

Written Comments
To the
Committee to Review the Title VI and Fulbright Hays International Education Programs
National Research Council
Submitted by
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Federal Interagency Language Roundtable

Overview Statement:

The Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) is a Federal interagency organization established for the coordination and sharing of information about language-related activities at the Federal level. It serves as a primary way for departments and agencies of the Federal government to keep abreast of the progress and implementation of techniques and technology for language learning, language use, language testing and other language-related activities. Participation in the ILR provides organizations and individuals with a channel of communication and cooperation among agencies that have common interests in foreign language training and testing; a centralized forum for the dissemination of language-related information across the government; and a working network for the mutual sharing of ideas, information and language resources among organizations in government, the academic community, and the private sector. Representatives of more than 35 federal agencies and almost 30 academic and non-governmental organizations meet every month from September to June to attend plenary presentations on topical issues, to discuss common interests in topic-specific committees and special interest groups and to network with professional colleagues. The ILR is led by a Steering Committee of representatives from the Foreign Service Institute, Defense Language Institute, Intelligence Language Institute, National Cryptologic School, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Defense Intelligence Agency, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Department of State's Office of Language Services, and Department of Education.

Across the ILR, both government and non-government alike, the concern is primarily with the development and assessment of language proficiency, by which is meant the ability to use the language effectively to carry out tasks. In our contexts, language is an (often critical) tool that provides leverage in getting something done, whether it is to understand full implications of an important editorial or the significance of an overheard conversation, to communicate our own points of view, to establish solid relationships, to give clear directions, to elicit information effectively and so on.

Among ILR Steering Committee members, it has been our collective experience that a large number of Americans with federal positions that require language ability and cultural and area studies knowledge studied under Fulbright-Hays or Title VI-funded programs, or received support for their study under Title VI or its predecessors (NDEA, NDFL). Indeed, the authors of this letter themselves received a significant portion of their language training in Thai and Lao (Dr. Jackson), and Chinese and Japanese (Dr. McGinnis), with the support of NDFL and FLAS fellowships during their graduate study. In addition, as professional language educators, we have had experience with Title VI outside of the ILR as well, ranging from our service as officers of professional language organizations like the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages, the Chinese Language Teachers' Association and the Council of Teachers of Southeast Asian languages, to serving as peer

reviewers of Title VI proposals and IRSP-funded grants and projects, to service on national advisory boards for National Language Resource Centers.

From our experience, it is clear that many, if not most, of the Title VI programs and centers have made and are continuing to make major contributions to American understanding of world regions and to the development of significant language skills, especially in Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs). The National Language Resource Centers, for example, a component of Title VI that was initiated only about a dozen years ago, have significantly improved the number and quality of proficiency-oriented learning materials in many LCTLs, have delivered excellent workshops and courses for language educators from kindergarten through post-graduate courses, have worked to develop necessary national testing standards and procedures in many LCTLs, and have conducted important research into the learning of these languages, especially to high levels. Indeed, from the very high quality of LRC proposals under this year's re-authorization, it is very regrettable that only 14 are able to be funded.

Similarly, several National Resource Centers have attained almost iconic status in their roles in educating Americans about specific regions of the world. Within both of our respective areas of professional expertise—Southeast Asia and East Asia—there are universities with Title VI Centers that are internationally renowned resources, with outstanding libraries, leading scholars, important publications and superb courses and degree programs. Increasingly, too, Centers have taken the lead in finding ways to maximize expertise by collaborating together in consortia and joint programs for intensive study of language and culture. One of the earliest such consortia was the Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute (SEASSI), which has been hosted by different Centers annually for almost 25 years, and which has served as a model for other regions. Another very important initiative by regional consortia has been the establishment of long-term programs of intensive language study at advanced levels in host-country institutions. Some of these programs have established themselves, together with such government training institutions as FSI and DLI, at the cutting edge of use-oriented culturally-contextualized foreign language education in the United States.

A brief remark is also necessary here about the importance of the Title VI International Research and Study Grants (IRS). This year, when the list of new IRS grants was posted, senior language experts across the government remarked very positively on the value of the topics to be researched and of the anticipated usefulness of the materials and tools to be developed. In addition, this year's grants also include funding for the Modern Language Association's survey of post-secondary foreign language education in all institutions throughout the United States and for comparable surveys of foreign language education in American primary and secondary schools. Without the data provided by these crucial surveys funded by IRS, there would be no solid objective national information on the state of foreign language education in this country.

Despite the important successes of the Title VI programs, however, improvements in them are required and should be implemented to ensure greater accountability. Many of these requirements are in the areas of assessment and evaluation, especially of students in the NRCs and CIBERs, where no formal records have been maintained of the levels of language study completed by students or the proficiency that each one was able to attain. Even more important is the need for good record-keeping for the FLAS grantees, to track the specific courses they have each taken, both domestically and abroad, and to obtain an objective assessment of their language proficiency levels at the end of their course of study. Other improvements needed are to provide earlier and more extended access to language

and culture education, beginning with the re-introduction of undergraduate FLAS grants and the addition of proficiency-oriented language instruction beyond fourth-year courses. (Four years of college study of a LCTL like Chinese, Korean or Arabic, especially if not accompanied by a year of intensive study in the country, barely permits the learner to scratch the surface in developing the ability to understand and communicate effectively in the language.)

A further improvement needed in the area of the teaching of less commonly taught languages, especially, is for many of the centers to stop depending on minimally-trained temporary, part-time, or adjunct faculty to teach the languages and to establish full-time, permanent, professional positions for language educators. As Professor Elaine Tennant of the University of California recently observed, "The academy and the federal government have played a cynical game in placing the burden of instruction of the high-need languages on the backs of untenured, temporary, irregular lecturers."

Responses to Questions:

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?

We see three purposes of these programs, or rather, three different (but overlapping) audiences:

1. To provide information and introductory and intermediate-level coursework for generalists who have interest in the region and/or in the language, enabling them to develop a basic functional proficiency in the language and understanding of the cultural context. The audience for these offerings ranges from potential majors all the way to such non-traditional students as medical personnel, engineers, business students, agricultural specialists, law enforcement students, fine arts students, lawyers, and non-degree continuing education students.
2. To strengthen the field's capabilities to provide top quality education in foreign languages, area studies, and international studies at all levels of the American educational system by developing coherent curricular models and top quality instructional and assessment resources, by training future and current teachers to use them effectively, and by researching new methods, approaches and tools to foster learning.
3. To provide very high-level preparation for future professional specialists in a range of area studies fields (including, e.g., literature and linguistics) and also in the ability to use language at sophisticated near-native levels of ability. Logically, this should include making available training in the development of skills in interpretation and translation. The intended audience for this kind of professional preparation would include area studies specialists intending to follow an academic career, and also such individuals as government employees, journalists, specialists in international commerce and banking, translators, interpreters, and anyone desiring a truly professional preparation in a particular language and culture. This kind of program, especially, must include long-term intensive study overseas.

Of these three purposes, it seems to us that Title VI programs have fairly good records with the first two, but, with a few exceptions, considerably poorer record with the third.

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?

All of these programs need to be accountable to the funding agencies and to the American people, and accountability depends on systematic objective assessment that is anchored in the goals and objectives of the programs. That said, it is clear that the means of assessing a program's success in achieving each of the three different purposes described above under the first question should certainly differ. That is, the assessment tools used to measure the extent to which a Language Resource Center contributed to effective K-12 teaching of a foreign language (2) would be very different from tools used to gauge the extent to which a center was able to provide effective introductory/intermediate cultural understanding and language ability to diverse undergraduate students (1), which, in turn, must be very different from determining how well the center did in preparing intended specialists to do professional work (3).

Similarly, systems of assessment for the IRS grantees must presumably be very different from those used to evaluate the achievements of FLAS or Fulbright-Hays grantees.

What data/information do you use to measure the effectiveness of this program(s)?

Students who take language courses at a center or overseas under FLAS or Fulbright-Hays grants need to have their language ability formally assessed by established tests of language proficiency. As has been demonstrated clearly in the research conducted over many years by Prof. Dan Davidson into the achievements of American students studying Russian in-country, only the use of a consistent objective standard makes it possible to continue to improve and strengthen the program.

How do you view the role of the Department of Education's Title VI and Fulbright Hays programs as similar or different from the role of other related federal programs?

To our knowledge, there are no other federal programs that have the same roles as the Title VI Language Resource Centers or the IRS grants. As already remarked, those programs seem to us to be unique and essential.

There are increasingly many federal (and other) programs that make it possible for graduate students to study language and/or conduct research overseas, as is possible under the FLAS grants and some Fulbright-Hays programs. Among the most promising of these are the Flagship programs under the National Security Education Program, which are expressly designed to develop professional-level language proficiency in five critical languages. However, the pitifully small number of college students who even study a foreign language at all (approximately 8%, according to the Modern Language Association) and the contrast between the numbers of students who express the intent to study abroad (>60%) and those who actually do (1%) would indicate that there is certainly not too much support for American students to study overseas, especially in non-Western European countries. The new NSLI initiative hopes to increase annual participation in the excellent NSEP program to 2000 students by 2010. This will only be a small drop in the big bucket of the national need. In our opinion, the number of FLAS grants needs to be significantly increased, and they need to be made available to committed undergraduate students, in addition to graduate students, as they are now. That will make it possible for motivated

learners to receive support to study more than four years of a critical LCTL and its cultural context.

The scope of work of the best NRCs and CIBERs is not matched by any other federal programs with which we are familiar, but a number of federal institutions were established specifically to provide federal employees with advanced training in language and other professional skills that they need in order to carry out their professional assignments. These include such institutions as the Foreign Service Institute, the Defense Language Institute and National War College, the Intelligence Language Institute, and the National Cryptologic School. Qualified federal employees, both military and civilian, also are given opportunities for extended full-time study and residence in top U.S. university programs, including NRCs. But most professional training for federal employees is done in-house, because it is not available elsewhere in the form needed.

The State Department's Foreign Service Institute is expressly designed to provide U.S. government employees with the training that they need to be able to carry out the responsibilities of their assignments. Such training typically consists of at least language and culture (to the level designated as required for the position), advanced area studies, functional training in the specific job, and leadership skills training. Each course program involves full-time training, requiring class and independent study of up to ten hours each day, in order to develop the needed skills.

It would help the Foreign Service greatly if more new officers entered the service with advanced proficiency in one or more languages—and especially in the less commonly taught critical needs languages. Last year was a good one for recruiting FSOs with language skills, but still only about a quarter of the new officers entered the service possessing Professional Proficiency (3/3) in any language. Development of these levels is a direct product of the amount of time spent in study, and the fact is that three or four years of study at an American university is not enough to learn a language like Chinese, Korean, Persian or Arabic to the needed level—certainly not without at least a full year of intensive immersion in-country. If the Title VI Centers committed to delivering more instruction in language skills, at higher levels, it would make it possible for the government training institutions to focus on helping employees with good basic skills from college to develop the Advanced Professional language proficiency (4/4) that they need to carry out their increasingly complex and hazardous responsibilities.

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