Bilingual jobs hard to locate

Editor's Note: This article is part of a series on the job-market outlook for University graduates.

By JENNIFER SUNSERI
Of the Emerald

Just because the job market doesn't teem with jobs for language majors is no reason to forgo a language-oriented career, several University language professors say.

The professors agree that teaching and translating positions — once the main source of jobs for language graduates — have become scarce. And the few remaining jobs are taken by graduates with the luck and perseverance to find them.

"If you want to do all your work in classics you need three basics: perseverance, skill and luck. My bit of luck was to be born at the right time," says Bennett Pascal, head of the classics department.

German Prof. Walther Hahn has a grimmer attitude.

"The outlook is very blah and will remain so for quite a long time," Hahn says.

Hahn attributes the lack of job prospects to the "parochial" attitude of Americans.

"In general there's a narrow-minded attitude that says let other people learn English," he says. "If Americans had a different attitude they would exert pressure to have languages taught more at the high school level."

Despite the poor employment outlook, Pascal, Hahn and other language professors agree that students usually get what they're looking for when they graduate with a language degree.

"Most people don't major in a language because they expect a set career," says Russian Prof. John Beebe. "They do it because they like it.

Beebe says an Indiana University study indicates that only eight percent of Russian graduates polled over the last 15 years use the language as their primary source of income.

"However, nearly 90 percent were using it in some way. Basically, it's a plus. Once you learn it you find ways to use it," Beebe says.

Scandinavian Prof. Virpi Zuck says it's impossible to predict what kind of job a German or Scandinavian major will find, "but it's usually something out of the ordinary."

"Employers sometimes feel anybody with enough imagination to study Norwegian is worth hiring," Zuck says.

But adding another major to a language also can make for a job-winning combination.

"There are a number of people who don't major in Latin and Greek but take big dollops of it because it helps them with their MCATs and LSATs," Pascal says. "What happens here, and elsewhere even more, is that classics majors go on to the professional schools.

"The best law and medical schools really set a value on a classics degree."

Michael Fish, head of the East Asian languages department, says "language and professional departments have to get together.

"Right now, jobs do exist. The student has to go out and find them. If they want to they'll go to East Asia and make what they learn in the classroom come alive on the streets."

But beyond the question of finding employment, language professors agree that knowledge of languages is invaluable.

"It's a terrible thing to be a prisoner of your own language," Pascal says. "Beyond language you get a world of ideas, a world of literature."

Graphic by Sioux Anderson

History helps define skills

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By MARIAN GREEN
Of the Emerald

History graduates find jobs not because they major in a job-oriented major, but because they learn "success skills," says history Prof. Richard Brown.

Success skills include the ability to write, analyze and generalize research, says Brown, head of the history department.

"Employers are increasingly looking for graduates who have these skills," he says. "History is a good major for success skills

"The employment market is tough today, but we have to stick with the assumption that, unless there is a terrible depression, a good college graduate is going to get a job.

"It may be a scramble, but the key thing is success."

A college education should be training for success, not a job, Brown says. Employers often train new employees, he says.

"A university can't teach someone how to do 'X' job for 'X' employer."

To be successful, students also must "major in the subject he or she likes best."

"I wouldn't want anyone to major in history who didn't like it best," Brown says. "You just won't be as comfortable and happy."

In the past, the number of history majors was low, but Brown says that trend is changing.

"Morale is going up, and enrollment is going up."

One reason for the change is an "increased historical consciousness," Brown says.

"If a law were passed forbidding the studying and writing of history, people would still do it because the historical instinct is one of our deepest social instincts," he says. "People just want to know it."

This increased consciousness is partially a result of the 20-year growth of what Brown calls "public history."

Public history is an area that provides jobs in historical preservation, historical parks, the preparation of environmental impact statements, historical societies, the federal government, and private corporations, Brown says.

Students also are finding jobs as history teachers in secondary schools but aren't landing jobs as university history professors.

Some history majors are "in effect pre-professionals" in areas such as business and law school, Brown says.

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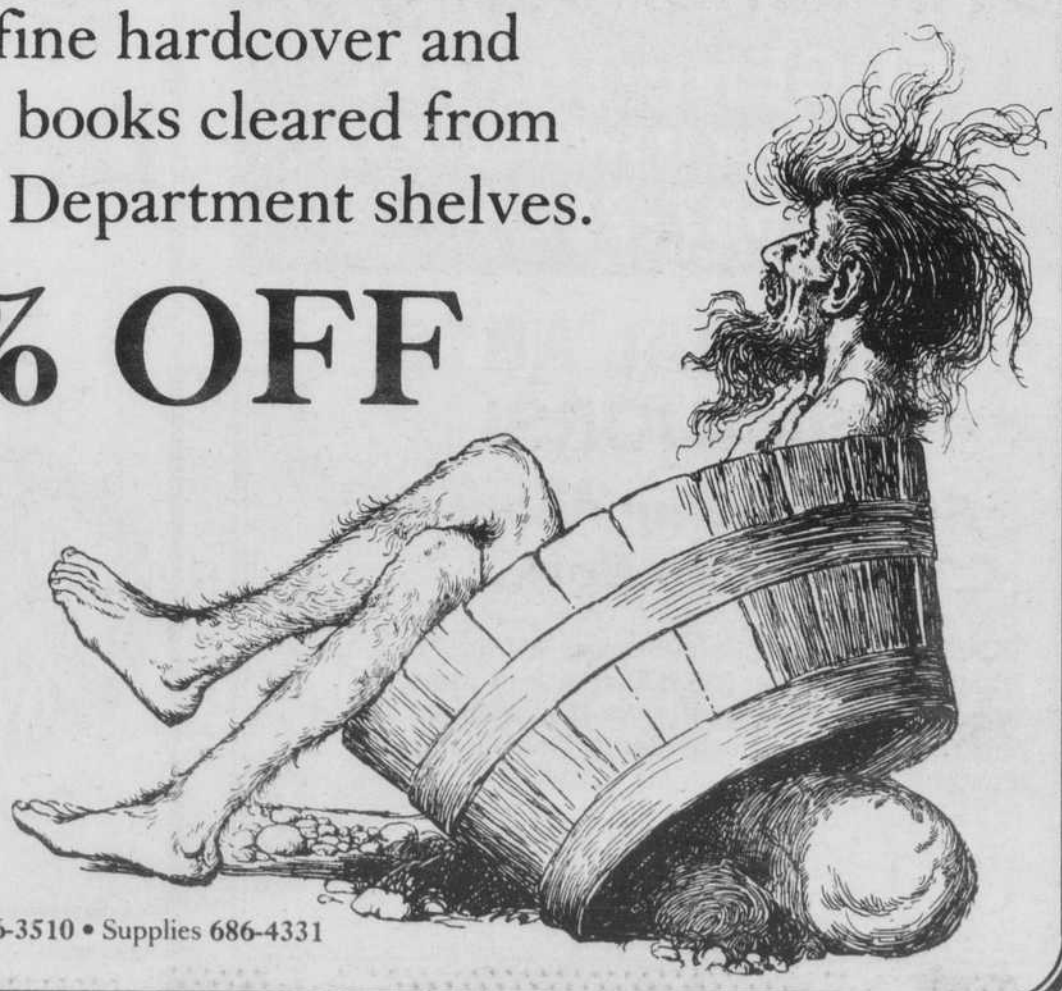

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