



Persian Language Instruction at West Point

Purpose: This paper gives an overview of the Persian (Farsi, or Persian – Iranian) language program at West Point, its inception, growth and enrollments.

Background: All cadets are required to take at least two semesters of a foreign language, as there is no option to validate a language. Cadets with previous experience are allowed to test in order to place into a higher level of a language. Until 2008, cadets chose from seven languages: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish. Beginning in 2008, that number increased to eight, with the inclusion of Persian.

Inception of Persian Language Instruction: Instruction in Persian began in Academic Year 2007-8 at the direction of the Dean of the Academic Board. This marked the first time that a language had been added to the West Point curriculum without being directed from an outside authority. The last language added to the West Point curriculum was Arabic in 1976. Persian language instruction began in 2007-8 as an elective course, taken primarily by First Class (Senior) cadets. The Department of Foreign Languages hired one full-time Persian language instructor in 2007, and still has only one full-time Persian instructor.

Growth of the Persian Language Program: In Academic Year 2008-9, the Basic Persian course became an option to satisfy the core language requirement for the first time. Since the course currently only consists of two semesters, only cadets with Math, Science and Engineering majors can select Persian to meet their core requirement, as most Humanities and Social Science majors require four semesters of a language. In the first year this option was offered, 40 cadets elected to choose Persian as their core language. Additionally, the Basic Persian course expanded from 40 hours a semester to 80 hours, being taught every day, instead of every other day.

CHART A: Persian Enrollments

The Persian language program has shown a steady increase in enrollment since its inception, which reflects a positive reception from cadets.

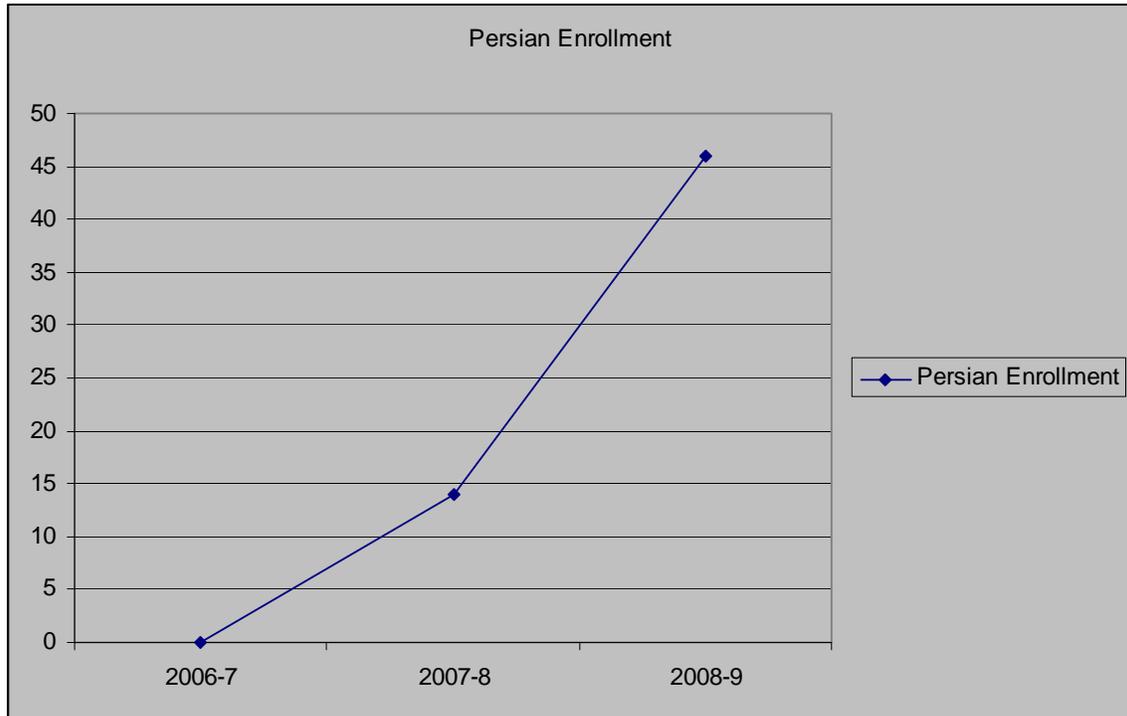


CHART B : Persian Enrollments by Year

Enrollment in Persian Language Course

| Academic Year | Sections | Enrolled |
|---------------|----------|----------|
| 2006-7 | 0 | 0 |
| 2007-8 | 2 | 14 |
| 2008-9 | 3 | 46 |

Demand vs. Enrollments:

Persian was first offered as an elective, and the Department of Foreign Languages was able to meet the demand, participation being limited primarily by cadet schedules. Although the language was offered in 2008 as a course to meet the core language requirement, the number of cadets eligible to select it was limited. Since Persian is still only a two-semester course, and most Humanities and Social Science majors require four semesters of a foreign language, only cadets who were certain of taking a Math, Science or Engineering major were considered candidates. These cadets were selected by soliciting volunteers among the Plebe (Freshman) class who identified themselves as likely Math, Science or Engineering majors.

During the Summer of 2008, for the first time, new cadets were allowed to choose Persian as one of their language choices during the normal language selection process. All cadets were briefed of the limitation of Persian to likely Math, Science and Engineering majors. In this case, 2.4% of the incoming class chose Persian.

Chart G below shows the actual 1st choice selections by cadets by year:

CHART G: Cadet 1st Choice Languages by Percentage

| | Jul-04 | Jul-05 | Jul-06 | Jul-07 | Jul-08 |
|--------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| ARABIC: | 20% | 16.9% | 18.8% | 16.4% | 13.5% |
| CHINESE: | 6.4% | 6.7% | 11.1% | 10.2% | 12.1% |
| FRENCH: | 8% | 11.6% | 8.9% | 13.7% | 10.6% |
| GERMAN: | 17.7% | 16.3% | 18.1% | 17.3% | 16.0% |
| PORTUGUESE: | 9% | 15.3% | 3.5% | 15.8% | 10.8% |
| RUSSIAN: | 4.3% | 7.0% | 7.4% | 5.5% | 9.0% |
| SPANISH: | 34.5% | 26.1% | 32.1% | 21.0% | 25.6% |
| PERSIAN: | | | | | 2.4% |

Course Content: Cadets focus on the basic skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening in formal written and colloquial (spoken) Persian. In this course, cadets are introduced to Iranian culture and history through culture presentations, video clips and movies. The topics covered range from the history of the Persian language to major significant events in the 20th and 21st centuries in Iran, the current Iranian government, Islam and the Iranian education system. Cadets are also introduced to great poets of the past such as Ferdowsi and Hafez, as well as more recent writers such as Sadeq Hedayat. Cadets also gain an understanding of cultural and social customs such as the concept of *taarof* (patterns of social etiquette), religious and secular holiday celebrations, as well as Iranian cuisine.

Future Developments in Persian. Persian began as a elective offered every other day, based on that successful pilot, it became a core-satisfying course taught five days a week. The current feedback on the course is overwhelmingly positive. Based on this highly successful pilot, the Department of Foreign Languages has advanced a plan to the Academic Board to offer Persian as a full, two-year sequence of basic and intermediate courses. This would satisfy the core language requirement for all cadets, thus allowing any cadet to select Persian as their core language. Implementing this proposal, if approved, would require hiring an additional instructor. Future options could include an Area Studies major with Persian as its language component (currently, the Middle Eastern Area Studies major is only possible with an Arabic language component). A full Persian language major is a future possibility, if the Area Studies program proves successful.

Immersion Training: Currently, no overseas immersion program is available to cadets. West Point has considered the possibility of an overseas experience in Tajikistan as a future possibility.