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# Maintaining the autonomy of the university language center within globalizing institutions

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## Résumé

In this presentation, we explore the potential for language centers - as both physical spaces and virtual nodes within a distributed digital network - to maintain their autonomy and retain their core identity within globalizing institutions. Many universities, and in particular research institutions, are currently undergoing major transformations in the nature and scope of their missions, their governance structures, the types of knowledge they produce and value, and their relation to the broader transnational economies and societies in which they function. As institutions rethink their core missions and strategic priorities to establish a global presence and refocus their curricular goals to educate global citizens, the role of language centers is also changing. Within the context of these changing conditions, we will critically examine some of the structural, institutional, and pedagogical tensions and synergies that are emerging in this process.

Historically, language centers have been uniquely positioned to promote and support language education in a variety of ways: serving as a central space for professional development of language instructors; keeping up-to-date with pedagogical practices and technological innovations; offering language programs not available elsewhere in the institution; and the teaching of languages across the curriculum. A critical role for many language centers has also been to serve as an advocate and provide a professional home for language instructors, particularly due to the bifurcated structure of language departments and their frequently decentralized locations. A core component of the mission of language centers has been their specialized disciplinary expertise, based in current research and pedagogy in the field of language education.

Within globalizing institutions, newly emergent structures, such as centers for teaching and learning, with the aim of a broader, cross-disciplinary focus, have created a point of tension for language centers with their specialized missions and expertise. This is, however, not just a pedagogical issue but a budgetary and structural issue as well, as universities must make choices and set new priorities. We will discuss these issues, using specific examples from two private research institutions that are in the process of redefining their spaces for learning support.

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