In institutions of higher learning in almost every state of the United States, a Liberal Arts Associate Degree requires that students pursue the study of a modern language. In its report entitled ‘Considering Community Colleges: Advice to graduate students and job seekers’, the Modern Language Association Committee on Community Colleges states that ‘more than 50% of all United States undergraduates are enrolled in community colleges (Phillippe, 2015) and that about half of undergraduates will take their only college-level studies in language and literature at a community college.’

These students choose the community college as the venue of choice for their language studies for a variety of very practical reasons. At community colleges, tuition is typically much more affordable than in four-year institutions and these savings are important to students who are confronted with the skyrocketing course of education. Classes are frequently available at a wider variety of times to accommodate students who work. It is not uncommon to find enough courses to complete whole degree programs by attending evening and weekend face-to-face classes as well as classes offered online. Another format designed for student schedule convenience is the hybrid course. Some community colleges offer languages courses with fifty percent of the hybrid course taught face to face and fifty percent taught online. The hybrid format offers greater schedule flexibility for working professionals who juggle school and work.

Economics frequently play into the initial choice of institutions for community college students, as the cost of education continues to be a concern for them. Students can frequently find a five-credit language class at the community college for far less than the cost of an equivalent course at a university. When they go to a university with an Associate
of Arts degree, most transferring community college students will have already completed the language requirement that their prospective university requires, saving them money for courses in other disciplines. Some students might even opt to take college level placement exams to earn credit for the languages that they already know. It is not unusual for international students to start a second or third language at the community college, before traveling abroad or taking on a job where a second language makes them more employable.

Community college teaching: who does it?

Many of the language educators in community colleges are full-time professors of languages such as Spanish, French, German, Latin, Italian, Japanese, and Russian. In recent years, it has become more frequent to see less-commonly taught languages like Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, Hindi, Korean, Portuguese, and Vietnamese offered as well, with many of these languages being taught by adjunct instructors. Community colleges may offer up to four semesters of transfer sequence language courses as well as one or two credit specialty courses such as Intensive Grammar Review and Pronunciation Workshops. Adult learners and career switchers, who come back to continue their education after leaving college or the job market, particularly appreciate these short-term, practical and affordable refresher courses. After experimenting with a one or two credit course, it is not uncommon for the same students to persist and take every course offered in a given language. Senior adult learners are joined in the classroom with typical undergraduates and they become partners in learning. As they often work together in communicative activities, the younger students learn from the life experiences of former judges, administrators, and occasional teachers who join them as learners in a basic language class. It is a frequent occurrence that the retired judge or schoolteacher will be very organized and diligent with homework preparation and therefore make an excellent role model for the young undergraduate language partner. These are totally accidental partnerships, but they make for some of the rich life experiences that make teaching and learning in the community college setting particularly enriching. Diversity is a key word when talking about the community college experience; including diversity of age, ethnicity, language experience, and even life experience. In one community class outside of a large metropolitan area, it is possible to have a myriad of student profiles within a single classroom including students with different kinds of disabilities, educationally