

22 August 2023

Dr. E. Gordon Gee
President
West Virginia University
1500 University Avenue, Stewart Hall
Morgantown, West Virginia
26506-6201
USA

Dear President Gee,

On behalf of TESOL International Association's board of directors, executive committee, and over 13,000 members worldwide, we strongly urge you to reverse West Virginia University's decision to eliminate its department of world languages, literatures, and linguistics.

Maintaining the world languages department affords WVU the opportunity to advance its mission of diversity and inclusiveness "by leading transformation in West Virginia and the world through local, state, and global engagement." There are more than five million individuals in the United States who classify as English learners (EL) enrolled in elementary and secondary education, and tens of thousands study in West Virginia's PreK-12 programs. Additionally, 4% of the state's public education population is engaged in dual language programs. Through the residents of its own state, WVU has access to a linguistically, culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse populations.

The world languages department directly and indirectly attracts, prepares, and enriches these pipelines and the myriad of others engaged in WVU's transformative education. The research and teaching of WVU's world language department, let alone its immediate and long-term impact from the recipients of that scholarship, are the backbone and at the forefront of serving these communities and the economy – local, national, and global – which depend on a linguistically and culturally competent population.

Studies show the economic impact and importance of multilingualism upon a culture and economy (see [Newman 2023](#) and [Irving 2022](#)). The WVU world languages department plays a vital role in the preparation and education of West Virginians for an ever-increasing and globally connected workforce of innovation and advancement. This information should bring clarity for WVU in reversing its decision, but we wish also to highlight both the diversity and impact afforded to English learners benefiting from the department's research and education.

Almost 30,000 of the citizens of West Virginia are foreign born (see [Migration Policy Institute, 2021](#)), and these individuals are highly undervalued and underutilized in the workforce (see [Batalova and Fix, 2021](#)). As all US Higher Education Institutions, including WVU, grapple with the fallout from SFFA v. Harvard and SFFA v. UNC, the diversity that English learners bring cannot be sufficiently underscored. Closure of the

WVU department of world languages, literatures, and linguistics removes this valuable path to campus and community enrichment and diversity.

Your own university publication promoted [Jonah Katz's NSF grant](#) in the same week of the announcement, highlighting the monetary value and international recognition that the department brings to WVU, the community, and the profession. This highlight stands directly in opposition to the institutional decision of department elimination. We strongly recommend that you do not sacrifice the long-term gain and prestige of WVU, nor its immediate impact, for the shortsightedness of "improving" a bottom line. The futility of pursuing such an endeavor is widely publicized for its contribution to WVU's current financial state.

TESOL and its members are dedicated to the advancement of professional expertise in English language teaching (ELT) to speakers of other languages, embracing the value and assets of multilingualism for the classroom, research, culture, and economy. The announced closure stands in stark contrast to our mission, and more importantly for WVU, it portends the diminution of its students, populace, economy, and influence as an R1 land-grant institution.

We recognize the enormity and complexity of the decisions that WVU has to make, and we ask with full measure that within these decisions and deliberations that WVU see beyond the immediate ledger and embrace the impact, potential, and value of its world language department by reversing the closure decision.

TESOL is happy to share resources and information for multilingual learners and the necessity of linguistic and educational research and training in order to assist in understanding this department's impact. Please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,



Amber Crowell Kelleher
Executive Director
TESOL International Association

CC: Maryanne Reed, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Valerie Lopez, Special Assistant to the Board of Governors