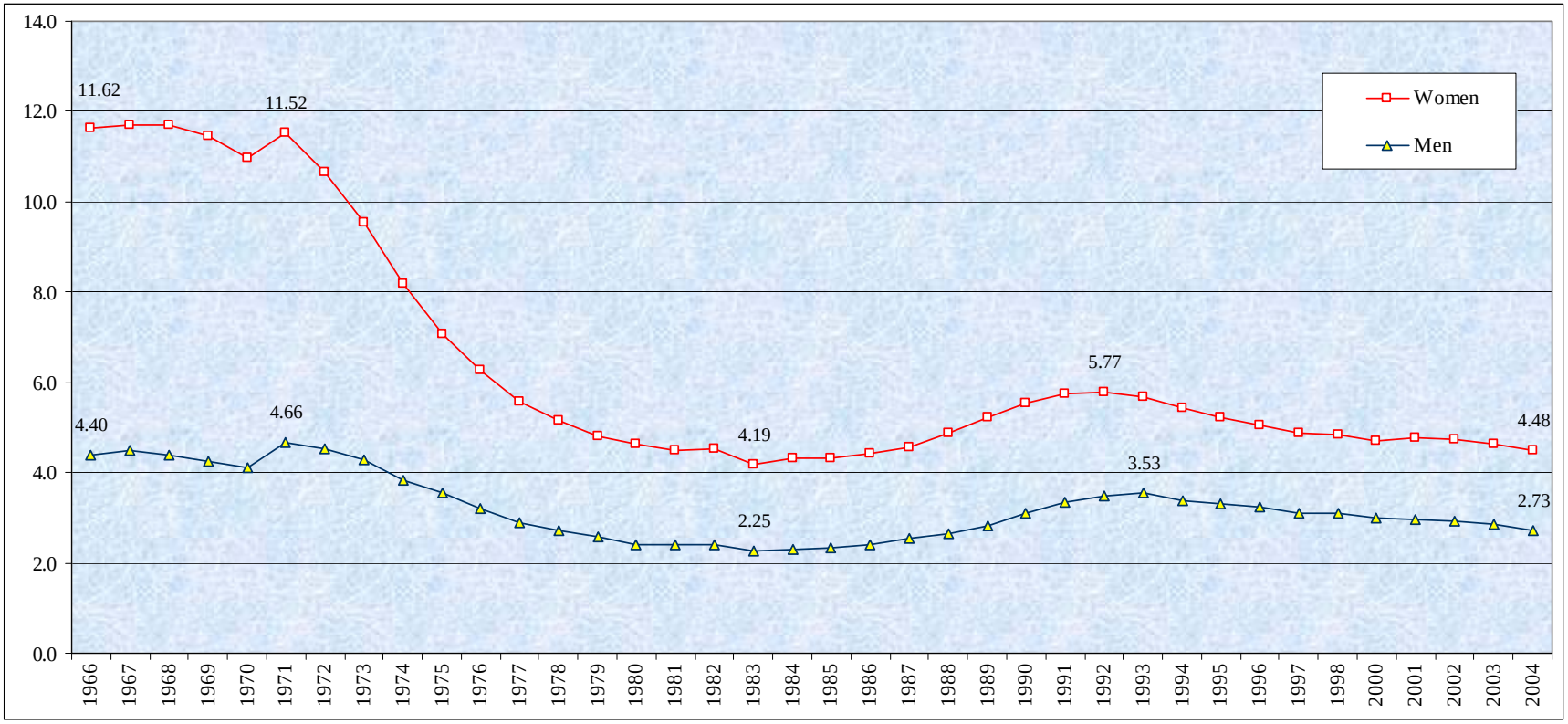
Meanwhile, as shown in figure 5, between 1972 and 1982, the number of bachelor's degrees in English awarded to women contracted from almost 12 to just over 4 of every 100 bachelor's degrees awarded to women. Figure 6 shows how a parallel alteration occurred in foreign languages, where the number shrank from about 5 in 1968 to 1.4 of every 100 degrees awarded to women in 1984. Especially revealing is the marked narrowing of the gap between the number of degrees in modern languages awarded to women and to men per 100 bachelor's degree awards to women and to men. The trend lines document how, in their choice of English and foreign languages as undergraduate majors, women's behavior came to resemble men's much more closely during the 1970s. That is, as career options widened for women in the wider society, women redistributed themselves across a far wider array of majors, and English and foreign languages lost women as a semicaptive audience in undergraduate education.

Fig. 4. Percentage of All Bachelor's Degrees Awarded, by Gender, 1966–2004



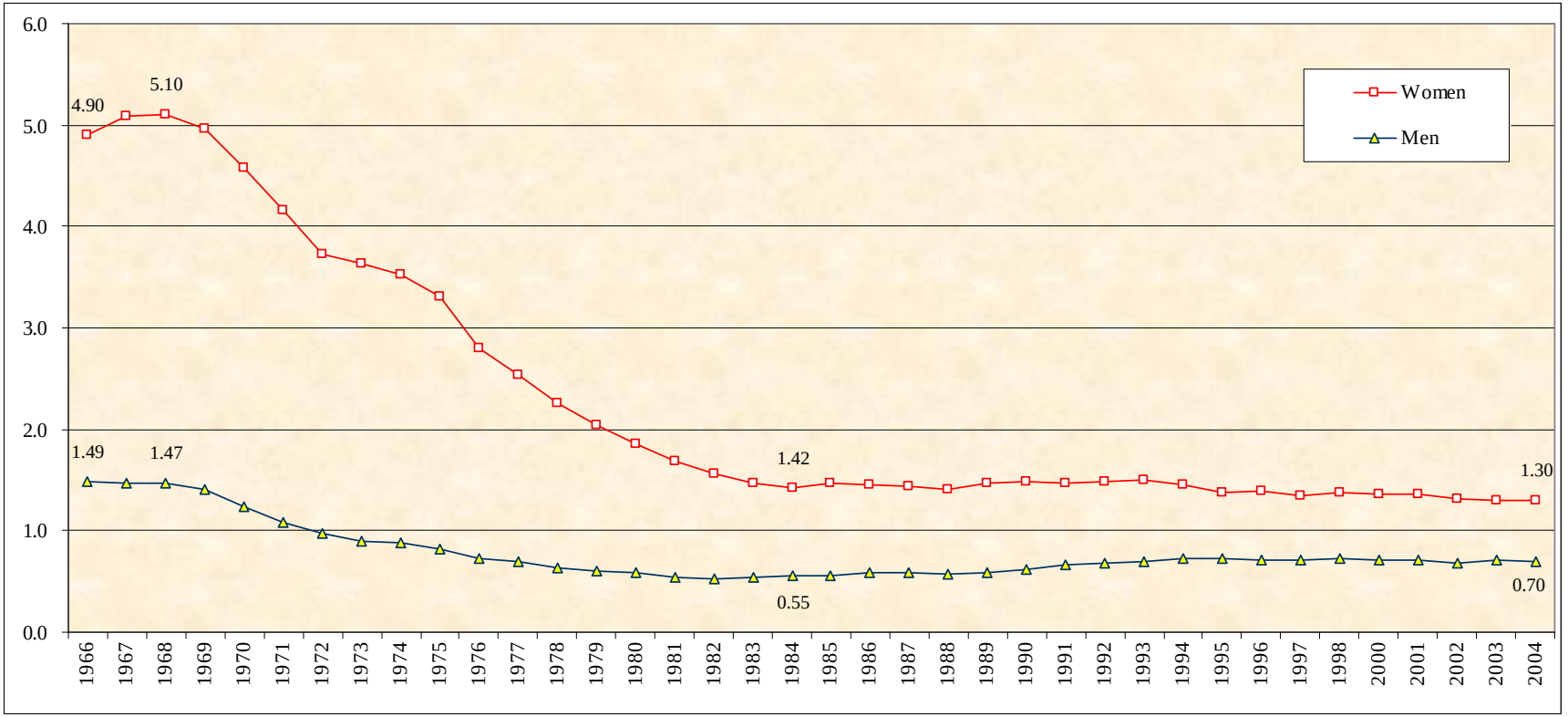
Source: NCES data on bachelor's degree awards, WebCASPAR

Fig. 5. Number of Bachelor's Degrees in English Awarded to Men and Women per 100 Degrees Awarded to Men and Women, 1966–2004



Source: NCES data on bachelor's degree awards, WebCASPAR

Fig. 6. Number of Bachelor's Degrees in Foreign Languages Awarded to Men and Women per 100 Degrees Awarded to Men and Women, 1966–2004



Source: NCES data on bachelor's degree awards, WebCASPAR

Table 1 compares the percentage of women bachelor's degree recipients in various subject areas in 1966 and 2004. As women redistributed themselves across a wider range of undergraduate majors, the proportion of women to men in English and foreign languages remained relatively constant even as the percentage of all degrees in English and foreign languages awarded to women declined far more sharply than for men. This could occur only because women made up a continually increasing share of the entire undergraduate population. That is, because the proportion of all women graduates increased from 42.6% in 1966 to 57.6% in 2004, the gap between the proportion of women graduating with majors in English and foreign languages and the proportion of all women graduates shrank by half, from a difference on the order of twenty-five percentage points in 1966 to one of about thirteen percentage points in 2004.

Table 1. Percentage of Women Bachelor's Degree Recipients in Various Subject Areas in 1966 and 2004

Subject Area	1966	2004
English	66.2	69.0
Foreign languages	70.9	71.6
Business and management	8.4	50.5
Economics	9.3	33.2
Mathematics and statistics	33.3	45.9
Medical sciences	13.7	67.4
Political science	22.1	51.4

Source: NCES data on bachelor's degree awards, WebCASPAR

Meanwhile, the proportions of undergraduates, both men and women, majoring in various arts and science disciplines were likewise shifting. The greatest shifts occurred in business and management, which claimed 12.5 of every 100 bachelor's degrees in 1966 (compared with 7.5 for English and 2.9 for foreign languages) but 22.5 in 2004 (compared with 3.7 for English and 1.0 for foreign languages), and in nonscience education, which declined from 22 of every 100 degrees in 1966 to 8.1 in 2004. More typical, however, is the situation of political science, which graduated 3.2 of every 100 bachelor's degree recipients in 1966 and 3.6 for every 100 of the massively larger number in 2004. Another interesting case is performing arts and music, which awarded 3.6 of every 100 bachelor's degree recipients in 1966 but 5.4 in 2004.

In December 2006, the United States Department of Education released data about degree awards for the academic year 2004–05. The 2004–05 data afford a detailed view of the number of bachelor's degrees currently being awarded and the distribution of degree recipients across different types of institutions.

In 2004–05, 1,320 institutions awarded a total of 55,265 bachelor's degrees in English; 976 institutions awarded 17,433 bachelor's degrees in foreign languages. (The totals reflect degrees awarded by all Title IV–participating institutions.) In both English and foreign languages, close to 70% of these bachelor's degree recipients graduated from public institutions (compared with 64.5% of all graduates); the two categories of private institutions divide the remaining 30% of graduates almost evenly between them (table 2). Graduates from Carnegie Doctoral/Research institutions made up 50.2% of graduates in English and 59.5% of graduates in foreign languages (compared with 45.7% of all graduates; see table 3).

Table 2. Number of Bachelor's Degrees Awarded in English, Foreign Languages, and All Fields in 2004–05, by Control and Affiliation of the Institution Where Graduates Received Their Degrees

Control and Affiliation of the Institution		English	Foreign Languages	All Fields
Public	Number of degrees	38,258	11,968	939,987
	Percentage of degrees in sector	69.2%	68.7%	64.5%
Private, for-profit	Number of degrees	9	0	49,222
	Percentage of degrees in sector	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%
Private, no religious affiliation	Number of degrees	8,123	2,665	220,583
	Percentage of degrees in sector	14.7%	15.3%	15.1%
Private, religiously affiliated	Number of degrees	8,872	2,799	246,169
	Percentage of degrees in sector	16.1%	16.1%	16.9%
Unknown	Number of degrees	3	1	440
	Percentage of degrees in sector	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total		55,265	17,433	1,456,401
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: NCES data on 2004–05 institutional characteristics and degree completions, IPEDS

Table 3. Number of Bachelor's Degrees Awarded in English, Foreign Languages, and All Fields in 2004–05, by Carnegie Classification of the Institution Where Graduates Received Their Degrees

Carnegie Classification		English	Foreign Languages	All Fields
Doctoral/Research	Number of degrees	27,754	10,369	665,277
	Percentage of degrees in sector	50.2%	59.5%	45.7%
Master's	Number of degrees	18,816	4,304	504,943
	Percentage of degrees in sector	34.0%	24.7%	34.7%
Baccalaureate	Number of degrees	8,300	2,681	180,847
	Percentage of degrees in sector	15.0%	15.4%	12.4%
Associates	Number of degrees	77	0	11,367
	Percentage of degrees in sector	0.1%	0.0%	0.8%
Specialized	Number of degrees	170	62	55,986
	Percentage of degrees in sector	0.3%	0.4%	3.8%
Not classified	Number of degrees	148	17	37,981
	Percentage of degrees in sector	0.3%	0.1%	2.6%
Total		55,265	17,433	1,456,401
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: NCES data on 2004–05 institutional characteristics and degree completions, IPEDS

Bachelor's degree awards can also be broken out by the specific program awarding the degree—9 subfields or programs categorized with English language and literature and 44 programs categorized with foreign languages and literatures. In English, for example, undergraduate degrees in creative writing have increased from 748 in 1992–93 to 1,841 in 2004–05. Tables 4 and 5 show the detailed breakdown for 2004–05, first for English and then for other languages and literatures. No surprise, degrees in Spanish language and literature comprise 47.8% of all bachelor's degrees in foreign languages, followed by French (13.8%), and German (6.3%). (In 2002–03, degrees in comparative literature were moved from English to foreign languages; the older categorization is retained here to match the way degrees were reported on the WebCASPAR database system at the time this report was prepared. WebCASPAR has since updated its system to match the NCES categorization.)

Table 4. Number and Percentage of 2004–05 Bachelor's Degree Recipients in 9 English Program Classifications

English Degree Program	Number of Graduates	Percentage of Graduates
English language and literature, general	41,171	74.5%
Comparative literature	834	1.5%
English literature (British and Commonwealth)	959	1.7%
American literature (United States)	113	0.2%
English composition	501	0.9%
Technical and business writing	459	0.8%
Creative writing	1,841	3.3%
English language and literature/letters, other	1,012	1.8%
Speech and rhetorical Studies	8,375	15.2%
Total	55,265	100.0%

Source: NCES data on 2004–05 degree completions, IPEDS

Table 5. Number and Percentage of 2004–05 Bachelor's Degree Recipients in 44 Language Program Classifications

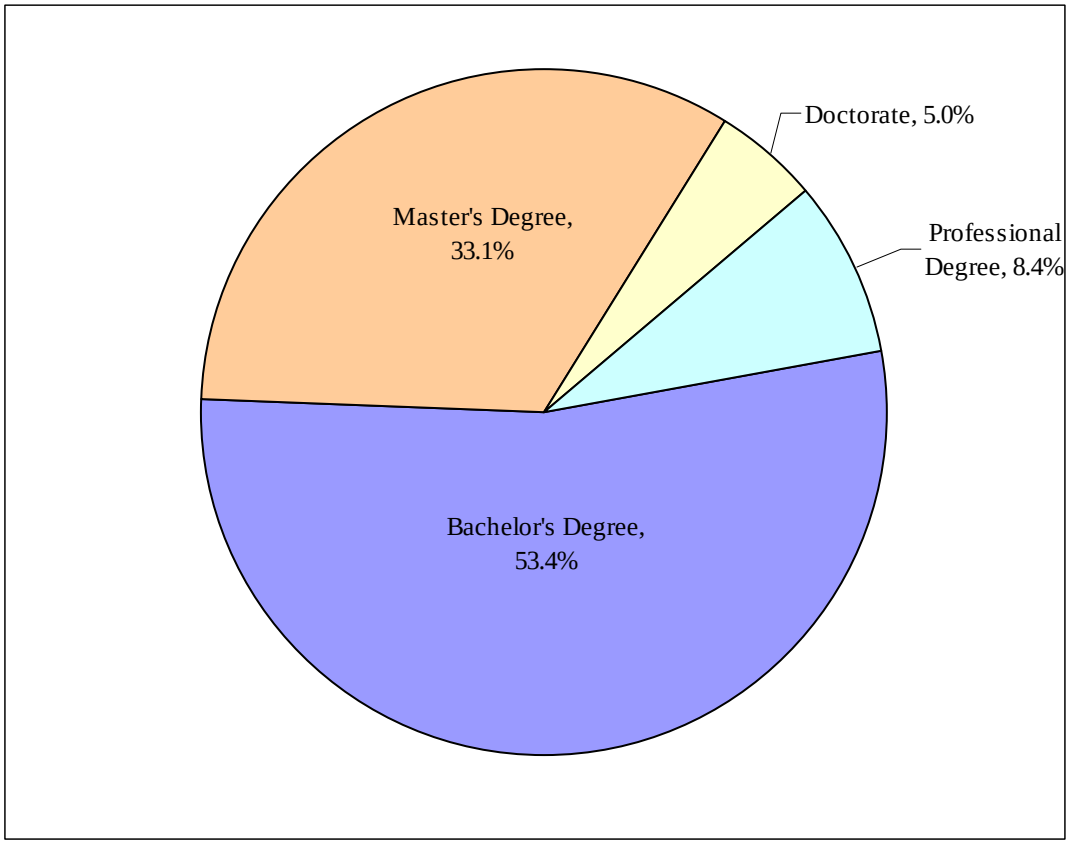
Language Degree Program	Number of Graduates	Percentage of Graduates
Foreign languages and literatures, general	1,385	7.9%
African languages, literatures, and linguistics	4	0.0%
East Asian languages, literatures, and linguistics, general	80	0.5%
Chinese language and literature	208	1.2%
Japanese language and literature	431	2.5%
Korean language and literature	8	0.0%
East Asian languages, literatures, and linguistics, other	88	0.5%
Slavic languages, literatures, and linguistics, general	46	0.3%
Russian language and literature	298	1.7%
Czech language and literature	2	0.0%
Polish language and literature	1	0.0%
Slavic/Baltic/Albanian languages, literatures, and linguistics, other	2	0.0%
Germanic languages, literatures, and linguistics, general	100	0.6%
German language and literature	1,103	6.3%
Scandinavian languages, literatures, and linguistics	8	0.0%
Danish language and literature	2	0.0%
Norwegian language and literature	3	0.0%
Swedish language and literature	4	0.0%
Germanic languages, literatures, and linguistics, other	0	0.0%
Modern Greek language and literature	0	0.0%
South Asian languages, literatures, and linguistics, general	3	0.0%
Sanskrit/Classical Indian languages, literatures, and linguistics	0	0.0%
Romance languages, literatures, and linguistics, general	61	0.3%
French language and literature	2,399	13.8%
Italian language and literature	277	1.6%
Portuguese language and literature	38	0.2%
Spanish language and literature	8,330	47.8%
Romanian language and literature	2	0.0%
Romance languages, literatures, and linguistics, other	99	0.6%

Semitic languages, literatures, and linguistics, general	0	0.0%
Arabic language and literature	21	0.1%
Hebrew language and literature	24	0.1%
Middle/Near Eastern/Semitic languages, literatures, and linguistics, other	34	0.2%
Classics/Classical languages, literatures, and linguistics, general	927	5.3%
Ancient/Classical Greek language and literature	39	0.2%
Latin language and literature	90	0.5%
Classics/Classical languages, literatures, and linguistics, other	22	0.1%
Celtic languages, literatures, and linguistics	7	0.0%
Filipino/Tagalog language and literature	2	0.0%
American Sign Language (ASL)	44	0.3%
Foreign languages, literatures, and linguistics, other	152	0.9%
Language interpretation and translation	36	0.2%
Linguistics	1,020	5.9%
Linguistic/Comparative/Related language studies and services, other	33	0.2%
Total	17,433	100.0%

Source: NCES data on 2004–05 degree completions, IPEDS

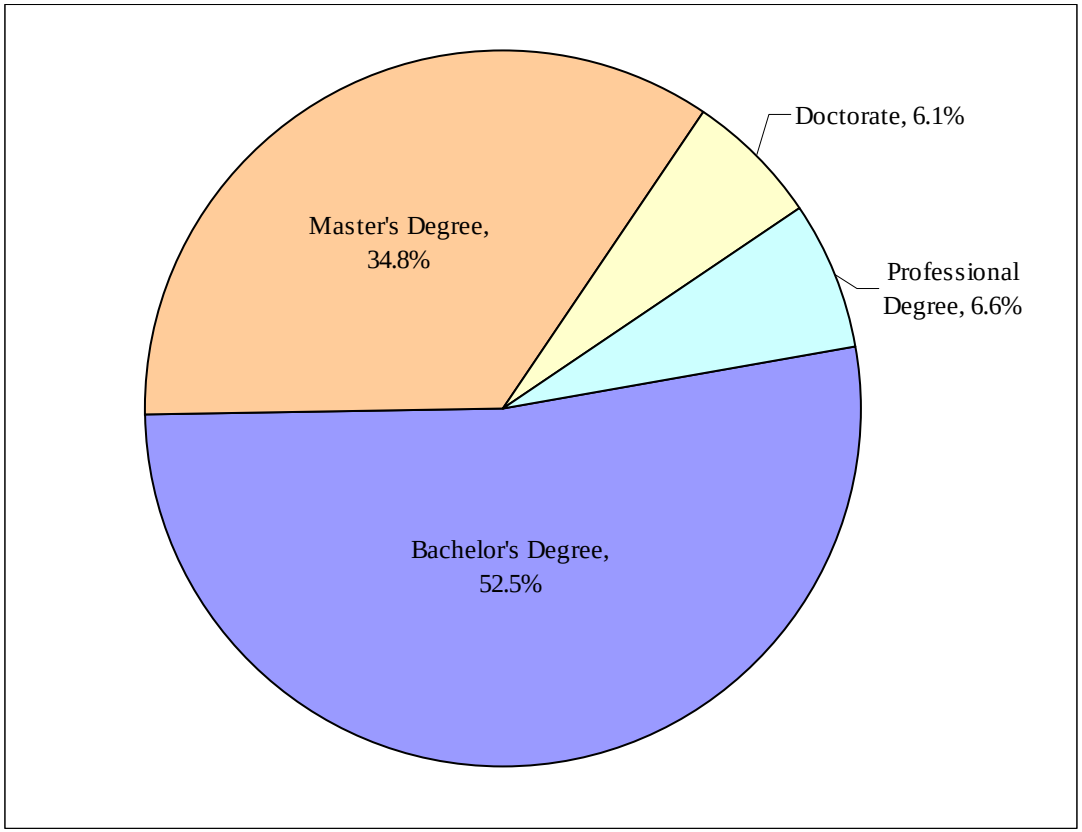
What happens to graduates who hold bachelor's degrees in modern languages and literatures? The 2003 National Survey of College Graduates (NSCG), a sample survey conducted for Congress by the National Science Foundation as a sequel to the 2000 census, provides some systematic information about both further degree attainment and employment of graduates. A query on the 2003 NSCG data for the highest degree earned by college graduates whose first bachelor's degree was in English (fig. 7) or in foreign languages (fig. 8) indicates that something over half of all graduates still had the bachelor's degree as their highest degree as of November 2003; about a third had gone on to earn a master's. Graduates with doctorates made up 5.0% of graduates in English and 6.1% of graduates in foreign languages. Graduates with professional degrees (e.g., law) made up 8.4% of graduates in English and 6.1% of graduates in foreign languages.

Fig. 7. 2003 National Survey of College Graduates,
Highest Degree Attained by Graduates Whose First Bachelor's Degree Is in English



Source: 2003 NSCG, SESTAT

Fig. 8. 2003 National Survey of College Graduates,
Highest Degree Attained by Graduates Whose First Bachelor's Degree Is in Foreign Languages



Source: 2003 NSCG, SESTAT

The NSCG also provides information about graduates' employment status and occupations. Of recent graduates in English (those who received their first bachelor's degree between 1990 and 1999), 85.7% were employed, 12.0% were not in the labor force (many because they were students), and 2.3% were unemployed. Of recent graduates in foreign languages, 81.5% were employed, 15.6% were not in the labor force, and 2.9% were unemployed. Of the employed graduates in English, 87.2% were employed full-time and 12.8% were employed part-time. Of the employed graduates in foreign languages, 85.8% were employed full-time and 14.2% were employed part-time.

The occupation of the greatest percentage of recent graduates in both English and foreign languages is elementary or secondary school teacher: 15.2% of recent graduates in English and 25.3% of recent graduates in foreign languages report elementary or secondary school teaching as their occupation as of November 2003. For English graduates, however, work in publishing and the media are almost as common—14.4% of recent graduates in English report "artists, broadcasters, editors, entertainers, public relations" as their occupational category (the figure for graduates in foreign languages is 2.7%). Marketing and sales account for 9.0% of recent graduates in English and 8.4% of graduates in foreign languages. Law accounts for 7.5% of graduates in English and 3.7% of graduates in foreign languages. Tables 6 and 7 provide complete lists. The weighted count indicates the total number of graduates as estimated on the basis of the representative sample of respondents canvassed in the survey.

Table 6. 2003 National Survey of College Graduates,
Job Category (as of November 2003) of Graduates Whose First Bachelor's Degree Is in English And Was Received between 1990 and 1999

Job Category as of November 2003	Percentage	Weighted Count
Elementary and secondary school teachers	15.2%	57,664
Postsecondary teachers: English	3.8%	14,556
Postsecondary teachers: foreign languages	0.2%	681
Postsecondary teachers; other subjects	0.7%	2,648
Education administrators(e.g. registrar, dean, principal)	0.2%	689
Artists, broadcasters, editors, entertainers, public relations	14.4%	54,665
Marketing and sales	9.0%	34,035
Lawyers, judges	7.5%	28,596
Medical and health practitioners, nurses, psychologists, technologists	3.1%	11,879
Top-level managers, executives, administrators	0.7%	2,758
Other managers	7.2%	27,378
Other administrative and secretarial	10.1%	38,513
Computer and information science occupations	5.3%	20,012
Insurance, securities, real estate and business services	3.3%	12,450
Other service occupations	4.0%	15,094
Librarians, archivists, curators	1.5%	5,697
Accountants, auditors, and other financial specialists	3.5%	13,170
Accounting clerks and bookkeepers	0.1%	222
Personnel, training, and labor relations specialists	2.5%	9,512
Engineers and scientists	1.5%	5,547
Social workers	1.0%	3,893
Clergy and other religious workers	0.2%	674
Teachers and instructors in non-educational institutions	1.3%	4,874
Food preparation and services	0.5%	2,059
Social scientists (outside academia)	0.7%	2,558

Other occupations	2.6%	9,682
Grand total	100.0%	379,506

Source: 2003 NSCG, SESTAT

Table 7. 2003 National Survey of College Graduates,
Job Category (as of November 2003) of Graduates Whose First Bachelor's Degree Is in Foreign Languages and Was Received between 1990 and 1999

Job Category as of November 2003	Percentage	Weighted Count
Elementary and secondary school teachers	25.3%	25,502
Postsecondary teachers: foreign languages	5.2%	5,225
Postsecondary teachers: English teachers	1.2%	1,202
Postsecondary teachers: other subjects	1.3%	1,344
Education administrators (e.g. registrar, dean, principal)	1.3%	1,357
Marketing and sales	8.4%	8,530
Medical and health practioners, nurses, psychologists, technologists	8.6%	8,656
Artists, broadcasters, editors, entertainers, public relations	2.7%	2,729
Computer and information-science related occupations	5.6%	5,613
Insurance, securities, real estate and business services	1.9%	1,898
Lawyers, judges	3.7%	3,695
Accountants, auditors, and other financial specialists	3.0%	3,043
Accounting clerks and bookkeepers	0.9%	940
Top-level managers, executives, administrators	1.7%	1,689
Other managers	6.5%	6,590
Other administrative and secretarial	7.6%	7,678
Personnel, training, and labor relations specialists	4.3%	4,331
Clergy and other religious workers	0.1%	138
Teachers and instructors in non-educational institutions	1.3%	1,347
Food preparation and services	2.2%	2,188
Social workers	0.1%	138
Engineers and scientists	0.4%	416

Social scientists (outside academia)	0.4%	362
Other occupations	6.3%	6,341
Grand total	100.0%	100,952

Source: 2003 NSCG, SESTAT