



A.P. Italian: A Challenge for Italian-Americans

Giovanni Castellaneta (January 13, 2009)



The Ambassador of Italy to the United States of America, Giovanni Castellaneta, speaks to *America Oggi* about the dissemination of Italian language and culture now that the AP courses and examinations in Italian have been suspended by the College Board. "There are over 120,000 students enrolled in Italian, making it the fourth most studied languages in U.S. schools. In the last ten years there has been a 60 per cent increase in the number of Italian courses offered at the college level," continues Castellaneta "a trend that seems to argue against the decision by the College Board." The Ambassador believes that reinstatement of the AP in Italian is a challenge for the entire Italian community in the United States.

We are delighted to share with our English-reading public a translation of Ambassador Giovanni Castellaneta's letter about the most recent decision of the College Board to suspend the Advanced Placement Program in Italian for the academic year 2009-2010. The letter originally appeared in the Italian-language daily, *America Oggi*. We thank Ambassador Castellaneta for providing us with an



English version in a most timely fashion.

The Editors, i-Italy.org

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The dissemination of Italy's language and culture in the world is a priority of our foreign policy to which our Government has assigned sizeable human and financial resources.

All 11 of Italy's consular offices in the United States, the Scholastic Directors, and the Directors of our Cultural Institutes remain pledged to the promotion of initiatives leading to the inclusion of Italian in the curricula of local schools, arranging training courses for the teachers and organizing cultural events in support of our language. It is a committed and continuous effort flanked by the essential assistance of our community and of the Italian American associations which play a fundamental role alongside the diplomatic and consular Authorities and to whom I extend my appreciation.

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An article by Ambassador Castellaneta published in the special print issue of i-Italy dedicated to Italian Language (June 2nd, 2008)

Much progress has been made. Italian is fourth among the languages most studied in the United States with an enrollment of over 120,000. The last 10 years have seen a 60 per cent increase in the number of course offerings at the college level and there are now 250 universities in the U.S. that offer Italian in the curricula or have Italian departments with an enrollment of 80,000 students. Since



2005, Italy has hosted 25,000 U.S. students per year in study abroad programs, putting it in second place, just behind Great Britain and ahead of Spain.

Given this trend, it was startling to learn that the College Board was suspending the AP in Italian language and culture barely three years after its introduction in 2006.

There are two reasons for the suspension: insufficient participation and the inability to cover costs. There is an obvious correlation because having more AP students in Italian would make it possible for the College Board to at least partially cover the program costs. So the crux of the problem is not so much related to funding as it is to increasing the number of students enrolled in the Italian AP.

It is our intention to take on the challenge. However, it is one we cannot win without the involvement of the entire community in the U.S, including the 25 million U.S. citizens of Italian descent that represent eight per cent of the U.S. population.

The rest of Americans look to them to draw closer to our country, its elegance, customs, and what is dubbed the Italian lifestyle. Language is a part.

Today in the U.S. Italian is becoming a conveyor of ethnicity and of culture. It has scaled the boundaries of the emigrant Italian family home where a localized dialect was what was often passed along from parent to child. Today, Italian is considered a 'privileged' language that holds great attraction for everyone who views it as an instrument that can give access to the immense cultural, artistic and historical wealth of our country.

You, the readership of *America Oggi*, are in charge of this transition, this change in mentality, you and your families, especially your children, rightly proud of their Americanness but at the same time interested in discovering their earliest roots by acquiring the most important key to this discovery: speaking Italian. There was a whole squad of such youths in attendance at the First World Conference of Youths Residing Abroad that took place in Rome last December. I met with them here in Washington and I was moved to see their genuine interest in learning more about today's Italy. Some spoke Italian only haltingly, but one and all gave me their assurances: "We want to continue studying Italian, just wait and see Ambassador how well we will speak Italian the next time we meet.

I am hopeful that this movement will become stronger and that, thanks also to the impressive commitment of the entire Italian-American community that it will sweep other American students in along with it.

We must therefore consider the one year interruption of the AP in Italian as an opportunity to reflect together on the challenge that lies ahead of us and to recognize that each one of you, all the readers of *America Oggi*, can 'make the difference' by requesting information on the Advanced Placement Program from your consular offices (also through the internet), the Comites, and the schools, by speaking with your children, by contacting the Associations (NIAF, OSAI, UNICA, Italian Language Foundation, AATI and many others) that are already hard at work on promoting our language in this



country and will continue their efforts.

On my part, I can assure you that the Government of Italy and the diplomatic and consular network in the United States will spare no efforts for the reinstatement of the AP course and exams in Italian language and culture. Even Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi himself took up the AP cause, restating its importance in the broader context of the excellent bilateral relations between our two countries. I believe, therefore, that I speak clearly on his behalf in thanking the Italian American Associations for their commitment to support the teaching of our language and to the reinstatement of the AP in Italian and also in encouraging all of you who read America Oggi to join our cause.

Thank you also to America Oggi for the interest that you have assigned and continue to dedicate to this important topic.

(Read the original letter in Italian from www.americaooggi.info [3])

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