

February 2, 2006

Title VI – Language Resource Centers

Prepared by the Council of Directors of the Language Resource Centers
For
The Committee to Review the Title VI and Fullbright-Hays Educational Programs
February 14, 2006

The Language Resource Center (LRC) Program is the only civilian federal program promoting the qualitative improvement of foreign language teaching and learning in the United States. Modest federal funding leverages expertise and resources at 14 universities. Despite limited resources LRCs provide critical national infrastructure in the form of materials, curricula, assessments, teacher training, teacher support, and technology-based learning.

All LRC programs focus on the teaching and learning of foreign languages in the United States. In 1989 the President's Commission on International Education recommended that some National Resource Centers be specifically designed to meet the nation's needs for foreign language education. In 1990, three centers were instituted by the USED: The Foreign Language Resource Center at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, the Language Acquisition Resource Center at San Diego State University, and the National Capital Language Resource Center at Georgetown University. These LRCs are all "comprehensive" centers; intended to address the objectives of the legislated purposes of the LRCs.

In 1993, the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) was established at the University of Minnesota and the National East Asian Languages Resource Center (NEALRC) was established at Ohio State University. The National K-12 Foreign Language Resource Center, with a focus on schools, was established at Iowa State University in 1996. The same year the Center for Language Education and Research (CLEAR) was established at Michigan State University.

Two more centers were added in 1999, both specifically designed to focus on the languages of a specific region: the Slavic and East European Language Resource Center (SEELRC) at Duke University, and the National African Language Resource Center (NALRC) at the University of Wisconsin.

Five new LRCs were added in the last grant cycle, 2002-2006. Two of these LRCs are consortia of departments across several universities, collaborating and combining resources to maximize impact and leverage limited resources: The Language Resource Center for the Middle East (NMELRC) at Brigham Young University and The Language Resource Center for South Asia (SALRC) at the University of Chicago. Other LRCs are The Center for Languages of the Central Asian Region (CeLCAR) at Indiana University, The Center for Advanced Language Proficiency Education and Research (CALPER) at Pennsylvania State University, The Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS), a comprehensive center, at the University of Oregon.

The questions of the Committee will be addressed from the point of view of the Language Resource Centers.

What do you view as the purpose of the Department of Education's Title VI and Fulbright Hays program(s)? What are the program(s)' strengths, weaknesses, and criticisms?

Purpose of the Language Resource Centers: Promoting national security, economic development, and cultural understanding and providing quality education by helping greater numbers of learners reach higher levels of proficiency in a variety of languages, including the Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs) such as Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Pashto and others.

Concrete activities related to the purposes are defined by the “allowable activities” taken from the legislation and listed below. They all focus on teaching and learning foreign languages. These activities are all critical to increasing and improving foreign language capacity.

1. **Research on language learning:** The conduct and dissemination of research on new and improved teaching methods, including the use of advanced educational technology;
2. **Materials for language learning:** The development and dissemination of new teaching materials reflecting the use of such research in effective teaching strategies;
3. **Assessment of language learning:** The development, application and dissemination of performance testing appropriate to an educational setting for use as a standard and comparable measurement of skill levels in all languages;
4. **Training foreign language teachers:** The training of teachers in the administration and interpretation of performance tests, the use of effective teaching strategies and the use of new technologies;
5. **Less commonly taught languages:** A significant focus on the teaching and learning needs of the LCTLs, including an assessment of the strategic needs of the United States, the determination of ways to meet those needs nationally, and the publication and dissemination of instructional materials in the less commonly taught languages;
6. **Foreign language education in K-12:** The development and dissemination of materials designed to serve as a resource for foreign language teachers at the elementary school and secondary school levels; and
7. **Summer institutes:** The operation of intensive summer language institutes to train advanced foreign language students, to provide professional development, and to improve language instruction through pre-service and in-service language training for teachers.

Strengths of Language Resource Centers Program: The great strength of the LRC Program is that we help significant numbers of learners to gain higher levels of proficiency in many foreign languages, including the Less Commonly Taught Languages.

- **Unique focus on foreign language:** The LRC Program is focused solely on the teaching and learning of foreign languages in the U.S. This allows us to: conduct applied research; develop materials and curricula; train teachers and instructors;

- organize, evaluate, and provide resources; and develop assessments with the specific goal of expanding and improving foreign language education K-12 and beyond.
- **Promotes the teaching and learning of less commonly taught languages:** The LRCs are engaged in meeting the critical language needs of the U.S. in languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Hindi, and Pashto. We do this through specialized materials and curriculum development, research on LCTL languages and language learning, teacher training, and student assessment. We, as a group, address these issues for all levels from elementary school through advanced levels.
 - **Promotes understanding of different cultures:** A specific strength of the LRC Program is that it provides materials, curricula, and teacher development that lead to deeper understanding of the perspectives of different peoples and cultures. All LRCs promote the fact that language cannot be separated from culture, and culture cannot really be learned and experienced without learning a language.
 - **Supports foreign language education K-12:** The LRC Program provides foreign language resources, materials, curricula, teacher training, and assessments that are available to all K-12 schools in the United States. All other K-12 foreign language teacher support is provided by the states, or not at all. (There is one program that supports 3-year innovative programs in specific schools [FLAP], and one program that supports LCTL education at the district level [NSEP].)
 - **Supports foreign language education at advanced levels:** An important national need has been identified for FL speakers with advanced proficiency. The Center for Advanced Language Proficiency Education and Research (CALPER) at Pennsylvania State University has been established specifically to address this issue. Other LRCs have projects that bring the diverse resources of their institutions to bear on this important issue in the contexts of various languages, especially LCTLs.
 - **Leverages intellectual, financial, and physical resources:** Although some LRCs are devoted to specific goals, it can be seen from Table 1 that the combined efforts of the 14 centers leverage the strengths of the various institutions to meet the overall purposes of the program.
 - **Collaboration:** The LRCs have a Council of Directors that meets at least once a year and that is in constant contact by email. We collaborate on projects and programs and disseminate each other's materials and programs. LRCs also collaborate with NRCs (National Resource Centers) and other institutions to share resources and increase impact.
 - **Flexibility:** The allowable activities of the LRCs provide us with the flexibility to take advantage of the strengths of our institutions to maximize our capacity and also to respond to the changing needs of the field in a timely manner.
 - **Provides articulation:** An important strength of the LRC Program is that its activities provide opportunities for articulation and collaboration across institutions and administrations including articulation of efforts in foreign language across grade levels K-12, university, and above, and articulation between federal, state, and district administrations.
 - **Represents federal promotion of foreign language education:** The LRC program publicly demonstrates to states, districts, schools, universities and the public that the federal government values foreign language education.

Challenges facing the LRC Program:

- **Need for support for basic projects:** The nature of the grant competition encourages applicants to propose high-profile projects that respond to current political concerns rather than proposing projects that focus on the less dramatic, but critical, work that is needed in the field of teaching foreign languages.
- **Time commitment only 4 years:** The greatest impact on language teaching requires sustained commitment to support research initiatives, faculty positions, and school programs over a longer period of time than the four years of an LRC grant.
- **Reduction in funding:** A major weakness of the program is that the number of centers has increased faster than the amount of money in the total pot, with the result that the per center allocation is actually less now (\$345K per center in FY 2005) than it was ten years ago (\$410K in FY 1995). When inflation is factored in, this represents a 35% reduction in funding per center. This has reduced the scope of projects LRCs can undertake.
- **Evaluating success and progress:** It is not possible to carefully evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the LRC Program, because the data collected by the EELIAS system, the electronic database which hosts data on Title VI program activities, is not organized to retrieve data specific to the purposes of the LRC program. For example, it is not possible to search the system for “Research Activities,” even though this is the first activity outlined in the allowable activities for LRCs.

Criticisms: We are not aware of any stated criticisms of the LRC Program from policymakers. We do, however, hear criticisms from the field. Some are:

- Need more focus on K-12. Too much focus on higher education.
- Too much focus on K-12, this should be left to the states.
- Need more focus on Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs).
- Too much focus on LCTLs, not enough on Commonly Taught Languages (which are the languages that most students actually study).
- Need more projects that focus on cutting-edge technology.
- Too much emphasis on advanced technology when most schools have limited technology capacity.

Most of these criticisms reflect the point of view of the speaker and the desire to have more resources focused on a particular aspect of the entire program. As the only U.S. Department of Education program solely devoted to providing resources nationally for the teaching of foreign languages, the mandate for the LRCs is very great in relation to the resources we are allocated.

How would you define “success” for the program(s)? How would you determine if the program(s) are “successful” or “effective”? Would you measure effectiveness differently for the various Department of Education Title VI and Fulbright Hays programs?

How would you define “success?”

The most meaningful measure of success of the LRC Program is the number of learners of various languages receiving quality education that allows them to achieve meaningful levels of language proficiency and cultural understanding to increase national capacity, meet national needs, and promote economic development.

How would you determine if the LRC Program is successful?

There is no external mechanism for evaluation of the overall performance of the 14 LRCs as a group, that we know of. We believe the reported activities of the 14 LRCs are combined with those of the 120 NRCs in the Title VI database, EELIAS. Although we do not think this is the basis of an evaluation procedure, we still believe that a single database is not appropriate. As described above, our “allowable activities,” our missions, and the objectives laid out by the legislation are unique, and as such, data about the LRCs activities should be stored as a separate entity. If LRC activities are evaluated, they should be evaluated in terms of LRC objectives.

Success of the 14 Language Resource Centers together should be determined by how well the centers meet the purposes of the legislation. The “allowable activities” outline the concrete purposes and objectives of the program, and we believe these objectives are appropriate for the purposes of the LRC program. If we successfully address those activities, that is a good measure of success for the program.

Table 1 provides a list of the program objectives (allowable activities) across the top of the table, and a list of LRCs. The cells include activities for each LRC that address each objective. This is the first time we know of that the LRC-specific activities have been reported according to the specific LRC objectives. As can be seen from the table, the LRCs are successful in addressing the objectives.

Just meeting the objectives, however, is not enough. A second measure of success is the measure of how *well* the LRCs are meeting the objectives. Evaluation of how well we are meeting the objectives occurs now at the level of individual programs and projects within LRCs. An evaluation plan of each project is required in the RFP. The evaluation plan is tailored to the objectives of each project. Evaluation plans include both qualitative and quantitative measures. We use quantitative measures: number of “hits” on web resources, number of language teachers and administrators attending institutes and conferences, number of members of listservs, mailing lists, and professional organizations we support, number and size of new materials and resources created. However, we do not expect that materials developed for elementary students of Arabic to be used as extensively as materials for high school students of Spanish. Success in dissemination of these two kinds of materials must be defined differently.

We also use qualitative measures to evaluate how well our programs are meeting the goals. These measures are primarily in the form of questionnaires to participants and clients seeking their reactions to our events and products, and their suggestions. Peer evaluations that occur in the process of publication of materials and research are also used. Sometimes we include external evaluations. There is no “one size fits all” even within one LRC.

Data about individual LRCs is provided in our Annual and Final reports and recorded in the EELIAS system described above. This data describes projects and programs, materials and curricula developed, tests developed, professional development for teachers, institutes, and dissemination activities. We include descriptions as well as quantitative information about impact. Annual reports also ask for descriptions of “exemplary activities” which allows us to report in more detail on particularly successful programs. We are not aware of how, or if, this information is used for evaluation.

At least two individual LRCs have also been evaluated through site visits from members of the Department of Education who are not members of the Title VI staff. These site visits include extensive review of our programs and projects based on our proposed activities and evaluation plans. They also include a review of our administrative procedures. The visits are very thorough and the feedback is detailed and useful. The two site visits we are aware of both produced extremely positive feedback from the U.S. Department of Education.

Would you measure effectiveness differently for the various Department of Education Title VI and Fulbright Hays programs?

Success must have different definitions and measures for the different Title VI programs. The specific objectives of the different programs are too diverse to be measured according to the same criteria and benchmarks.

How would you use the results of an evaluation?

The results of evaluations would be used to improve the quality of our products and services within a funding cycle and in future work. An evaluation of the entire program, all LRCs, would provide information about how well the program as a whole is meeting the purposes of the program. Evaluation can also serve to determine meeting future needs of the teaching and learning community.

How do you view the role of the Department of Education’s Title VI LRC Program as similar or different from the role of other related federal programs?

The LRC program is the only national federal civilian program uniquely devoted to research and the development of materials, curricula, assessments, and teacher training programs in foreign language. There is no other general federal support for FL teachers and students in the schools or universities. Our entire focus is on improving and expanding the teaching and learning of foreign languages in the United States. Although there are only 14 LRCs across the nation, our impact on FL education is significant and our role critical.