

National Flagship Language Initiative (NFLI): Addressing National Needs for Language Proficient Professionals

We can no longer keep our nation safe if we do not commit ourselves to learning the languages and cultures of critical areas around the world. The security of our troops overseas and the American people here at home demand that we act quickly to eliminate the severe shortage of critical need language professionals in this country. Inaction on this issue is not only irresponsible; it's dangerous. [Congressman Rush Holt, Remarks to House of Representatives, November 25, 2003].

The National Flagship Language Initiative (*NFLI*) at the National Security Education Program (NSEP) represents the nation's first major partnership between the federal government and higher education to implement a national system of programs designed to produce advanced language competency in languages critical to the nation's security. Working in partnership with the *National Foreign Language Center* at the University of Maryland, NSEP has established national flagship programs across the U.S. These Flagship Programs, coupled with directed and targeted fellowships for individual students, have begun to produce graduates, many of whom will be candidates for employment with agencies and offices of the federal government, across a broad range of disciplines with advanced levels of proficiency in languages critical to national security. The *NFLI* focuses initially on the following critical languages:

Arabic (including dialects)

Chinese (Mandarin)

Hindi

Japanese

Korean

Persian

Russian

Turkish

Why NFLI?

Foreign language programs in the U.S., both federal and academic, at best, generally aim toward a "limited working proficiency" (level 2) goal. This level of language is generally insufficient in more complex and sophisticated work-related tasks. Simply put, a professional

...We have much work to do. Semester abroad programs and foreign language study, for example, are critical for our future. More American students need to study abroad and study foreign languages, and the trend is in the opposite direction. The ability to cultivate and sustain relationships between peoples and governments will determine America's future successes in the world. [Senator Chuck Hagel, remarks at Conference on New American Strategies for Peace and Security, Center for American Progress]

at a “level 2” proficiency in a language cannot work effectively in that language. The *NFLI* addresses the urgent and growing need for significantly higher levels of language competency among a broader cross-section of professionals, particularly for those who will join Federal agencies. **The goal is to produce students with professional proficiency (level 3) in critical foreign languages.**

The federal sector cannot and should not address the language deficit in a vacuum. Only through strategic partnerships with recognized national leaders in foreign language education can the federal government address short- and long-term needs for language proficient professionals. Properly charged and appropriately funded, elements of the higher education system are capable of producing higher-level proficiencies in languages critical to U.S. national security. The *NFLI* is already demonstrating this capacity through the creation of permanent infrastructure for advanced programming in critical languages.

Guided by the oversight of the NSEP, *NFLI* unites the federal sector with the higher education community by utilizing proven NSEP management and structure, drawing upon the experience of leading government and academic second language acquisition and curriculum specialists, capitalizing on the experience of the National Foreign Language Center (the nation’s principal institutional resource for strategic language planning), and exploiting the resources of several of the nation’s leading universities.

The major focus of *NFLI* is to establish the field-wide and institutional infrastructure that will support the production of advanced language-proficient students in languages critical to U.S. national security. Through a combination of innovative and intensive campus curriculum and overseas immersion, each flagship program offers intermediate to advanced level students a full-time, one- to two-year program of study designed to achieve professional proficiency (superior/level 3) in the targeted language.

Critical to this objective is the recruitment and development of language proficient candidates for employment with the federal government. Flagship programs are developing and implementing plans to attract students from multiple constituencies, including:

1. *Matriculated Degree Students at Flagship Institution.* Flagship institutions recruit students from their own campus, targeting, among others, professional degree students.
2. *Local/Regional Students.* Flagship institutions recruit students from the geographically proximate region who wish to benefit from the flagship opportunity.
3. *Students from Across the Country.* As national and regional resources, flagship institutions recruit qualified students from throughout other U.S. colleges and universities.

4. *Federal employees from offices and agencies with foreign language requirements and responsibilities.* Current federal employees will be able to register as matriculated or special students, and their expenses will be paid directly to the Flagship institution by the sending federal organization.

All students, except for current Federal employees, are eligible to apply for newly established NSEP/NFLI Fellowships that cover the total cost of attending any one or two year Flagship program. NSEP/NFLI Fellows are awarded based on the applicant's qualifications in the target language and commitment to federal service in the national security community. NSEP hopes to expand the number of NFLI Fellowships as additional funding becomes available.

The NFLI Pilot Program

In September 2002, Congress, through the Fiscal Year 2003 Intelligence Authorization Act, authorized and strongly endorsed the National Security Education Program (NSEP) effort to implement the NFLI. Constrained only by current funding limitations, NSEP has inaugurated an aggressive NFLI Pilot program focusing on Arabic, Chinese, Korean, and Russian. Each of these programs is implementing an exciting and innovative curriculum and has enrolled students both with and without direct support from NSEP.

Arabic for Interactive Communication (AFIC)

The AFIC program represents a new initiative in the field of Arabic Study designed to promote new methods and approaches to the study of Arabic at higher levels of proficiency, with special emphasis on developing models for innovative and effective teaching of interpersonal and presentation modes of communication. Guided by a steering committee of leading Arabic scholars from across the U.S., AFIC has initiated through the Center for Arabic Study Abroad at the American University in Cairo, a program of intensive advanced Arabic study. Efforts are currently underway to expand opportunities for Arabic language study at the University of Damascus. In addition to overseas study, AFIC has begun work on research and materials development projects, utilizing the latest advances in technology and general language acquisition research, intended to improve instruction in U.S. Arabic programs that will insure an increased flow of students at the advanced proficiency level to the overseas programs.

AFIC enrolled its first students beginning summer, 2003. A number of these students are already in contact with federal agencies to identify opportunities for summer, 2004.

Chinese Flagship Center: Brigham Young University (BYU)

The Chinese Flagship program at BYU is targeted to upper-intermediate and advanced speakers of Mandarin Chinese and seeks to move these students to a superior level of proficiency. The program not only addresses general issues of advanced level Chinese, but insures that learners will function professionally in

their field or discipline. BYU has implemented a curriculum that includes guided, directed study with faculty members, as well as access to a body of specialty language materials tailored to the goals of the learner. Upon completion of the first year of study at BYU, NFLI students will proceed to Nanjing University in China where they will undertake intensive language immersion study coupled with professional/internship experience.

BYU enrolled its first 8 students during the 2003-2004 academic year. Four of these students are funded directly by NSEP.

Korean Flagship Program: University of Hawaii

The Korean Flagship Program on the main research campus of the University of Hawaii at Manoa (UHM) offers students with advanced Korean language proficiency an opportunity to undertake a program of intensive, task-based language instruction, with specialized options in their chosen career fields. During their studies at the Manoa campus, students benefit greatly from the substantial Korean heritage population and cultural activities in Honolulu. A full academic year at UHM is followed by a year of intensive immersion at Korean University in Seoul, with university courses and/or industrialized professional internships, structured Korean living arrangements, and Korean peer tutors. The UH Korean Flagship program has enrolled 16 students for the 2003-2004 academic year, with four students receiving full support through NSEP.

Korean Flagship Program: University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)

The UCLA Korean Flagship program offers advanced proficient Korean students an opportunity to study intensive Korean at an institution that both leads the nation in Korean enrollments and that is located in proximity to the largest Korean community in the United States. The UCLA program uses a content-based approach to focus on academic/professional level reading, listening, and speaking skills. Courses cover topics on Korean civilization and cultures, such as business, health, law, and the arts. The program includes individual mentoring and internships. Students who attend the UCLA program will proceed to the NFLI immersion program being developed and implemented by the University of Hawaii in collaboration with UCLA. UCLA will enroll its first flagship students in fall 2004.

National Flagship Initiative for Russian (American Councils)

Through NFLI, the American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS has initiated an intensive language program at St. Petersburg University in Russia for students already at a more advanced level of proficiency. Led by one of our nation's leading international education organizations, the Russian Flagship program will commence in 2004-2005 with an innovative overseas immersion program that builds on years of experience in delivering high quality intensive Russian language instruction. NSEP will begin working to establish U.S.-based infrastructure in Russian to insure a continuing flow of qualified candidates for the overseas component. NSEP support is available to qualified students for the 2004-2005 year.

Federal Placement of NFLI Graduates

NSEP is actively working with federal agencies to insure that all NSEP funded NFLI graduates find rewarding positions within the national security community. Each NFLI Fellow was selected based on their commitment to federal service. Federal agencies have an important opportunity to identify and hire highly competent professionals certified at the superior (level 3) in languages critical to national security. During 2004, NSEP representatives will be working directly with federal agencies and each NFLI Fellow to identify needs and provide credentials on each individual. NSEP fully expects to achieve a 100% federal placement goal for NFLI fellows.

Future Plans

NSEP hopes to expand dramatically the NFLI program to efforts in additional languages, including Hindi, Japanese, Persian/Farsi, and Turkish as well as to increased demand for additional capacity in Arabic, Chinese, Korean and Russian. NSEP, thus far, has supported the NFLI only through a transformation of its "institutional grants" program. **Substantial additional funding is required if NFLI is to be sustained and expanded to: (1) support and expand curriculum efforts at current NFLI programs; (2) provide expanded funding for NSEP/NFLI Fellows to attend flagship programs; (3) increase the number of programs and critical languages covered by NFLI.**

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National Security Education Program

The United States today faces a critical shortage of linguistically competent professionals across federal agencies and departments responsible for national security. The inability of intelligence officers, military personnel, disease specialists, law enforcement officers, and other federal employees to understand information from foreign sources and to interact with foreign nationals in virtually every country on the globe presents a threat to their mission and to the well-being of the nation....The Foreign Service reports that only 60% of its billets requiring language are at present filled, with waivers applied to another 35%. The US Coast Guard recently completed an audit of its language requirements for all mission types...finding that fewer than 50% were met. [from *Language and National Security, The Federal Role in Building Language Capacity in the U.S.*, National Foreign Language Center, 2002].