

**FRA NOI - MAY 2005 COLUMN**

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**ARE WE UP TO THE CHALLENGE?**

**By Dona De Sanctis**

Italian is the fastest-growing foreign language in the United States, but the number of high school and college students studying Italian is still relatively small—only about 128,000 compared to nearly 5 million studying Spanish; 1.3 million in French and nearly 400,000 in German.

The major Italian American organizations have laid the groundwork to turn this situation around. In 2003, the Sons of Italy, NIAF and UNICO National joined forces with the government of Italy and the invaluable help of Matilda Cuomo and convinced the College Board to establish an Advanced Placement (AP) program for Italian. The program would allow students coast-to-coast to take college-level courses in Italian while still in high school.

To guarantee the launching of the program, the three organizations and the government of Italy pooled their resources to provide the College Board with \$500,000 in seed money to develop the AP Italian curriculum and examinations. Why is the AP program in Italian so important?

**CATCH-22**

As those of you who are parents of teen-agers know so well, the challenging high school AP courses have become an academic status symbol because they attract the best and the brightest students and teachers. For this reason, college admissions officers look

at the number of AP courses a student takes in high school in deciding who to admit to college.

Many language experts believed that the lack of an AP Italian program has created a “catch-22” situation that has stunted the growth of Italian studies in U.S. schools. How? Let’s walk through it.

Because there was no AP program in Italian, students took AP French, Spanish and German instead. Since fewer students took Italian, fewer teachers were needed. Since there were few teaching jobs in Italian, future teachers did not major in Italian in college. The teaching of Italian was left to instructors of Spanish or French who often barely spoke the language. As a result, Italian was often poorly taught if taught at all.

AP classes, however, require highly prepared teachers who must take special training courses to be eligible for the program. An AP Italian program, therefore, will have excellent teachers and attract more high school students. When they enter college, those who have passed the AP Italian test, will receive college credit for the courses and move to the next level of Italian.

With more students taking advanced Italian courses in college, Italian programs at universities will grow. High schools and colleges will need more instructors of Italian, creating viable careers for young people who want to teach Italian in the United States.

So it’s a “win – win” situation for all—or could be.

## **THE AP ITALIAN PROGRAM**

This fall, the new AP Italian program will be launched in many schools across the United States. To prepare for that, teachers of Italian need to be trained in the AP Italian

curriculum. Over the coming months, the College Board will hold a series of teacher training workshops at various college and university sites.

When the new AP Italian program is launched this fall, Italian will become the first new foreign language added to the AP program since it started exactly 50 years ago. The AP Italian program will break new ground because, unlike the other AP languages, it will offer courses in culture as well.

Our research indicates that there are at least 700 high schools in the United States that offer some level of Italian. Of these, an estimated 250 schools have students advanced enough to qualify for the AP Italian program this fall.

The College Board has told us that this is a respectable number for the *first* year of an AP program, but the number must grow over the coming years or the program will be cancelled.

## **WHAT YOU CAN DO**

If the AP Italian program fails to thrive, the College Board will be forced to drop it after only a few years. We all can and must do something to guarantee the success of the AP Italian program. Here's what you can do:

- Help Italian studies grow in your community by getting Italian into your local high school. The Sons of Italy has developed a handy “how-to” kit with all the materials you need. It is on our Web site at [www.osia.org](http://www.osia.org) or you can get a free copy from OSIA National by writing to OSIA LANGUAGE KIT, 219 E Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002.
- If Italian is already being taught at your school, meet with your principal to ensure that the school offers the new AP Italian program.

- If your school needs a qualified teacher of Italian, contact the American Association of Teachers of Italian at [www.aati-online.org](http://www.aati-online.org) or contact Paul Giordano at 407/823-2472 ([pgiordano@mail.ucf.edu](mailto:pgiordano@mail.ucf.edu)).
- If you are a teacher of Italian or know one, contact the College Board to find out how you can receive training in the new AP program.
- Find out more about the AP Italian program on the Internet at <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com>

We Italian Americans have led the way. As a result of our successful AP campaign, Chinese, Japanese and Russian organizations are trying to establish AP programs in their languages.

It would be a great disappointment and embarrassment if the AP Italian program failed to grow after all this work and expense. We would have no one to blame but ourselves. So become a leader in your community by promoting the AP Italian Program at your local public and private schools. *Viva l'Italia e viva la lingua italiana!*

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