

Business First of Columbus - July 9, 2007

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COLUMBUS BUSINESS FIRST

BUSINESS PULSE SURVEY: [Made in China](#)

Advocates want education that produces more bilingual Americans

Business First of Columbus - July 6, 2007 by [Carrie Ghose](#) Business First

When attorney Dixon Miller evaluates potential associates who claim to be fluent in German, the partner in the international law practice at Porter Wright Morris & Arthur LLP has someone call them und spricht auf Deutsch.

If the job candidate calmly answers in German, that's a plus.

Miller represents several German companies that do business in the United States, and it's a major selling point that he can conduct his clients' business in their language.

"There are thousands of lawyers in Columbus, Ohio, who speak English," Miller said. "There are only three who speak German - or maybe four or five now."

Miller was keen to take part in a conference last month in Columbus for about 70 businesspeople, academics and government officials to start assessing companies' needs for foreign language proficiency.

The conference was hosted by the U.S. departments of commerce, defense and labor. It was hosted by several Ohio State University departments, the Ohio Department of Development, the Educational Council and COSI Columbus.

The meeting, one of three of its kind in the country, kicked off an effort to develop a five-year plan for how business and government can work to improve language instruction, starting at the elementary level. A final report is to be released Oct. 25.

Polyglot world

About 1,063 foreign-owned businesses have operations in Ohio that employ some 181,000 workers, said Deborah Scherer, acting director of the Ohio Department of Development's International Trade Division.

And about 6 percent of Ohio's private employment depends on the state's \$38 billion in exports, according to information from the department.

U.S. companies can no longer count on English as the international language of business, said Galal Walker, director of the OSU Chinese Flagship Program, which develops bilingual proficiency in non-native Chinese speakers and seeks to place graduates in internships and jobs in Asia.

The Chinese middle class is expanding in size along with its demand for products, he said.

"They're not going to learn English in order to let you play in their market," Walker said.

Businesses in various sectors are experiencing an increased need for employees who can speak more than one language.

"We have a need for handling calls from customers who don't speak English," said Bonnie Jo Young, a support analyst for an American Electric Power Company Inc. call center in Columbus. "We don't seem to be able to recruit bilingual associates within Ohio."

Laith Khalaf, associate vice president at Morgan Stanley in Dublin, said even clients who speak English feel more comfortable discussing investments in their native language.

That practice builds trust, she said.

"Many of the referrals we get from foreign-speaking clients are of similar heritage who also appreciate our language and cultural knowledge," he said.

Corporate officials would not let him disclose which languages the office offers, he said.

Miller said Porter Wright's office in Washington, D.C., is looking for Portuguese-speaking lawyers to meet the demand presented by an increase in Brazilian clients.

He was impressed to hear of OSU's Chinese Flagship Program, one of only a few of its kind in universities and colleges across the country.

"The kids who come out of that with that kind of training," he said, "that's exactly what someone like me will be looking for."

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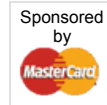
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