



## American Academy of Arts and Sciences Announces Commission on Languages

CAMBRIDGE, MA, July 30, 2015 -- The American Academy of Arts and Sciences (AAAS) has officially announced the much anticipated Commission on Language Learning. The Commission, which was requested by bipartisan groups from the House and Senate last November, will report back to Congress in the summer of 2016 with a report on the current state of language education in the U.S., what language competency needs in the U.S. will be in the future, and recommendations on how best to meet those needs.

The Commission will compile research from leading scholarly and professional organizations to examine the benefits of language learning for all age groups, including pre-school and k-20 education as well as lifelong learning. The Commission will initiate a nationwide discussion on language learning and international education in the United States.

AAAS President **Jonathan Fanton** has noted that language learning "...should be among our highest educational priorities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century," and that "by reviewing existing practices and proposing new ideas, the Academy's Commission will advance the conversation about language education, focusing on a body of knowledge and a set of skills that will become more critical as communication between and among cultures increases."

Serving as Chair of the Commission will be **Paul LeClerc**, former Past-President and CEO of the New York Public Library. Dr. LeClerc holds a doctoral degree in French Literature from Columbia University, and currently serves as the Director of Columbia University's Paris Global Center. Said Dr. LeClerc about the Commission, "We hope that the commission will be a galvanizing effort bringing together all of the people who have done important work over the last few decades to identify the personal, social, political, commercial and even the biological benefits of language learning. The evidence, when gathered together, is striking and undeniable. For ourselves and for the nation, we need to do a better job of learning how to communicate across language barriers."

Other notable Commissioners that have been identified by AAAS include: **Martha Abbott**, Executive Director, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages; **Dan Davidson**, President, American Councils for International Education; **Nicholas Dirks**, Chancellor, University of California, Berkeley; **Karl Eikenberry**, former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, retired U.S. Army Lieutenant General, and Director of the U.S.-Asia Security Initiative, Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, Stanford University; **Rosemary Feal**, Executive Director, Modern Language Association; **Carol Gluck**, George Sansom Professor of History, Columbia University; **Philip Rubin**, Senior Advisor to the President, Haskins Laboratories, and former Principal Assistant Director for Science, White House Office of Science and Technology Policy; **Diane Wood**, Chief Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, Seventh Circuit; and **Pauline Yu**, President, American Council of Learned Societies. AAAS anticipates the appointment of additional Commissioners throughout August and September.

Marty Abbott, President of JNCL-NCLIS and Executive Director of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages said “this study will provide a critical look at our nation’s language capacity and the important link to our economy, diplomacy, workforce development, and educational opportunities. It is a pivotal time for the AAAS Commission to embark on this initiative that no doubt will help shape a multilingual and multicultural citizenry better able to handle the global challenges we face.”

This Commission will produce the first national report on Languages since *Strength Through Wisdom: A Critique of U.S. Capability*, commonly referred to as the Perkin’s Commission and published in 1979 by the President's Commission on Foreign Languages and International Studies in response to the hostage crisis in Tehran.

"The 106 member organizations of the Joint National Committee for Languages commend the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the members of the Commission on Language Learning, which will examine why languages matter to America in the 21st century," said Bill Rivers, Executive Director of JNCL-NCLIS. "This is an exciting opportunity for the Language Enterprise, as we make our vital role in the public and business sectors more visible."