

House Education Committee  
P.O. Box 30014  
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Chair Hornberger and the Honorable Members of the House Education Committee,

On behalf of the department of Romance and Classical Studies and the department of Linguistics and Germanic, Slavic, Asian and African Languages at Michigan State University, I respectfully request that this letter be entered into the record of testimony of the hearing of October 29, 2019 to voice our opposition to HB4974's inclusion of computer coding as "a language other than English."

To do so, I would like to point to two recent publications.

**1. THE SURPRISING THING GOOGLE LEARNED ABOUT ITS EMPLOYEES**

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2017/12/20/the-surprising-thing-google-learned-about-its-employees-and-what-it-means-for-todays-students/?wpisrc=nl\\_sb\\_smartbrief](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2017/12/20/the-surprising-thing-google-learned-about-its-employees-and-what-it-means-for-todays-students/?wpisrc=nl_sb_smartbrief), written by Valerie Strauss, published by the Washington Post on December 20, 2017.

This article starts with the following: "The conventional wisdom about 21<sup>st</sup> century skills holds that students need to master the STEM subjects — science, technology, engineering and math — and learn to code as well because that's where the jobs are. It turns out that is a gross simplification of what students need to know and be able to do, and some proof for that comes from a surprising source: Google." It then goes on to explain that Google developed hiring algorithms to find the best computer science students in elite science universities.

"In 2013, Google decided to test its hiring hypothesis by crunching every bit and byte of hiring, firing, and promotion data accumulated since the company's incorporation in 1998. Project Oxygen shocked everyone by concluding that, **among the eight most important qualities of Google's top employees, STEM expertise comes in dead last.** The seven top characteristics of success at Google are all soft skills: being a good coach; **communicating and listening well**; possessing insights into others (including others different values and points of view); having empathy toward and being supportive of one's colleagues; being a good critical thinker and problem solver; and being able to make connections across complex ideas."

"A recent survey of 260 employers by the nonprofit National Association of Colleges and Employers, which includes both small firms and behemoths like Chevron and IBM, also ranks **communication skills** in the top three most-sought after qualities by job recruiters. They prize both an ability to communicate with one's workers and an aptitude for conveying the company's product and mission outside the organization. Or take billionaire venture capitalist and "Shark Tank" TV personality Mark Cuban: He looks for philosophy majors when he's investing in sharks most likely to succeed."



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## 2. SOFT SKILLS TOP EMPLOYERS VALUE

<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/list-of-soft-skills-2063770>, written by Alison Doyle, published by the balance careers on August 24, 2019.

This article lists the top 6 soft skills as follows:

### 1. Communication

“Communication skills are important in almost every job. You will likely need to communicate with people on the job, whether they are clients, customers, colleagues, employers, or vendors. You will also need to be able to speak clearly and politely with people in person, by phone, and in writing.” Examples given in the article include: listening, negotiation, presentation, and public speaking. **In world language classes, but not in computer coding classes, we teach students to negotiate meaning and co-construct communication, to participate in active listening, and to develop effective presentation skills using clear language.**

### 2. Critical Thinking

“Employers want candidates who can analyze situations and make informed decisions. [...] [Y]ou need to be able to understand problems, think critically, and devise solutions. Skills related to critical thinking include creativity, flexibility, and curiosity.” Examples given include: adaptability, flexibility, problem solving, resourcefulness, thinking outside the box, and tolerance of change and uncertainty. **In world language classes, but not in computer coding classes, we teach students how to adapt to unfamiliar environments and situations, how to express meaning with limited means (i.e. how to solve a problem with the tools you have and find ways to compensate for unknown elements).**

### 3. Leadership

### 4. Positive Attitude

“Employers are always seeking people who will bring a positive attitude to the office. They want employees who will be friendly to others, eager to work, and generally a pleasure to be around. Being able to keep things positive is especially important if you’re working in a fast-paced, high-stress work environment.” Examples given include: confidence, cooperation, courtesy, patience, and respectfulness. **In world language classes, but not in computer coding classes, we teach students to cooperate with peers in the learning process and in the co-construction of interactions and projects, to develop patience and courtesy with others, and to show respectfulness toward differences and other’s ideas.**

### 5. Teamwork

“Hiring managers look for job candidates who can work well with others. Whether you will be doing a lot of team projects or simply attending a few departmental meetings, you need to be able to work effectively with the people around you. You need to be able to work with others even if you do not always see eye to eye.” Examples given include: accepting feedback, collaboration, dealing with difficult situations, diversity awareness, empathy, intercultural competence, and interpersonal skills. **The world language class is the only class in the curriculum in which students can develop skills such as intercultural competence and empathy toward diversity. These skills are**

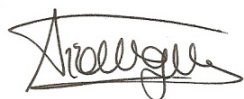
**gained by learning about how various people and culture view the world and construct meaning for it. Allowing computer coding to replace a language other than English prevents student from developing this skill.**

6. Work Ethic

“Employers look for job candidates with a strong work ethic. [...] They are able to budget their time and complete their work thoroughly. While they can work independently, people with a strong work ethic can also follow instructions. Examples include: perseverance, persistence, proper business etiquette, self-monitoring, staying on task, and working well under pressure.” **In world language classes, but not in computer coding classes, we teach students to never give up, even if you can’t see a way to say something or be understood because we show them different ways of reaching the goal. In addition, we teach students to constantly monitor what they say while under the pressure of speaking in a language they are still learning.**

For all the benefits that learning another language brings to students, I urge you to oppose HB4974’s the classification of computer coding as “a language other than English” and any other bill that weakens our students’ ability to develop skills that are crucial to the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anne Violin-Wigent". The signature is stylized with a large initial 'A' and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Anne Violin-Wigent  
Associate Professor of French  
Faculty Supervisor of French Basic Language Instruction