Preliminary Findings from the AATJ Survey on the Impact of Federal Funding Cuts on Japanese Language and Culture Programs

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Purpose

To assess the impact of recent federal funding cuts on Japanese language and culture programs.

Method

A 7-item survey was created using Google Forms. Invitations were distributed on October 9, 2026, via the AATJ Bulletin and the AATJ Local Affiliate Network. Participants could respond in English or Japanese by the end of October. A reminder was sent through the AATJ Bulletin on October 28, 2026.

Responses

A total of 43 responses were received.

Participating Institutions / Schools / Programs

Over 80% of the participating institutions are in higher education, including Japanese language and culture programs at four-year public and private universities, community colleges, and Asian studies resource centers, as shown in Figure 1. The remaining roughly 20% are public high schools. Table 1 summarizes the participating schools and their program descriptions.

Figure 1: Types of Participating Institutions

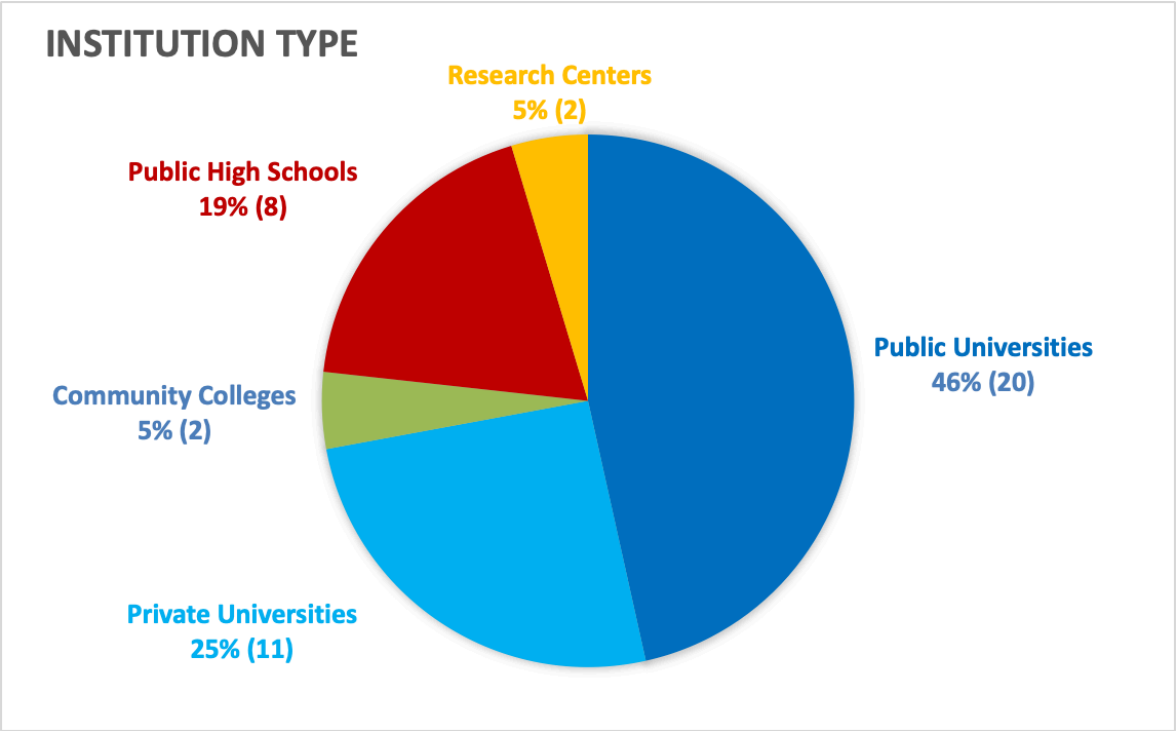


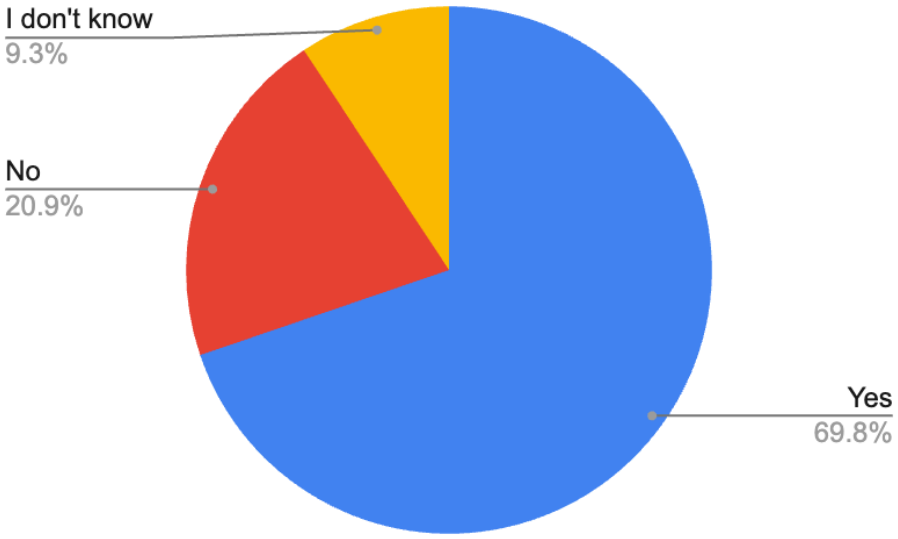
Table 1. Participating Schools and Program Descriptions

School Category	Faculty	Students	Courses	Programs	Special Features
Ivy League & Large Research Universities	4–6 full-time + part-time/adjuncts	~100–445/year	Elementary → Advanced; literature, film, translation, business Japanese	BA/major, minor, certificates; some graduate courses	Study abroad, exchanges, student clubs, scholarships, internships
Public & State Universities / Regional Colleges	1–6 full-time + part-time/adjuncts	50–400/year	Elementary → Advanced; culture & literature	Majors, minors, certificates; interdisciplinary	Study abroad, cultural events, career workshops
Liberal Arts Colleges / Small Private Colleges	1–2 full-time + 1–3 adjuncts	25–150/year	Elementary → Advanced; literature & cultural studies	Major/minor in Japanese or Asian Studies	Personalized instruction, immersion focus
Community Colleges	1–2 full-time + 1–3 part-time	20–100/semester	Elementary → Advanced	Small minors or language programs	Language-focused instruction
Public High Schools	1–2 teachers	30–150	Japanese 1–5; sometimes AP/IB	Immersion or world language programs	Varies; cultural activities

Observed Impacts of Recent Federal Funding Cuts or Administrative Changes

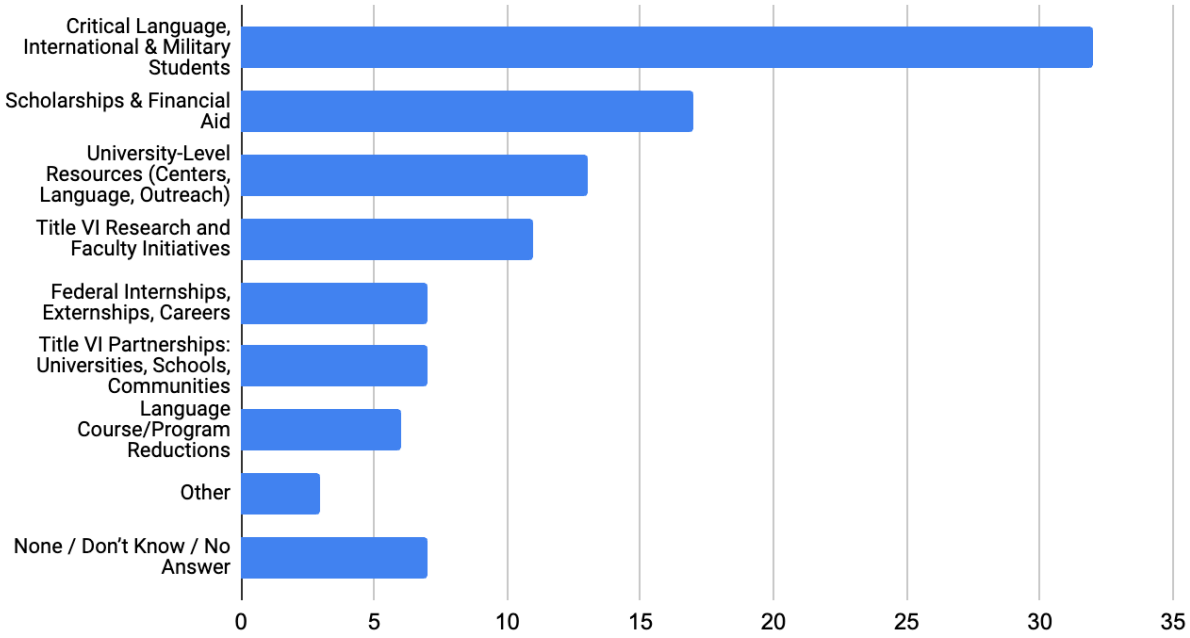
For the question, “Have you observed any impact of recent federal funding cuts or administrative changes on your institution or its programs?” nearly 70% of respondents answered “Yes,” over 20% answered “No,” and the remaining 10% selected “Don’t know”, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Responses to Institutional Impacts of Federal Funding Cuts and Administrative Changes



As shown in Figure 3, when asked which areas have been most affected (participants could select all that apply), the area most frequently reported was students—including Japanese language learners and international students—accounting for over 30% of responses. The next most affected areas were scholarships and financial aid (≈17%), university-level institutions such as Asian Studies and Language Centers (13%), and Title VI research and faculty initiatives (11%). Other reported areas included federal internships, externships, and careers (6.8%), Title VI partnerships between universities, schools, and communities (6.8%), and reductions in language courses or programs (5.8%). Some respondents noted that it is still too early to observe any impact.

Figure 3. Observed Areas Affected by Federal Funding Cuts and Administrative Changes



Insights from Open-Ended Responses

When respondents provided open-ended responses describing these impacts in more detail, the main patterns can be summarized as follows:

1. **Institutional and research impacts**
    a. University-wide budget cuts and financial instability have created uncertainty for programs, research projects, and new initiatives.
    b. Research funding, travel support, and summer language grants have been reduced or eliminated.
    c. Centers dependent on Title VI or other federal support face significant operational challenges.

2. **Student support and opportunities**
    a. Study abroad scholarships, Gilman awards, Fulbright placements, and other fellowships have been disrupted or delayed.
    b. International student enrollment has declined due to visa issues, funding cuts, and reduced support.
    c. Limited financial aid and higher tuition have restricted student access and program participation.

3. **Program and course reductions**
    a. Budget constraints have led to cuts or consolidation of language courses, including elementary and upper-level Japanese classes.

b. Some institutions have eliminated entire language programs or majors.
c. Funding for elective courses and cultural activities has been reduced.

4. **Staffing and professional development**
    a. Faculty professional development, tutoring programs, and language resource centers have been reduced or canceled.
    b. Positions such as AP coordinators, special education assistants, graduate TAs, and some full-time instructors have been cut or left unfilled.
    c. Staff reductions and decreased support have increased workloads for remaining faculty.

5. **Effects on secondary schools**
    a. Larger class sizes and fewer course sections strain both students and instructors.
    b. Local high schools have reduced Japanese programs and staff, weakening the community language education pipeline.
    c. Planning and hosting of conferences, workshops, and international exchange programs have been limited.

Below are some of the responses addressing the points above.

- *The most noticeable impacts of federal funding cuts have been felt in research support and institutional stability. Our Title VI–funded organization, the Atlanta Global Studies Center (AGSC), has been significantly affected. One staff member left in August and has not been replaced, and I lost the research support that previously covered travel and the hiring of a research assistant. As a result, I now need to seek external funding to sustain ongoing projects. The Provost's Office has agreed to provide temporary institutional support for AGSC for one year, with the understanding that the Center must secure external funding to continue beyond that period. This uncertainty has already impacted future initiatives. For example, I had planned to obtain partial funding for hosting SEATJ 2027 through AGSC, but that now appears unlikely. Consequently, I will need to seek additional external sources to support SEATJ, which will be hosted by our institute.*

- *Because ASU has lost a large amount of funding in the sciences, it has restructured its financing model for each of the schools to pool money centrally. This left the School of International Letters and Cultures without any extraneous money to support anything other than our currently offered courses. The paid tutoring system was cut right at the start of the academic year which has been a big hit to student support.*

- *The primary effects come from overall institutional financial pressure. We do not have a Title VI in Asian languages, but one in another area is affected as are incoming Fulbrights and other government fellowships. All of our language classes have to be larger due to budget constraints and funding for cultural activities was also reduced.*

- *The university eliminated an undergraduate grant to support intensive summer language study (It was for all languages and for undergraduates from all schools at our university.) as a part of budget*

tightening and staff cut -- they had a limited staff to administer the grant. They administer undergraduate research. It is just that the language grant is not their priority.

- *Our institution's budget model is enrollment-based, meaning that funding allocations—and the possibility of converting a part-time position to a full-time one—depend on demonstrated increases in student enrollment. However, under the current political climate, it has become increasingly difficult to expand enrollments in language programs. Despite these challenges, the Japanese Program has actively promoted our program by organizing events such as Japan Day and Meet Alumni, and by hosting major academic conferences, including AAAS in 2026 and SEATJ in 2027. These initiatives are designed to enhance visibility, strengthen community engagement, and attract new students to the program.*

- *The Financial instability has increased the difficulty for teachers and students to obtain proper and efficient educational resources to properly improve students experience.*

- *The international Fulbright Scholars who were accepted to the UW prior to the cutting of the Fulbright Program could not come to the UW to earn the degrees they were admitted to earn due to lack of funding. They're at some other university elsewhere in the world earning those degrees, which will have a negative economic impact on the US.*

- *Mainly international student admissions were affected, as visas were not issued during the critical period. We are down 40% in international graduate enrollment (primarily from India and China) and are facing a financial crisis. Because we do not receive large federal funding, the impact on our course offerings and research activities has been less severe than at many public institutions.*

- *Due to Student enrollment greatly decreased enrollment number, enrollment of the langauge class is significantly lower than ever. This also impacting every level, but most significantly the funding availability for the students including First gen students, international students, and students who need financial support. Funding for each department has also decreased. this impacts the programs and events the department can offer.*

- *Faculty's professional development opportunity was canceled due to the elmination of federal funding. University-wide budeget cut is under discussion.*

- *Three positions (Japanese, Chinese, and German) will be cut. I believe this is due to the low enrollment, not Federal funding cuts.*

- *Funding cuts have impacted hosting conferences not only at my institution but other institutions. One neighbor high schools have discontinued their Japanese program and another one has reduced the number of instructors of Japanese program.*

- *There was some impact, but it was manageable primarily because there weren't too many Federal initiatives that directly supported language teaching at community colleges to begin with (except for NRL, LRC, and a few study abroad awards such as Gilman). The continuing decline in students interested in foreign language courses is a more immediate challenge for us.*

- *Although I have not yet observed a direct impact of the federal funding cuts on the Japanese program, the institution is experiencing a serious setback in science research. Please see the local news article for more details:*

https://www.mercurynews.com/2025/07/19/cuts-to-science-grants-force-san-jose-researchers-student-to-scramble/

Key Findings from the Survey

Open-ended responses from participating institutions highlighted three major patterns regarding the impact of federal funding cuts. First, the severity of the impact varies widely by institution: while some Japanese programs remain largely unaffected, others face the risk of elimination. Second, public institutions and programs that rely heavily on federal support report the most significant challenges. Third, financial pressures influence institutional decisions even in areas that do not directly receive federal funding, creating ripple effects across programs and departments.

Financial and federal impacts extend across multiple aspects of program operations. Overall funding reductions have affected teaching faculty, additional course sections, cultural activities, study abroad opportunities, and research support. Federal funding cuts have a more pronounced effect at universities than at K–12 schools, and few federal initiatives directly support language teaching at community colleges or fund study abroad awards. Additional challenges, including H1-B and student visa regulations, combined with broader economic pressures in the United States, have further increased budgetary and staffing concerns.

Enrollment trends and program size are also affected. Departments of Modern Languages and Literatures have experienced notable declines in enrollment, although there are early signs of a modest recovery. Limited financial support continues to impede extracurricular research, outreach, and long-term program sustainability. At the university level, enrollment-based budgeting ties funding and faculty positions to student numbers, making growth difficult amid ongoing political and economic pressures. Specific programs, such as the newly established Chinese Immersion program with just eight students in its ninth-grade cohort, raise concerns about resource allocation for other languages, including Spanish and Japanese.

Universities often make course reductions based solely on low enrollment, which can produce counterintuitive outcomes. For instance, higher-level Japanese courses may outnumber beginner-level sections, reflecting resource prioritization rather than student demand. Such decisions highlight the broader challenges programs face in maintaining balanced curricula while navigating financial constraints and enrollment pressures.

Institutions are taking proactive steps to address these challenges. Increasing program visibility and outreach has become a key strategy. Japanese programs actively promote their value through events such as Japan Day and alumni meetings, as well as at major academic conferences like the 2026 AAS (Association for Asian Studies) and 2027 SEATJ (South Eastern Association of Teachers of Japanese). Faculty efforts to make their work visible, including

sharing photos from speech contests, festivals, and campaigns such as Onigiri Action, help secure departmental support. Petition drives, such as “Save the Japanese Program at WSU,” demonstrate community and alumni engagement in sustaining programs.

Finally, programs are addressing career and internship opportunities to counter the narrative that “majoring in foreign languages does not lead to careers.” Efforts include creating Japanese-language internship opportunities, although faculty capacity is limited. Support from organizations such as AATJ (American Association of Teachers of Japanese) and JFLA (Japan Foundation Los Angeles) in compiling internship options would be valuable. Moreover, faculty reflection on the purpose and value of teaching Japanese and other foreign languages is essential for advocating for their programs amid ongoing budgetary, political, and enrollment challenges.

Limitations

Because the survey was conducted within the AATJ community, the majority of responses came from individuals affiliated with university-level Japanese programs. It is therefore unsurprising that many respondents reported impacts on students, enrollment, scholarships, and internships. While more responses from Asian Studies Institutes and/or Resource Centers were anticipated, only two were received. Given that Title VI funding directly affects these institutions, future surveys should target them more deliberately. In addition, further research is needed to examine the effects of federal funding at the K–12 level, such as Title III grants.

It should also be noted that respondents to this survey are likely highly aware of and concerned about the impacts of federal funding cuts, which may skew the results toward their institutions. Nevertheless, other institutions—where faculty are occupied with daily responsibilities or are not directly affected by Title IV grants—may also be experiencing consequences. Future surveys should therefore adopt a broader targeting strategy to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of federal funding on Japanese language and culture programs.