

AP Italian: Moving Forward Step by Step

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The Columbus Citizens Foundation has just pledged \$500,000 to help fund the AP Program in Italian Language and Culture which has been recently discontinued

A huge step in an important battle for Italian Americans has been taken on Tuesday, May 25 2010. The [Columbus Citizens Foundation](#) [2] pledged \$500,000 to help reinstate High School AP Program in Italian Language and Culture, which was eliminated completely starting this month.

In January 2009, the College Board announced their very controversial decision to discontinue AP Italian, which offers college preparatory courses and exams for high-school seniors; this was a decision that stirred up various reactions within the Italian-American community.

The College Board declared that their action was based on statistics that showed, in their opinion, a decreased interest in these courses and as a consequence, financial losses. When it comes to education though, the loss of something simply cannot be seen only in monetary terms: clearly, the less the options are, the less prepared and stimulated the students will be, and, consequently, less courses offered will obviously mean even less interest in this subject.

Italian culture and language in the United States have always been very much alive in an infinity of forms, and especially in the new generations of Italian Americans, who have to worry less than the



early immigrants about assimilating. In this new generation there is indeed a rebirth of the interest in Italian culture.

There are over 25,000,000 Italian Americans who live in the US and hundreds of programs, university departments, courses and scholarships dedicated to Italian Culture. Even Americans, more or less educated, who do not have Italian roots, recognize the importance of this language.

When students go off to college and study Art History, for example, though they might not have any personal connection or fascination with Italy, their grades will be higher if they can pick up on the names of the Renaissance artists and paintings; even better, if they can connect them with a place they have studied or a historical, political and social context. The same can be said for Philosophy, History, Architecture, Political Theory or even Law, in which Latin plays a determinate role.

More and more campuses are also offering study-abroad programs, the majority of which happen to be in Italy. New York University, for example, has hundreds of students who tend to choose the Florence location over other options across the globe.

When AP Italian was first established, after an extended and hard-fought campaign by Matilda Cuomo (former First Lady of New York State), it was at the outset, an undeniable success. Currently, there are, obviously, difficulties, which makes it more important than ever to come together in order to overcome them.

The President of the Columbus Citizens Foundation (CCF), Frank Fusaro made a declaration: "Our pledge continues the tradition of our first act of philanthropy, dating back to 1946, which provided scholarships to students who were striving to improve themselves and their opportunities in life".

"The reinstatement of AP Italian will allow students to earn college credit for their advanced high school work and will encourage the study of Italian, the language of Dante, Leonardo da Vinci, Giuseppe Verdi and Umberto Eco. We call on all Italian language advocates to join us and the Republic of Italy in making the advanced study of Italian a vital part of the American educational system."

On the heels of the National Italian American Foundation and the government of Italy, the CCF is committed to raising \$1 million in order to reinstate the program along with other funders: the final goal is to reach \$3 million. This is essential financial support, although there are still many steps ahead such as, for example, teacher recruitment and bureaucratic obstacles.

Languages are important vehicles to teach memorization, critical thinking, writing and verbal skills, and Italian is an important tool in order to understand better some of the most important texts of Western civilizations, as well as to reinforce the already established links between the two continents.

As High School students are about to close their books for the summer and leave for college or embark in new adventures in their lives, it is a perfect moment to reflect on how school, more than simple rote learning, is about opening new doors and looking at things from other point of views. AP Italian is indeed about all of this: language, culture, preserving roots, exploring parts of American history, and opening new doors instead of closing those that were already open.



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