

*Dr. Liliانا Soto-Fernández. President's Message: January 2011.*

Saludos, saudações, greetings! In this my first message as president of AATSP I would like to take the opportunity to thank all of you who voted for me in 2009. Thank you for honoring me with a second opportunity to serve, first as college/university representative, and now in a more formal capacity as president of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese. I am delighted to have the opportunity to serve an organization that has been around since 1917 and is recognized as the oldest professional organization in the world.

I take this opportunity to thank my colleagues in the Executive Council whose term has just ended for their service and to extend a warm welcome to the current members. I feel honored and privileged to have the opportunity to work with you.

My connection with AATSP began as a high school student. Mrs. Regalada Costello, my high school Spanish teacher and AATSP member, presented me with AATSP certificates and medals for my accomplishments in her Spanish classes. I have to confess that I still hold those certificates and medals. Throughout my career they have been a source of validation and inspiration to continue learning the Spanish language, literature and culture. Therefore, I want to make my first message a message of gratitude to Mrs. Costello and to all language teachers everywhere who inspire us with their love and commitment to the teaching of foreign languages. Your love of the language and the profession lives through your students. You make the most important difference of all: YOU TOUCH THE FUTURE!

That is why I am so concerned when I learn about how the current state of the economy is impacting foreign language education. In some states entire programs have disappeared and tenure is under attack. For example, the recent cutbacks in state aid resulted in sweeping cutbacks at the State University of New York at Albany and the closure of the French, Russian and Italian programs. The only safe program was Spanish but this is no consolation to all us who value languages and are faced with the conundrum of producing citizens of the world while not been able to provide our students with the very tools that they need to reach their goal.

We recognize that foreign language classes are more expensive than other classes. Yet while not being cost effective they provide invaluable tools to students: a new perspective of the world, a peek into a different way of thinking, an understanding of other cultures, the means to communicate with others. Is that not the purpose of education?

In spite of the cutbacks, the newest enrollment survey of the Modern Language Association based on data from 2009 found that enrollment at the undergraduate level is up in almost all languages but it is down at the graduate level. We are encouraged by the fact that Spanish enrollment at the undergraduate level is up by 5% and Portuguese by 10%.

I urge you to become more active in our organization and not to forget that together we can make a difference.

*Best wishes to all in the New Year! ¡Hasta pronto!*

**Works cited:**

Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education: Fall 2009. By Nelly Furman, David Goldberg, and Natalia Lusin. Web publication, December 2010

Foderaro, Lisa W. "Budget-Cutting Colleges Bid Some Languages Adieu." *The New York Times* [New York, New York] 03, December 2010. 03, January 2011 <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/05/education/05languages.html>

