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“FOREIGN” LANGUAGE IN THE UNITED STATES

EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

“Foreign” Language in the U.S.: Examining motivation, systemic attitudes, xenophobia, and
foreign language anxiety

Honors Thesis
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the
Requirements of HON 420
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By
Olivia Jennings

Mentor
Dr. José Juan Gómez-Becerra

Department of Languages, Cultures, Humanities

ABSTRACT

With the focus on the systemic attitudes, this study examines previous background in foreign language, attitudes about language in general, and the relation of language to identity. This study stresses the defining process in the making of American as a national and cultural identity, and how it has changed over the years. It examines the role of xenophobia and xenoglossophobia in the context of American identity, and through its evolution in past and current sociopolitical beliefs impacting an overall disinterest in foreign language. The disinterest in foreign language is investigated to discover the reasons why foreign language programs are being cut, why people are not studying them, and why they are not growing despite the presented humanistic, economic, and social benefits. It explores the historical background of interest and disinterest in foreign language and how that is tied to an established pattern of nativist attitudes that include aspects such as English-only policies. This study surveyed 100 participants about their perspectives on foreign language and how it relates to identity, their ability to speak another language, and what factors prevent someone from learning another language. With these results, this study is a call to action for foreign language education in the United States and awareness of differences in cultural attitudes, norms, and beliefs tied to language.

Key words and phrases: American national identity, xenophobia, xenoglossophobia, foreign language, identity, systemic attitudes.

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Introduction

Foreign, strange, unknown, unfamiliar, of, from, or characteristic of a country. In a context of foreign languages, it means a language other than one’s own. When foreign is attached to language, it does more than just providing a linguistic categorization, it rather ties the notion of language to nationalistic perceptions, values, cultures, and identity. These are known as language ideologies. These language ideologies play into a foreign language stigmatization ensuing from the construction of a national American identity and the rise of xenoglossophobia. With a disinterest in foreign language in the United States, there is also a contradiction to that: the promotion of the benefits of learning a foreign language such as humanistic and materialistic gains of language such as for a career or social purpose. The clash between the two ideas in society shows multiple viewpoints in regards to foreign language but the main viewpoint to observe is the disinterest. With numerous benefits of language acquisition, it is baffling why there is a high disinterest in foreign language. Therefore, this contradiction is the driving force for examining the factors and influences behind the disinterest. In the United States, there is a disinterest in “foreign” language that is due to systemic attitudes, xenophobia, and foreign language anxiety.

Language ideologies permeate into society based on racist and prejudicial attitudes that align with nationalist and patriotic and superiority views that stem from American national identity and colonialism. This is the reason why “foreign” is in quotations within the title of this paper to question its validity as not being a part of America; since foreign is defined as oppositional to American national identity, it produces an othering effect that separates groups of people from the hegemonic identity. There are several definitions presented in the United States

for the word foreign that are beyond just the dictionary definition. Thus, we are not simply using the word foreign, this paper takes in consideration “foreign” as a concept.

In the last decade, the Spanish-speaking population has grown and expanded through the United States, reaching a 13.4% of the entire population in 2018. Since the U.S. has the second largest Spanish speaking population of the world, it would make sense to have much more interest in foreign languages. However, the opposite seems to be taking place since there has been a resurgence of public attacks and discrimination towards Spanish speakers and the Latinx population. These attitudes raise the question on the history of U.S. xenoglossophobia in general, and Spanish in specific. This animosity towards the foreign threatens the livelihood of a bilingual society.

Literature Review

Amidst heavy and longstanding political tension and conflict, the topic of immigration is one of high importance within the United States. This pertains to foreign language because it allows the federal government to block the entrance of people who speak other languages (other than English) and other cultures. With the current presidential administration and the immigration crisis and debate, injustice towards the “foreign” is evident and it is a representation of existing xenophobia within our society and among individuals. Not only is there a growing prejudice against foreigners, but xenophobia is also present in the dismissal of any person that is not pertaining to the dominant culture. For example, in order for the current administration to build a wall at the border with Mexico, as Donald Trump promised, native American sacred grounds have been ruined. That is blatant disrespect for one of the cultures that are intrinsic to the United States’ cultural fabric; it is of importance to highlight that this is treated as a

subculture of the United States since they are born in the United States but speak another language besides English and are not white. In addition, having a physical territorial barrier can affect good international relations between countries because this division sends a message of animosity rather than promoting peace and unity.

In combination to the present political situations, we are experiencing a national economic crisis that resulted on the slashing of public service budgets; including cuts to institutions of higher education. As such, this resulted in cuts and removal of arts and humanities programs and departments that teach foreign languages and cultures. The cut-backs of these programs further this division since it includes foreign language courses. For instance, with the election of a new governor in the state of Kentucky, the budget for the department of education and the higher education sector were reduced significantly, which in turn forced many colleges and universities within the state to eliminate programs. Since 2008, \$200 million dollars has been cut in higher education in Kentucky (Sonka 2020). Programs in the humanities were greatly impacted because of the perceived lack of profitability, there were harsh cuts in theatre, foreign languages, religion, philosophy, art, and music (Seltzer 2017). In 2019 alone, more than 650 foreign language programs were cut nationwide according to the Modern Language Association. The reduction of these programs not only illustrates a general disregard for the humanities, which entails a lack of interest in the study and promotion of languages. Moreover, this attitude is indicative of systematic disregard for the study of languages in the United States.

However, the construction of a general perspective is dependent on political infrastructures, and also in media and channels of mass communication. The use of targeted language and communication to conceptualize an idea of the “foreign” is illustrated and exhibited within media every day and throughout the course of history. In *Brown Tide Rising*, author Otto Santa Ana claims, “In California, the political bellwether of the country, Latinos took center stage- as targets of public outrage. Once the governor expressed anti-Latino sentiments, xenophobia was no longer confined to private discussions. It became the stuff of public discourse” (Santa Ana 2002). He shows that specific targeted language that is oppositional to the foreign, became a public topic projected into political discourse that affects all people of the United States. Due to the advancement in technology and international communication, news is able to travel long distances fast and reach a broad audience within seconds. Advances like this allow for a great deal of influence in forming popular beliefs. This advantage has increased the use of targeted media and the spread of critical ideas and conceptions about the outsider. It depicts the internal thoughts of a systematic level in an external medium to be shared and therefore shaping and possibly misconstruing a general belief towards others and specifically, the foreign.

In the context of current socio-political situations and past history of prejudice in the United States, this study explores the relationship of an American national identity, second language acquisition, the concept of the “foreign” in the U.S., and other concluding factors as contributors and motivators of a desire in learning a foreign language in American while concentrating on a specific focus and emphasis of Spanish. In the United States, there is not an official language recognized at the federal level, however individual states have enacted laws

that enforce and regulate English-only policies that are telling of language ideologies. There is a foreign language stigmatization ensuing from these types of policies and ideologies are playing into a role in the construction of a national American identity and the rise of xenoglossophobia. Therefore, a disinterest in foreign language within the United States can be explained by key factors and influences: overall systematic attitudes, poor motivation, xenophobia, and foreign language anxiety.

With the growth of the Latino/Latina community in the United States and push for globalization around the world, foreign language education is becoming increasingly important. There are countless benefits to learning a second language such as more job availability, wider social network, psychological advancement, and cultural competency. Jay Matthews in the *Washington Post* article “*Half of the world is bilingual, What’s our problem?*” states, “Bilingualism is helpful when forming new connections with people around the country, whether be for social or work purposes” (Matthews 2019). Additionally, the author claims that “With so many jobs becoming tech and service based, our students need to be able to compete with people from all over the world. Being bilingual or trilingual enables them to compete economically and be a contributing member to the larger world community.” Not only is there a need for foreign languages to be able to compete globally and be a global citizen, also the United States is lacking in comparison to countries around the world. They are lacking in comparison when it comes to knowledge of other languages, culture, and politics.

The United States is behind when it comes to multilingualism and foreign language education even though there are countless benefits. A recent study showed that only 20% of kids in the United States study a language in school whereas 92% of kids in Europe study a language (Livni 2018). This is a wide gap in the study of languages. Perhaps, other countries are ahead of

the United States in terms of foreign language due to a geographic advantage. For example, Portugal is next to Spain and due to the close proximity of each other, it is common for citizens of both countries to grow up speaking multiple languages. The same concept can be applied to countries in Europe. The United States does have a geographic advantage in terms of other languages with it bordering Mexico and Canada where other languages are spoken. Also, Puerto Rico is a Spanish speaking common-wealth of the United States. Therefore, taking this into consideration, bilingualism could be beneficial to sustain competent global citizenship.

Foreign language education seems ideal for the purpose of bilingualism and international competition. However, given the nature of American national identity and strong systematic attitudes present in society, there is not a strong focus on foreign languages. Recent promotion of a state Seal of Biliteracy in secondary education seems to be promoting an increase in foreign language education. This Seal reflects a students’ proficiency in another language besides English and is stamped on a high school diploma. In fact, at Eastern Kentucky University, former university President Dr. Michael Benson sent out an email about diversity to students, faculty, and staff in November 2018 that, “This journey of personal growth, discovery, and knowledge is foundational to the ‘Eastern Experience’ and makes us all better global citizens. It is key to the assertion that a college education is a wise investment”. For Benson, seeking a college education impacts students’ competence by making them better global citizens. Like Benson, many administrators in higher education recognize the value of an education for the purpose of making students competitive global citizens. However, how can students be competitive global citizens without foreign language education? Perhaps, foreign language is not widely promoted in the United States because English is a common language around the world and many children in

other countries grow up learning and speaking it to be able to compete in the international market or global politics.

It is commonly known that English has been a dominant world language in the past decades, being the most spoken around the world, but there are also new competitors; and bilinguals around the world are now not only looking into English. However, in the United States, English holds a dominant status and it has even been encouraged as the only possible language for official protocol. In 30 states, English-only policies were enacted to make English the dominant language and what would be used in things such as instruction/educational curriculum or legal documents. This policy does not mean that other languages are not accepted or allowed to be spoken, it simply means that English is just the recognized language for the state. This all ties into the precedent in history of the United States and an established pattern of xenophobia, racism, prejudice, and superiority.

Xenophobia in American national identity and in turn leads to xenoglossophobia. In order to understand xenoglossophobia, xenophobia must first be defined. Xenophobia is defined as “The fear or hatred that which is perceived to be foreign or strange. Intense or irrational dislike or fear of people from other countries. It can involve a desire to eliminate their presence to secure a presumed purity and may relate to a fear of losing national, ethnic, or racial identity” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2020). Xenophobia can be seen in the past historical events in the United States towards that considered foreign. Xenoglossophobia is the fear of learning or using foreign languages (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2020). Occasionally, it can go right alongside xenophobia, racism, and prejudice.

There are various instances in United States’ history involving cases of hate and violence towards groups that fall outside the perceived general hegemony. In 1882, the United States.

enacted the Chinese Exclusion Act. This is an example of xenophobia and could lead to sentiments of xenoglossophobia. This act made it illegal for Chinese people to immigrate to the United States and Chinese education was not allowed in schools. In the process of the act, it was remarked that, “Congress passed the exclusion act to placate worker demands and assuage prevalent concerns about maintaining white racial purity” (Lockemy 2017). This act demonstrates how xenophobia began in the United States. Since this act is exclusive and depicts a threat to a presumed racial purity, it also is an example of xenophobia leading to xenoglossophobia because it shows how the language is imposing a threat to their purity and their identity. This act depicts the image that the foreign was a threat to their identity and who they were as Americans. Since the foreign identity (the Chinese in this case) spoke a different language, the United States feared them and wanted to promote English-only and push for assimilation. However, if assimilation such as conforming to societal norms (like speaking English) does not occur, the foreigner can receive discrimination, feel excluded, or be held to a higher standard/work ethic. The xenophobia would only continue into the 20th century during World War II.

In 1917, the United States enacted a German ban and that put a stop to all German education in the United States, including foreign language courses. Much like the Chinese Exclusion Act, this measure targeted a group of people perceived as the others. However, in this case the target was clearly their language, German. This ban is an example of xenoglossophobia and how the fear towards the other and foreign language pertains to maintaining a presumed purity of the American identity. During this ban, the Indiana State Teachers Association remarked, “There are no real German-Americans today, they all ought to be Americans and they have filled our land with spies” (Gershon 2017). This excerpt implies that in order to be

American, a multicultural person must give up the parts of their identity that are not American; this includes speaking another language or belonging to groups that are considered the others. Banning a language in the country is a great example of xenoglossophobia because it shows that the country fears the other language and other culture because it could potentially mix with the dominant culture or threaten the presumed purity that the hegemonic group desires to maintain. Additionally, during a time of War, sentiments of patriotism and nationalism skyrocketed, leading to a push of American national identity and opposing the foreign, and in this case, the war enemy. Not only was Germany a physical threat to the United States at the time, but Germans and German-Americans were seen as a threat because of their identity and identity markers, such as their language. While war time increased sentiments of xenophobia and xenoglossophobia, xenophobia and xenoglossophobia has been a part of U.S. history until the present day.

In 2016, the United States saw an election campaign that was unique in various respect, but particularly because of the incendiary rhetoric by the winning candidate and the elected president of the United States, Donald J. Trump. Particularly, this incendiary rhetoric was direct to immigrants and scapegoated foreigners as the reason for loss of jobs and violence in the United States. This rhetoric, being anti-foreign in nature gave rise to xenophobia again in the United States. This resurgence of xenophobia would be the initial step to a rise in xenoglossophobia as well. For example, President Donald Trump assumed that he could force Mexico and their citizens to pay for the wall or to construct it. From this assumption, having the foreigner pay for something that is not theirs shows that the foreigner is being blamed for issues such as illegal immigration and should accept responsibility even if the issues were not directly caused by them. This is an example of xenophobia because it shows that a political figure with

power and influence fears the foreign whether it be entering the country, imposing a threat to the presumed purity, or the mix of different cultures and languages. First, building and constructing a wall to geographically divide Mexico from the United States and restricting immigration shows how the foreign is not being accepted and that Trump’s use of American national identity is built on patriotism that equates an anti-immigrant sentiment. Second, his push for the return of the 1776 commission and for patriotic education instills old, traditional values that promote nationalism in a sense of superiority and exclusivity. This education plan was constructed in a mindset of xenophobia and xenoglossophobia that is demonstrated through public discourse.

This is not the only modern day example of xenophobia. After glossing over examples of xenophobia in history, it can be seen in today’s society in a video from 2018. In a New York City restaurant, a customer was speaking Spanish to the employers. Because the group of individuals was speaking Spanish, the man assumed that these people were foreign and illegal and even threatened to call ICE. He claimed, “This is America, you should be speaking English. This racial tirade in a public restaurant, as CNN and ABC calls it, is a demonstration of the embedded English-only policies in the United States and xenoglossophobic and xenophobic sentiments that have been presented throughout history. This man’s reaction to a foreign language shows the fear a person can have of a foreign identity and the way that they feel a foreign is a threat to them and society.

With a mindset of xenophobia and xenoglossophobia, this could be one of the factors that lead to many foreign language programs being cut. In fact, in 2019, colleges lost a total 651 language programs according to the Modern Language Association (Johnson 2019). Partly due to a disinterest in foreign language and an emphasis on STEM programs, the opportunity to be competent global citizens is affected and American national identity is enforced. These same

attitudes permeate the social context in the state of Kentucky. During the administration of Matt Bevin, the former governor cut humanities and arts programs in higher education in Kentucky because he believed them to be fields that do not produce money. He proclaimed in one of his speeches, “Find entire parts of your campus that don’t need to be there” (Schreiner 2017). This is directly relating to foreign language programs because in his opinion, he believed the field of humanities and languages to be a field that does not produce money like other fields such as science. His statement is a good reflection of the present systematic attitudes where the government should have an influence on what a person does in society. The state of Kentucky has been doing this since 2008 and have cut \$200 million in higher education funding.

A big part in the configuration of what it means to be American stems from subjectivity, power, institutionalization, and ideological state apparatuses. In his piece, “Subjectivity and Power”, author Michel Foucault draws on the ideas of how institutions and ideological state apparatuses form obstacles for marginalized citizens to jump through (Foucault 1982). These hoops then form a dynamic of inclusion and exclusion. In the United States, the established hegemony, what it is meant to be American, does not typically include knowing a second language. However, there are many privileged families that put their kids through bilingual or full immersion programs, which perhaps, could be due to a change in the systemic attitudes. While Foucault’s concepts are not solely aimed at the United States, they directly apply. When looking at the systems of power and influence of the United States, one might think of government, churches, education, and healthcare. These tend to be groups and organizations that can instill fear, promote sentiments of exclusivity, and have high amount of influence. They have a high amount of influence because they are the groups that instill beliefs, values, perspectives, and opinions and affect the overall well-being and mindset of each individual. For example,

when looking at sex education programs in the United States, the programs being instructed and promoted are ones that focus on abstinence-only. The decisions for those programs are ones that come from institutions that have power and influence such as the government who decides on the policies and funding for said programs. The same can be true about foreign language education and support of foreign languages; essentially the opposite of xenoglossophobia. When systems such as government, churches, healthcare, or education are opposing societal demands, it is difficult to really achieve the goals of advocacy and promote equity and equality. A great example of oppression from ideological state apparatuses is the idea of English-only ideologies. English-only ideologies encourage the education of English only and reinforce the idea that English should be the only language in the United States and it should be the official language. While 30 states have enacted this policy, including Kentucky(1984), the United States on a national level does not have an officially recognized language. In fact, for 40 years, Illinois had their official language listed as American. An English-only policy is where in formal settings such as the workplace, they have requirements for when English needs to be spoken. For example, it has become a common practice for certain workplaces to ensure the employee is always speaking in English to customers unless asked to speak another language. Encouraging these policies shows the importance of language and how it pertains to the country.

Additionally, in a recent study where researchers looked at latinx families in the United States, they found that English proficiency was the only significant factor in determining American national identity (Kiang, Broome, Chan, et. al 2019). Therefore, under this principle, a nativist dichotomy of the foreign and the national is formed. Since language is a part of culture, it is a part of an identity. Language is a part of identity because it can determine a person’s sense of belonging and a set of beliefs represented and expressed through the language. For example,

Native American nations are distinguished by their outward appearance and language (all forms of communication-verbal and nonverbal), this is a part of their culture and their identity, even though it can lead to misconceptions and stereotypes about their identity and culture. In trying to figure out what it means to be American, language, culture, and identity must be examined. After examining identity, then one can understand the concept of nativism and the meaning of containing a mutual national identity. The opposing side of this would be the foreign. An individual who is culturally competent and acknowledges both sides is the global citizen.

In order to understand the overarching identity that is American national identity, it needs to be broken down in components of identity. This can be done by exploring the concept of intersectionality. It is described in two different models, this exposes how gender, race, citizenship status, ability, religious preference or affiliation, class, and sexuality, all overlap to form one's own identity; it is oppositional to the homogenization proposed under nativist attitudes. There is an established hegemony about what is the dominant culture, especially in a low-context individualistic culture like the United States; this in turn creates a pressure for assimilation. Generally, those who fall outside of the hegemony are seen as the foreign and face the most oppression and discrimination. They are generally the marginalized group or the minority in the country and they are encouraged to assimilate and be more like the hegemony or the native. When these groups do not assimilate, for instance, by speaking English, they can be the target of discrimination even if it is something as small as a microaggression. This is seen heavily in the treatment of immigrants and those who have English as a second language. This also relates to who holds the power in the United States and who makes the decisions over the rights of individuals living in the country.

The perceived hegemony in the United States, usually people in positions of power, can be categorized as straight, white, Christian men. Usually they hold leadership roles in institutions that make powerful decisions such as government, education, or healthcare. Since they have this power and influence for decisions, they can impact the amount of funding programs receive such as foreign language. However, the hegemonic identity, while representing a majority is not the case for all. There are many men who identify with this identity that are open to the idea of foreign language and support it. This hegemonic identity can show that foreign language is not encouraged in the United States as in other countries due to a systematic mindset embedded within American national identity that promotes xenophobia, English-only ideologies, and xenoglossophobia. Consequently, this systemic mindset is not only counterproductive for reaching an intersectionally competent society, but it also puts the United States behind on a global level and impact of international relationships.

This mindset leads to the lack of education in foreign languages and other cultures and therefore, not understanding other countries or expecting them to speak English and assimilate to the U.S. culture such as in dealing with trade or business negotiations. Also, when compared to other countries, the United States falls behind academically and does not promote multilingualism. They are striving to promote global citizenship with advances in communication and technology that allowed for more international connectedness especially socially. With more language skills, it could be an opportunity for a business to expand their sector on a global level to expand their consumer base and see other perspectives on projects. Additionally, knowing other languages can be beneficial to the political realm for fields such as diplomacy and United Nations that need ambassadors who can interpret languages back and forth. It is examples like these that call for a need for foreign language education and promotion

because they are essential to the career field and allow for more opportunities in regards to national security, politics, and capitalism.

Methods

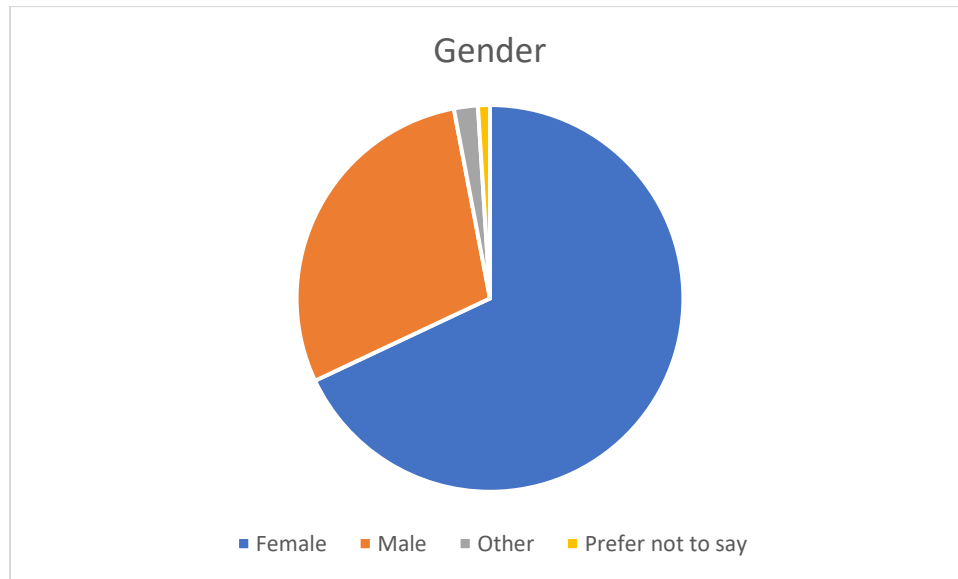
For this study, I created a survey with open-ended and closed-ended questions that asked about demographics and perspectives on language. The survey would collect data to reflect on systematic attitudes present in the United States. There is a focus on the state of Kentucky and Eastern Kentucky University students because of the physical and cultural proximity to the researcher. The survey consisted of nine questions that collected basic demographic information, language proficiency, attitudes about foreign language, language apprehension factors, and the role of language in identity. The survey questions are listed in Table 1 in the Appendix.

This survey was created using the platform SurveyMonkey and did not collect any identifying information. The survey was sent out on my personal accounts on Facebook and Snapchat and several friends on Facebook shared my survey to their friends. The survey was also posted in a weekly email for the Eastern Kentucky University Honors program where Honors students could partake in the survey. The survey was open for two weeks and then data was interpreted. All research conducted in the study was qualitative inquiries and pulled information from participants living in different states in the United States. This questionnaire/survey was conducted in Fall of 2020.

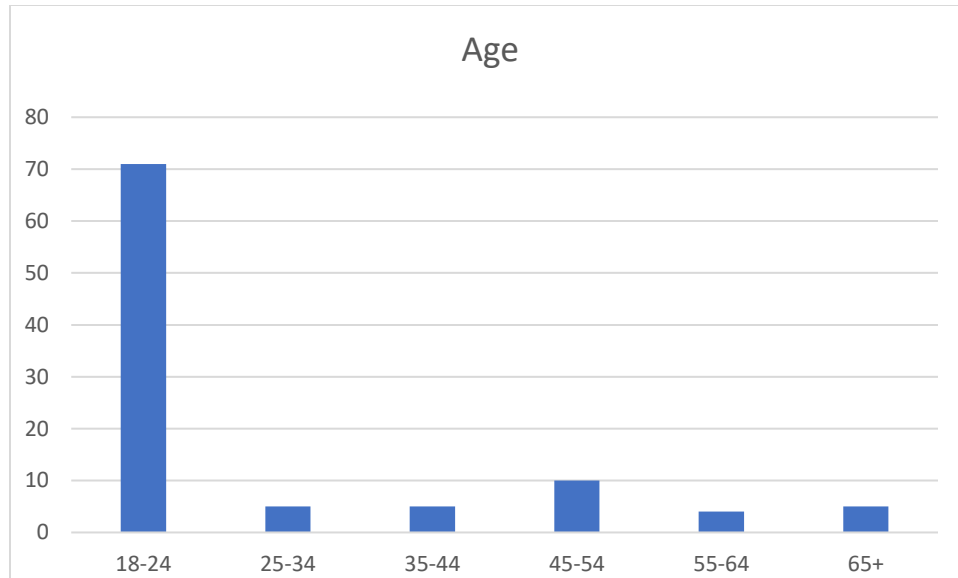
Participants

One hundred and sixty-seven participants partook in this study. However, due to the Survey Monkey platform, it would only allow 100 of those responses to be seen. Although that may seem like a downside, it is actually positive because it allowed to look at 100 random

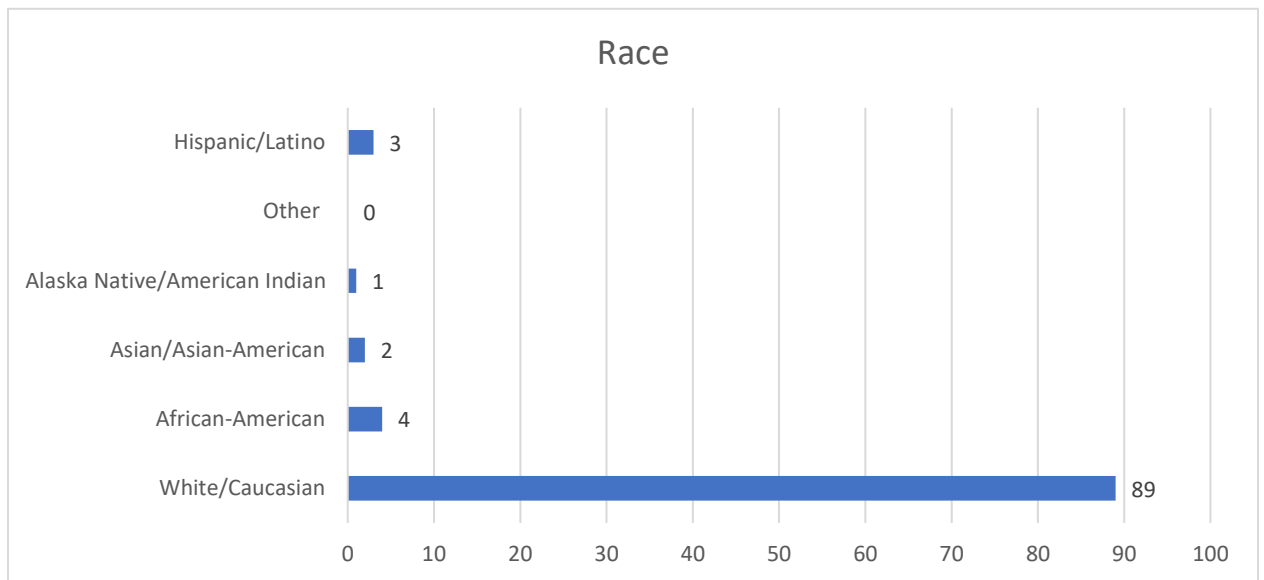
responses. Out of the 100, there was 68 people who identified as female and 29 people who identified as male. There were three respondents that identified as other gender.



In regards to age, 71 respondents fell into the 18-24 age range. There were 5 respondents that fell in the 25-34 age range. There were also 5 respondents who fell in the 35-44 age range. There were 10 respondents who fell in the 45-54 age range. There were 4 respondents who fell in the 55-64 age range and there were 5 respondents in the 65+ age range. With this broad set of data, there is a wide generation and age range represented and expressed in this questionnaire.



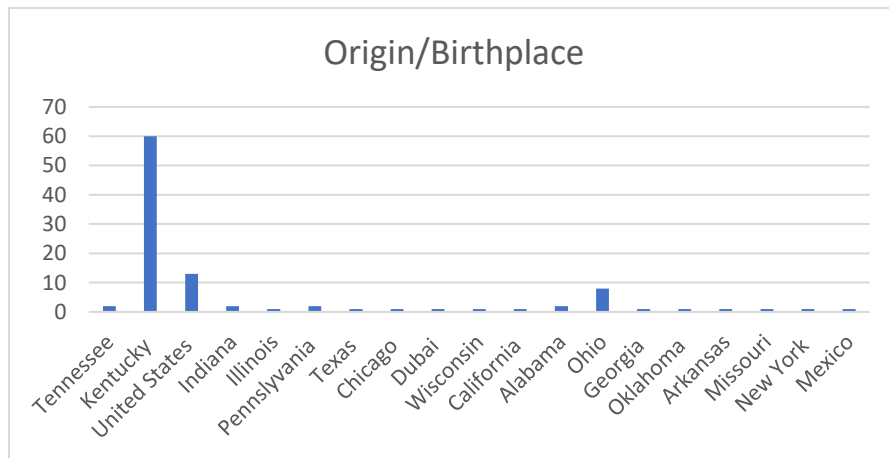
There was not a lot of cultural diversity amongst my respondents, 89 of them identified as white/Caucasian. Four respondents identify as black/African-American. Three respondents identify as Hispanic/Latino. Two respondents identify as Asian or Asian American. One person identifies as American Indian or Alaska Native.



There was a variety of responses in regards to origin or birthplace, but Kentucky was the prominent answer. 60 respondents wrote-in Kentucky as their origin or birthplace. Thirteen respondents opted for writing the United States as their birthplace. One respondent is from

Arkansas. Eight respondents are from Ohio. Two respondents are from Indiana. Two respondents are from Pennsylvania. One respondent is from Alabama and another respondent indicated that they are from both Alabama and Mexico. One respondent is from Texas. Three respondents are from West Virginia. Two respondents are from Tennessee. One respondent is from Chicago. One respondent is from Missouri. One respondent is from Wisconsin. One respondent is from California. One respondent is from Georgia. One respondent is from New York. One respondent is from Illinois. One respondent is from Oklahoma. One respondent is from Dubai.

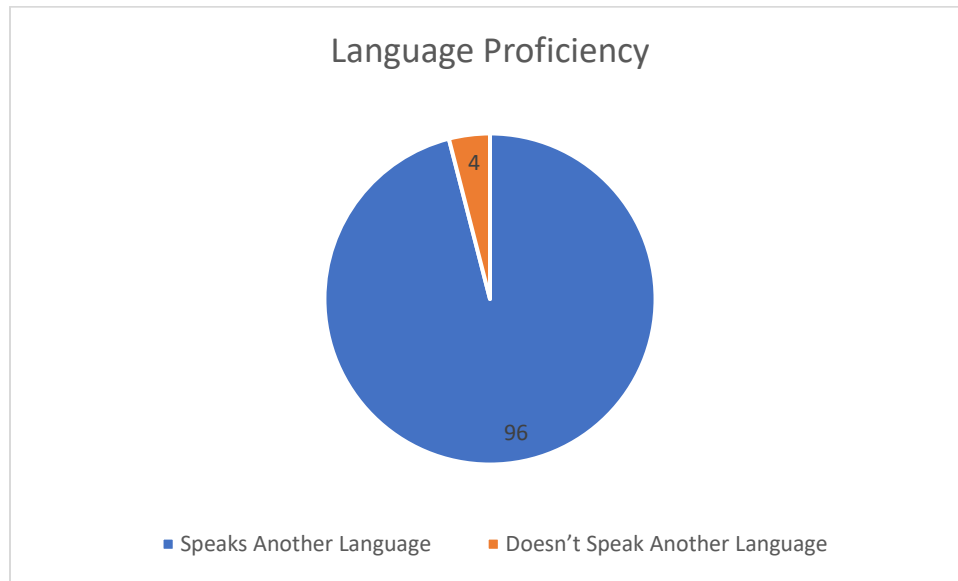
Overall, the majority of the respondents identify as white, female, between the ages of 18-24, and were born in Kentucky.



Data Summary

The first qualitative inquiry covered in the survey asks if the respondent speaks another language besides English. If they did not, they were asked to provide a reason why. 96% of the survey respondents speak another language other than English. Only 4 participants said they could not speak another language and their reasons why were that they never had the chance to,

it was not required in school, they are currently learning one, and they did not think they needed a language. While it was not asked in the question, some respondents provided what other languages they spoke; these languages are Spanish (the majority), French, American Sign Language, and Vietnamese.



Since respondents speak more than one language, their opinion and attitude towards foreign language results even more interesting. While the results were unique to each person, the common responses (that multiple people responded with) are the desire to be fluent, the desire to learn more languages, they are essential for culture, it is essential for communication, they are beautiful, and it is a valuable skill to have. Also, one participant claimed that “knowing another language is useful for a career.” However, in contrast, there were a few bleak responses such as “they’re okay” and “I am not opposed to other languages other than my own.” One respondent even remarked, “We live in America. I can take or leave it. I do feel that ATMs should only be in English”. In addition, one respondent answered with, “English is the most important language in the world”. This question opened the door to seeing the duality of American national identity in looking at the aspect of foreign language. Since the results showed perspectives on both sides, it

is still evident that former systematic attitudes are present today (i.e., the notion that foreign languages are not important or English-only policies should be enacted).

The next survey item pertains to how language is tied to identity. Many survey respondents agreed that language is directly tied to identity or as one participant said, “it is intrinsic to identity.” Additionally, several respondents agreed that language is important for communication and expression of identity. They believe that it shapes the way that we view the world and it shapes our own perspectives which in turn shapes our own identity. One key finding is that multiple participants in the survey said that language is an important part in knowing the origin of someone and a good predictor and indication of identity. Therefore, if this was the case, then English would be a predictor of American national identity or the identities of other countries with English as a dominant language such as Great Britain or Australia. Another response said that “language helps shape your identity to determine where you belong.”

From the responses, it can be observed that language plays a huge role in the expression of ourselves, the culture around us, our own self identity and intersectionality, and our sense of unity in shared group identity such as national identity. With that being said, there are some survey respondents who reported that for them language is not part of identity. While the majority of respondents agreed that language is important to identity, one participant considered that “what language you speak does not define who you are.”. One interesting thing that was proclaimed in this section was that one person claimed that, “I don’t believe English defines me and my identity but I believe that foreign languages determine foreign identities.” This response means that people pay attention to someone that speaks a foreign language; it actually shows that respondents are aware that people are much more pressed about a foreign language than they are about English... so, foreigners are identified by their language, this is where xenophobia meets

xenoglossophobia. On one hand, it says that language is a part of identity but it omits the possibility of having English as a part of your identity. Despite having some opposing views to the question, most of the responses are consistent with the research presented in aforementioned sections where it is suggested that English is a significant factor in determining American national identity.

The following survey item pertains to what are some of the factors that prevent someone from learning a foreign language. In this question, there is a lot of similarities in answers and overlap in responses. Many responses pointed to a lack of access to foreign language education/resources to learn foreign languages. Others responded with time or investment being a big factor. Others declared money being an issue. Others pointed to age being a huge factor and a few stated that they should have started learning the language at an earlier point in life. Some people pointed to a lack of exposure to other languages. Others pointed to the idea that, “if English is your first language then you may not see a need to learn another language because almost the entire world speaks English”. A key factor that many people highlighted is the lack of interest. The lack of interest response clearly shows the point that there is a lack of interest in foreign language in the United States. In addition to this crucial response, others pointed out that “xenophobia and racism” prevent someone from learning another language; another key factor mentioned in my research and present in systematic attitudes embedded in American national identity. In addition to these key points, some other factors mentioned were genetics, learning disabilities, laziness, stereotyping, bigotry, imperialist beliefs of the United States, and pride. While these are minor factors listed in responses, they can still have a significant impact in holding back someone from learning a language.

Discussion

This research study is important because it calls for the need for foreign language education and by showing the reasons behind disinterest in such programs through analyzing language ideologies that might be prevalent in the United States. With programs such as foreign language, theater, art, and culture being cut, especially in the humanities, it goes against what employers have reported as traits and skills they are seeking. In the Washington Post, Blanton comments, “Employers also tell us they need graduates who communicate well, think critically and work well in teams. These soft skills are exactly what students learn in majors and classes in English, history, the humanities and fine arts, among others.” That being said, cutting foreign languages and cultures goes against what experts recommend.

If the identity crisis in America changes to be one that promotes foreign language education and sparks an interest in language learning, systematic change will occur and all of society can benefit. Society can benefit because they will be able to make better connections internationally and with improved relations, there is less of a threat in terms of national security. Promoting foreign language and cultures is extremely important for the field of diplomacy and international affairs. A systemic change would not only affect the state level but also the federal level where it pertains to foreign affairs and foreign exchange for business and the economy. Systemic change is ideal for the United States in order to advance as a nation and be equivalent with other countries when looking at multilingualism. A systemic change would look like more support for foreign language and cultural education, more access to resources about American history and national identity, and the continued promotion of global citizenship.

For this research study, systematic attitudes towards foreign language in the United States were investigated to see if it was consistent with the attitudes presented in history. After

looking at the aforementioned background of systematic attitudes including intersectionality and present perspectives on foreign language, this research study explores how people across the United States currently feel about this topic and how that corresponds to their own unique intersectionality and identity as an American. There is an emphasis on Kentucky because that is where this study originated and where I could get the most data.

In the data sample there was a lack of diversity. The majority (89 respondents) identified as Caucasian/White. This is an advantage because it presents a generalized systematic attitude of people who share a common identity. It also shows the perspective of whiteness and is a factor of intersectionality that could affect the results. In examining this data, it is important to recognize and be aware of privilege and how that relates to the overall outcome of the data. While this can be seen as a limitation, it can also be helpful because it sheds light on one particular group in the population and specifically, for the most part, one area of the United States (Kentucky). On the other hand, it is a disadvantage because viewpoints from various races and ethnicities cannot be compared or represented well.

While some diversity is represented in my sample, it is important to state my own privileges and possible bias in doing this research. While personal views are not expressed, this study was conducted by a white, cisgender, able-bodied, female studying a foreign language who has studied in another country. Due to the fact that this study relates to intersectionality, it is crucial to note my own intersectionality and lens. For the sake of evaluating the results of the study in the framework, I encourage readers to look at their own intersectionality, privileges and bias, in contrast to the intersectionality of the participants in my study and in the data findings. Expecting that readers will be Americans, what aspects are the ones we might have in common and how does that relate to language? Before looking further into my study, take into

consideration the things that we commonly do without even thinking such as nonverbal gestures and jargon. In other countries, their communication is different and that is something that is learned in foreign language education and interdisciplinary courses. Having the cultural competency and knowledge is beneficial in all career fields but does America have the mindset of a global citizen or is it still buried deep in nativism and English-only policies?

While this study examined multiple factors to explore the disinterest in foreign language, there are more components that can be looked at. For example, one thing to notice in the age range is the generational gap. It would be interesting to compare and contrast the viewpoints on foreign language of each generation. Doing so could provide information on how views align with systematic attitudes present in historical context of the participants' formative years. Looking at the responses from the different generations could help see which age groups are more in favor of foreign language and the different angles on American national identity.

Another thing to look at in the study is the concept of dual identity. For example, one survey respondent listed that their birthplace was both Alabama and Mexico. Therefore, they share the Mexican identity and the American identity to create a Mexican-American identity. Exploring this concept further could have a completely different viewpoint on what it means to be an American and have a different perspective on foreign language in the United States, especially if they already speak another language. Looking at the reasons for learning foreign language could be beneficial to my study as well as knowing which languages other than English are being promoted in the current climate. Lastly, if this study were to be repeated or expanded, it would be interesting to see the correlations between their viewpoints on foreign language and identity and how that corresponds to age, gender, languages spoken, and ability.

Another potential expansion of the study is by adding more questions to the survey such as “What encourages foreign language education?” or questions that incorporate the various components of intersectionality. Another to extend this study is by looking at regionalisms, not only for language differences but also how different regions have different attitudes and beliefs that are shared in their local and shared subculture. If that were the case, we could compare results from each region and see how their attitudes differ. If the researcher even wanted to go beyond that, hopefully the researcher could get results from each state and compare the perspectives from each state or, If the researcher wanted to keep my study with a Kentucky emphasis, I could try to get results from each county or city and compare the perspectives on that. I think that would be a fantastic addition to the study and a good way to see the different viewpoints on American national identity coming from various perceptions and backgrounds. That would allow me to explore and compare the past systematic attitudes in different generations and see what has carried over and what has changed or reformed. Similar to this idea, it would be interesting to include statistics about educational resources and funding for foreign language in each region represented in my study, By looking at educational resources and funding for foreign language education, it can be determined what areas need the most attention and advocacy to advance in society as a global citizen.

From the results of this study, the main thing to point out is that there is still a disinterest in foreign language in the United States. Several survey respondents claimed that their “lack of desire/motivation to learn” is a factor that prevented them from learning a foreign language. This reflects the systemic attitudes present within the American national identity that is oppositional to the foreign. This is consistent with the thesis that there is still a disinterest in foreign language in the United States. Additionally, from this study, it is evident that there are socio-economic

factors that prevent foreign language education. There are people who are wanting to learn and wanting to promote global citizenship but don't have access to the resources to do so. This can be a call to action to advocate for foreign language education in public discourse. If languages are promoted like they should be, the United States can better compete on an international level and potentially reversing systemic attitudes from the past or avoiding its continuation.

Additionally, it is important to consider the concept of foreign language anxiety/xenoglossophobia in the results. While many people responded with factors that prevented foreign language study in my questionnaire, it would be nice to find out how big of a role communication apprehension has. If a person has anxiety or apprehension towards speaking in their native language, they are more likely to have increased or similar anxiety and apprehension to speak in a foreign language or second language. Therefore, if this study were extended, this could be a factor that could be examined. Much like having a disability or a learning disability, foreign language anxiety could really impede on one's desire to attempt to learn another language.

Also, from the results where multiple respondents answered with “language helps determine where you belong”. The idea of belonging is important in recognizing American national identity because if English is a significant factor in determining identity, then, if a person in the United States doesn't speak English, they may feel as if they don't belong. If society becomes more aware and conscious of these types of sentiments, it could promote acceptance and tolerance of other cultures and languages because they can understand how the “foreigner” or the “Other” feels. This can be a call for more empathy and cultural awareness. As a whole, this study showed that multiple generations in America, especially in Kentucky are working more towards an attitude of acceptance and support of foreign languages. Many

responded with languages are important to identity and useful for career. They are aware of the benefits and the majority are longing to learn more. Several respondents already spoke another language and therefore support foreign language education and immersion. The main highlight is that there is a positive shift in the attitude towards foreign language compared to the xenophobic past in America. Overall, in becoming educated on identity, intersectionality, English-only policies, factors that prevent foreign language acquisition, and systemic attitudes, America can work towards better promotion of global citizenship, advocacy for foreign language, and understand their own culture better.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First, there is a personal bias in the survey where the researcher favors foreign languages and cultural competency. This can potentially influence the arguments and consideration in this research. Second, it would be beneficial to separate the respondents based on those who speak a second language and those who don't. Doing so would allow for comparison and contrast in regards to attitudes about foreign language. Third, another limitation to the study is that in terms of intersectionality, there is a lot of other categorical items that I could have included in the survey to analyze but I could have included level of education, socio-economic status, religion, sexual orientation, and potentially political affiliation. These factors could play a role in someone's views towards foreign language and American national identity.

Additionally, factors of intersectionality could explain some of the factors that prevent someone from learning a foreign language such as access to resources or lack of education. Also,

another limitation to the study is that this survey was sent out on my personal social media accounts and on others’ social media accounts. Therefore, the responses could be potentially biased since they are a part of my network or the network of my friends. Thus, their view might align more with my views and they probably share common interests with me.

Future Implications

With the information presented in this research study, the future for this study is advocacy for foreign language in the United States through the means of institutions such as government and schools. There has already been a change in advocating for foreign language in recent years with high schools promoting the Seal of Biliteracy, and Google is calling for a change in foreign language education (Tsukayama 2018). Society is starting to recognize the benefits and becoming compassionate towards other cultures despite xenophobia and foreign language anxiety still being present. Additionally, many schools are beginning to create immersion programs where children start learning a foreign language at a young age (typically kindergarten) and have classes such as science entirely in another language. This promotes and encourages bilingualism and can prepare students better for the professional world. However, it is also problematic because foreign language education becomes tied to economical privilege. If school systems encourage foreign language, they can work towards ensuring global citizenship and cultural competency that allows students to be equipped to travel to other countries, compete in an international job market, and help ease language barriers. In addition, advocating for foreign language in public discourse such as politics would be beneficial because it would be helpful in government such as the United Nations or for Diplomacy. Since language is useful in any career, it is expected that all businesses or agencies or institutions would want to advocate

for foreign language education because it not only allows for more investment but more networks and more knowledgeable and diverse employees.

In conclusion, this study supports research on global citizenship, diversity, unity, and global competition. On top of supporting foreign languages, this study can be useful in understanding the intersections of American nativism and xenoglossophobia, and what it implies to think of language as intrinsic to identity. Understanding systemic attitudes of the past and how they have shifted or remained the same over the years and how that might affect generalized perspectives and beliefs is necessary to think of xenoglossophobia as a systemic issue. An aware perspective of foreign language discrimination and English-only attitudes can be helpful to understand identity issues in the United States and promote awareness of differences through a framework of intersectionality.

Appendix

Survey Questionnaire

1. Gender:
2. Age:
3. Ethnicity:
4. Origin? Birthplace?
5. Do you speak a language other than English? (think about it) What languages are you familiar with?
6. If no, why not?
7. What is your opinion towards foreign languages?
8. What is the role of language in national identity?
9. What are some factors that can prevent someone from learning a foreign language?

Email from President Michael Benson

From: President's Office
Sent: Friday, November 02, 2018 2:48 PM
Subject: Message from President Michael Benson

This email is being sent on behalf of President Michael Benson.

Dear Campus Community,

Fall is my favorite season at Eastern, when the leaves become a blanket of beautiful colors with hues of green, red, yellow and orange all playing their individual parts on a collective canvas. United, they paint a picture that truly defines “The Campus Beautiful.”

As autumn creates this diverse natural landscape, it reflects another beautifully diverse and rich experience around us all year: our people.

At EKU, we are a community of one-of-a-kind individuals, weaved together to form a big, beautiful picture. Students, employees, alumni and others who are ethnically and culturally diverse make living and working on our campus very special. Classroom learning is complemented by the opportunity to learn from people with cultures, likes, dislikes, beliefs and convictions that are different from our own. This journey of personal growth, discovery and knowledge is foundational to the “Eastern Experience” and makes us all better global citizens. It is key to the assertion that a college education is a wise investment.

As all of us engage together in this educational process — on a campus that is home to our living and learning community — I am often reminded of this quote from one of my favorite writers, Robert Frost:

“Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence.”

Universities have long been revered as sanctuaries for freedom of expression, exchange of ideas and vigorous debate. In our state and our nation, recent violent acts have been committed by individuals and groups who do not share our values, but choose hate and intolerance instead. Our hearts go out to the victims of these heinous acts.

Recently, a student penned an open letter to my office and EKU calling for unity in times of division. It was penned before the recent spate of violence that has dominated the news cycle, but the message is even more poignant today:

“Listen to your neighbor, even when everything in you is shouting they are wrong, you might just be surprised at the insight they can bring to the table. Stand united with your community, do not let it divide, do not let it fail, because only you can bolster and nurture your community. Look toward the future, not with the bitter hatred of the world, but the pure hope of the world that could be, because even in the light of all the pain and all the hurt, there is still hope to be found.”

A defining characteristic of EKU is our ability to foster hope and provide opportunity for all. I see hope in the eyes and smiles of incoming freshmen and new graduates. It is my greatest source of joy and pride to see lives changed and Colonels’ dreams brought to fruition, thanks to the hard work of our EKU family.

When you choose Eastern Kentucky University, you are choosing to learn, live or work at a place that values each individual as a unique and special part of the whole. You become a Colonel, a bond we all share. We are at our best and

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