Foreign languages are a vital tool for understanding the world, regardless of one’s major field of study. Although Bowdoin does not have a language requirement, the study of languages can be an important component of each student’s liberal arts education, opening unique perspectives on other cultures and a new understanding of one’s own. Bowdoin has strong offerings of four years of study in nine languages: Chinese, French, German, classical Greek, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Russian, and Spanish. In addition, Bowdoin currently offers two years of Arabic (elementary and intermediate).

Courses in all languages range from the introductory level to the study of literature and culture. Course work in all of the contemporary spoken languages is supplemented by conversation sessions with native speakers.

**Chinese**

The Chinese studies program offers four levels of Mandarin language courses. Two tracks at the beginning level meet the needs of true beginners and of heritage speakers and students with some prior experience. More advanced students gain a greater knowledge of grammar, so that they can explore varied topics and read newspapers, understand TV programs, and use the Internet in Chinese, while the most advanced students can explore materials in business, literature, and film. The study of Chinese language can provide a linguistic and cultural background for other courses on Chinese art, economics, history, literature, politics, and sociology. Throughout the year, many cultural activities are organized on major Chinese festivals, such as the Chinese New Year, Dragon Boat Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, and China Night, as well as during Asian Week.

**Japanese**

The Japanese program offers eight semesters of language instruction, providing opportunities for beginners as well as for those with prior experience. After a few months of introductory classes, the student learns how to engage in basic conversations and talk about daily activities. Advanced courses use literature, newspapers and cultural journals, and audiovisual programs to develop mastery of the spoken and written language. Weekly showings of Japanese films allow for a greater understanding of Japan, and we encourage students to take other offerings in history, literature, and government. Students can test their skills at the annual spring Japan Fair, a joint event with Bates and Colby Colleges. Some Bowdoin students have written honors projects or advanced independent studies on topics as diverse as taiko drumming, Japanese notions of the “West,” epidemics and scientific knowledge, and international trade and Japan’s nineteenth-century modernization. The study of Japanese can also be integrated with classes on Japanese politics, history, and literature to create an Asian studies major or minor.

**Asian Studies**

Both Chinese and Japanese are important components of Bowdoin’s Asian Studies Program, which offers majors that focus on a particular geographic and cultural area (e.g., China, Japan, South Asia, East Asia) or in the subfield of Disciplinary Asian Studies (e.g., government, history, literature, religion). Eight courses are required in addition to the study of an Asian language. Students may also pursue the study of Sinhala in Kandy, Sri Lanka, or Tamil in Tamil Nadu, India.

**German**

The German department offers a flexible curriculum encompassing language, literature, and culture. The first five semesters engage language and culture, accommodating both those who wish to begin their study of German in college and others with prior background.

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**Facilities and Resources**

Many opportunities exist for students to practice their language skills and embrace the culture outside the classroom. The Language Media Center provides audio, video, and multimedia development facilities to support the teaching of foreign languages and houses the major portion of the library’s collection of audiovisual materials, with special emphasis in the areas of foreign culture, second-language acquisition, and film. The center’s website provides links for students of both classical and modern languages to online resources, which include streaming audio and video from international radio and television, links to online foreign-language newspapers and magazines, and an annotated list of language-specific resources. Nine foreign-language broadcast stations received via satellite are directed to the Language Media Center.

Most departments employ one or two teaching fellows—native speakers who come to Bowdoin for a year and conduct conversation and tutoring sessions with students each week. Each modern language has a weekly language table in Thorne dining hall. It is a wonderful opportunity to practice the language and discuss various cultural, political, and social issues with instructors, classmates, teaching fellows, and members of the community, while dining together.

Bowdoin’s language departments have traditionally presented dynamic extracurricular programs to the community, including lectures, film programs, seminars, concerts, festivals, poetry readings, and visits by acclaimed scholars, authors, actors, and directors. Finally, there is no better way to study a language and culture than to live in it. Bowdoin strongly recommends that language students spend a semester or year studying off campus in a country where their language is spoken.
Literature and culture courses encompass not just the expected great works and periods of literature, but also German film, European pop culture, and contemporary German culture. Each year, a native German teaching fellow assists in individual and group sessions with advanced students. The German department encourages students to combine the study of German with majors or minors in other departments. Senior majors may choose to work independently on honors projects tailored to a wide range of interests in literature, film, theater, and culture. Advanced students may also participate actively in the teaching of the department as teaching assistants and tutors. The department is especially proud of the success of its graduates in obtaining Fulbright grants for language study and teaching after college.

**Romance Languages**

**French, Italian, Spanish**

The Department of Romance Languages offers courses at a wide variety of skill levels in French, Italian, and Spanish languages, literatures, and cultures. Majors are offered in French, Spanish, and Romance languages, and minors in French, Spanish, and Italian. You can begin a study of one or more languages at Bowdoin, or build on your high school studies to incorporate active use of the languages into work in many fields. Native speakers are involved in most courses, and all courses, unless specifically designated otherwise, are conducted in the language being studied. During the first five semesters of study in French, Italian, and Spanish, students practice the four basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in a variety of linguistic, literary, and cultural contexts. Numerous intermediate and upper-level courses in literature and culture provide a thorough understanding of the regions where Romance languages are spoken, including the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe, and Africa. Weekly language tables allow students to practice conversational skills and build the foundation of cultural awareness.

Upper-level courses in French, Spanish, and Italian may focus on literary genres or periods, or on other cultural topics. Recent courses have dealt with French war fiction and film; Hispanic short story in the nineteenth century; the “fantastic” in Italian film and literature; the representation of black and Jewish people by French writers; coming of age in contemporary Latin American literature; and Italian culture as seen through literature, news, films, the Internet, and art and photography.

**Russian**

The Department of Russian offers a wide array of courses on Russian language, literature, and culture. The language curriculum includes a five-semester grammar sequence, plus advanced courses in Russian prose, poetry, and folklore. It can easily accommodate beginners and students who have already taken some Russian in high school, as well as heritage speakers. A variety of courses introduce students to Native Siberian, Central Asian, and East European history and culture, and Russian cinema.

Russian majors may explore unique subjects in depth through independent study. Recent honors projects have investigated Chernobyl, Central Asian history, and Soviet prison camps, while other students have delved into nineteenth-century poetry, contemporary cinema, and current events through Russian journalism.

Many students have double majors in Russian and another discipline, such as government, history, or economics; they can also opt for an area-studies concentration through the Eurasian and East European studies program.

**Classical Languages**

The classics department at Bowdoin offers courses in both classical Greek and Latin at all levels, from beginning through advanced. Students can begin their studies of either or both languages here, or build on their high school studies to move more swiftly to the upper levels of classical language study. Because Greek and Latin are ancient languages and rarely spoken today, focus is on the written languages and the ancient cultures in which they were spoken and written. The first year of coursework in both Latin and Greek is intended to equip students with the grounding needed in vocabulary, grammar, and syntax to read and study virtually any of the writings that remain from classical antiquity. Second-year courses are designed to strengthen skills in these areas while introducing students to central texts in Western history and thought. Locating texts in their cultural context is a central goal, and students studying Greek and/or Latin are encouraged to take courses in classical history, archaeology, and civilization to complement their language study. On the advanced level, seminars focus on a wide variety of ancient authors, texts, genres, and periods.

The study of Greek and/or Latin complements coursework in many other areas of study at Bowdoin, including English literature, modern foreign languages, art history, history, philosophy, political theory, and religion. Students are encouraged to combine their majors or minors in one or both of the classical languages with other concentrations.

For more information about Bowdoin, please write or call Dean of Admissions Bowdoin College, 5000 College Station Brunswick, ME 04011-8641 207-725-3100 bowdoin.edu admissions@bowdoin.edu

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For more information, go to: bowdoin.edu/academics/