



Capstone Amidst COVID: Flagship Students Tackle Virtual Language Immersion with Success

The global pandemic forced the Language Flagship Overseas Capstone programs to shift to online learning for part or all of the Capstone experience over the last two years. Online learning caused adjustment for all parties, but Flagship students and their overseas instructors and partners have nevertheless continued to meet the goal of professional language proficiency. The Language Flagship Capstone Program is a nine-to-twelve-month rigorous overseas study program which consists of intensive language instruction, direct enrollment opportunities, homestay opportunities, and a professional internship in the target language. The Capstone program maintained overseas instruction and engagement with partners, including virtual internships, in a variety of ways.

Due to the Capstone's intensive and immersive nature, it has never been replicated online prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the transition to online learning, students and staff rose to the occasion to make the most out of the experience. Elias Keif, a Chinese Flagship student from the University of North Georgia states, "before the virtual Capstone started, I was extremely anxious as to how the program would pan out... however after the program started, although that anxious feeling didn't disappear, it was accompanied by a budding sense of excitement. Despite the challenges posed by online learning, I am very satisfied with the content of the courses and the incredible effort of the instructors."

Samara Schuman, a Chinese Flagship student from the University of Oregon says she chose to focus on "progress over perfection." She believes this experience taught her adaptability and resiliency where she states, "I think that if a future employer sees how I used this time to push myself and expand my knowledge, it will demonstrate my work ethic."



University of Oregon Chinese Flagship Student
Samara Schuman

SAMARA SCHUMAN

While online overseas study experiences will never replace in-person immersive experiences, many students have rose to the occasion in the face of these unique challenges. Zachary Boyce, a Chinese Flagship student from Brigham Young



Brigham Young University Chinese Flagship Student
Zachary Boyce

ZACHARY BOYCE

Multiple Technology-Driven Events Hosted by Tech Center

The Language Flagship Technology Innovation Center (Tech Center) at the University of Hawaii, Mānoa serves as an innovative hub for integrating existing technologies and piloting creative new technology development efforts into The Language Flagship program. The Tech Center hosted multiple technology-driven events in the past year, serving The Language Flagship community and the broader language community.

The Tech Center hosted the 4th and 5th annual language education technology competition event, LaunchPad. Startup companies presented virtually to language educators and pushed the conversation forward on the latest language education technology available. The 2021 LaunchPad winner was Fabulinga with ImmerseMe as the People's Choice Award. This year's LaunchPad winner is Lirica with Charlala as the People's Choice Award.

Ainsley Gordon, a Chinese Flagship student from the University of Mississippi and Outreach Chair for the Tech Center's Student Executive Committee was a judge for the 2021 LaunchPad. "I was honored to be able to offer my insight to both the developers of the apps that I judged and the other LaunchPad judges. I'm excited to watch my favorite apps from the event grow in the future" said Ainsley. The Tech Center will be offering Flagship faculty the opportunity to test these technologies through the new Blended Learning Pilots.

In September 2021 and April 2022, the Tech Center hosted the Language Flagship Hackathon event for Flagship students. The Hackathon is a two-day event optimized for discovery and creativity where Flagship students can propose technology-based solutions ('hacks') that help drive innovation in language learning. This year's Hackathon had Flagship students propose innovative mobile solutions to enhance the Flagship experience.

The Tech Center hosted events for faculty participation too. The Project-Based Language Learning (PBLL) Summit was the culmination of

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University conducted his virtual internship with a neuroscientist at National Yang-Ming Chiao-Tung University in Taipei, Taiwan where he analyzed fMRI data from cognitive responses to short humor video clips in order to understand the neural basis of humor and the role of language in cultural differences to humor. Zachary was able to develop new research techniques and develop technical language acquisition from experts in the field by absorbing current vocabulary and conventions of neuroscience in Chinese.

While some students completed their entire Capstone program virtually, in recent years there have been a few students that have had the opportunity to complete half of their program online and half in person. Natalia San Antonio of Bryn Mawr College said "While the curriculum is pretty much the same, I feel a big difference between my experience virtually and overseas. While I enjoyed the program at home, it was very difficult to fully immerse myself in Russian because I was not in a place that allowed me to speak Russian 24/7. Now that I am in Bishkek and living with a host family, I can sense myself improving much more rapidly than last semester just by interacting with people in Russian. As well, everything feels much more rewarding now that we are able to study abroad, and all be together in one place."



NATALIA SAN ANTONIO

Bryn Mawr College Russian Flagship Student
Natalia San Antonio

Griffin McGuire, a Russian Flagship student from UNC Chapel Hill discussed his daily life for the first few months of his program in Bishkek after completing the virtual half of the program and starting his in-person study. Griffin began his day eating breakfast with his host family and taking a taxi to get to class. He normally had four to five classes a day and would spend time after class with other students to study. In the evening he would go out and visit cafes or spend time with his host family.

In addition to developing advanced proficiency, cross-cultural experiences enable students to develop key strengths necessary for entry into a global workforce. Understanding and adapting to new cultures, learning a new language, and thriving in novel circumstances is the backbone of overseas study. While traveling overseas was not possible for most of the pandemic, re-committing to a virtual Capstone experience has still prepared students to acquire competitive skills and competencies in preparation for their future careers.

Although most Language Flagship students agree that the program is intensive, they also agree that it is an invaluable experience worth repeating. Kamilah Dreux, a Korean Flagship student from the University of Hawaii, Mānoa said "even though, I am always ready to go to Korea at anytime when this is over, I value the fact that even though I wasn't there this year my teachers and my study habits made me really feel like I was...the main thing I took away from this experience is that I would never want to give up learning Korean. I've learned that about myself through this experience and I've also learned that I am willing to put in the work if I need to."

The Capstone Year presents a unique challenge for every student, and while the COVID-19 pandemic was an unexpected part of the experience, the hard road leads to meaningful destinations.



KAMILAH DREUX

University of Hawaii Korean Flagship Student
Kamilah Dreux

Word from Flagship

Dr. Sam Eisen
Director
The Language Flagship



SAM EISEN

After lengthy delays, our Language Flagship students will be able to resume overseas language immersion this summer in all the eligible Flagship languages: Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Portuguese and Russian, and indications are positive for our Regional Flagship Language Initiatives in the fall semester in Advanced French (Senegal), Hindi, Indonesian, Swahili, Turkish and Urdu. The numbers of qualifying Chinese and Russian Flagship Overseas Capstone students for the fall semester are at an all-time high, as the need for professional skills in Chinese and Russian has never been greater.

The dedication and resilience of the Flagship students who have persisted and succeeded in intensive online language immersion deserves recognition. This cohort, along with the devoted overseas instructors and partners who continued to work with our programs in the online environment, has shown that it is possible to achieve impressive language gains in virtual immersion, to participate in meaningful virtual internships, and to qualify for Flagship certification at the end. However, as Dr. Dan Davidson documents in this issue, the virtual environment is not fully capable of transmitting crucial cultural and sociolinguistic elements that are important for full integration into an overseas environment. Our Flagship experience has shown both how much it is possible to achieve through online learning, and how much is missed by not having the in-person overseas experience.

Our task now is to restore our full capacity in overseas language immersion and reaffirm and strengthen our productive partnerships with overseas educators and institutions. At the same time, we should examine our recent experiences with virtual learning to find ways to expand the possibilities for language and cultural engagement throughout the Flagship curriculum, and to use the online resources available in creative ways to maximize language learning both in the US and overseas. Our appreciation also goes to the University of Hawaii, Mānoa Language Flagship Technology Innovation Center for both providing advice and training on online teaching and learning, and also for working with our students to unleash their creativity for fresh and practical approaches to language learning and connections across our programs.

Tech Center... (from page 1)

a joint Flagship and Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) teacher training experience in applying PBLT concepts to project designs. The languages represented in the multi-part learning experience were Arabic, Chinese, Portuguese, Korean, Russian, and Spanish.

In coordination with Portuguese Language Flagship faculty from the University of Georgia, Ana Paula de Araujo Lopez and Carolina Vianini of the Overseas Portuguese Flagship program designed a project that challenged learners of Portuguese in the US and learners of English in Brazil to collaborate on a resource for young adults in Brazil and the US to build literacy skills and increase awareness of important social movement figures, preparing readers for global citizenship. At the PBLT Summit, Ms. Lopez presented *The ABCs of Social Justice*, a bilingual e-book created by Portuguese Flagship students and Brazilian students with the goal of fostering literacy and critical thinking skills to engage young adults who speak English and/or Portuguese. This was one of many innovative projects stemming from the PBLT teacher training experience.

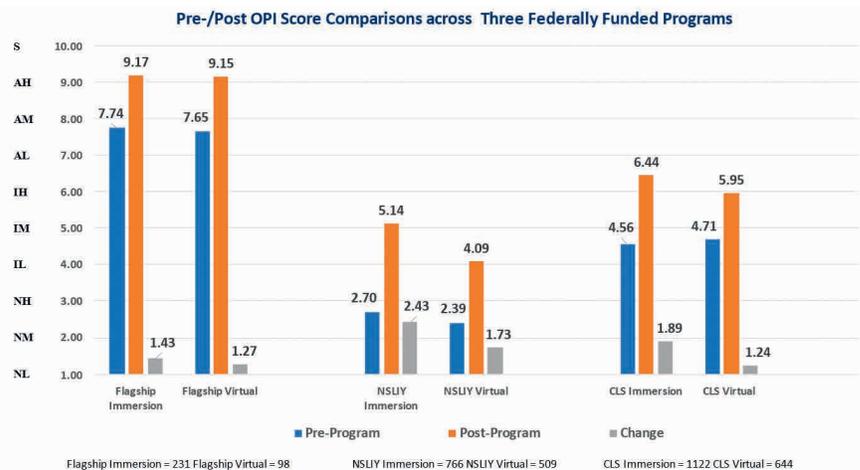
Op-ed: Capstone Learning Outcomes in the Virtual and Overseas Contexts

Dr. Dan E. Davidson, Founding President of American Councils for International Education

To better understand the outcomes of recent virtual overseas language programming, American Councils analyzed the differential effects of in-person versus virtual training on the measured proficiency outcomes (across skills) of participants in the Arabic, Chinese and Russian Capstone programs over the periods 2017-2019 (in person) and 2020-21 (virtual).

Given the relatively small size of the virtual cohort, parallel analyses were also conducted of data from two other federally sponsored overseas programs: NSLI-Y and CLS. NSLI-Y accepts early-stage learners of the critical languages, CLS accepts mainly intermediate-level learners, while Flagship Capstone accepts advanced-level learners. For the duration of the COVID pandemic all three programs shifted from in-person to virtual instruction, cooperating closely with their established overseas partner faculties in adapting core curricula, group instruction and tutorials to the virtual environment and organizing “virtual” homestays, internships and cultural programming for US participants.

Comparison of the speaking proficiency outcomes by language and training levels of in-person cohorts (N = 1767) and virtual cohorts (N = 471) revealed a relatively *consistent gap in mean gain levels across languages*, with participants in the virtual groups attaining on average one proficiency sub-level *lower* in speaking gains than the corresponding face-to-face students. Comparisons of reading and writing outcomes, however, showed smaller differences.



Russian Flagship Programs Begin Collaborative Recruitment and Outreach

In recent years as the number of institutions hosting Russian Flagship programs grew, so too did the need to more recruitment of new students. In 2020, representatives from all eight Russian Flagship Programs as well as American Councils and IIE collaborated to create a working group for collaborative recruitment and outreach, which is currently co-chaired by Meredith Doubleday and Sofia Ivanova of the UNC-Chapel Hill and University of Georgia Russian Flagship Programs.

“The overarching goals of this group were to create a strategic multi-year recruitment and outreach plan and to promote inclusion, diversity, equity, and access in recruitment, outreach, and program operation” says Ivanova. Other goals include positioning Russian as a trans-national language and promoting more of the Russian-speaking world as opposed to just Russian in Russia, increasing the visibility of underrepresented groups within outreach and recruitment content and materials, and supporting the development and education of ROTC unit commanders in their role as Flagship advocates.

“The group has collaborated on two large-scale events each year” Ivanova says, “a virtual open house for recruitment of prospective students in fall and a virtual alumni panel for retention of current program students in spring. Longer-term collaborative initiatives include small-group projects to create additional repositories of promotional and outreach materials and compile best practices information for use by any program.” The two Open House events the group has held have been virtual to facilitate national participation by both panelists and audience, with recordings of the events available on the Language Flagship website.

Meredith Doubleday, co-chair of the group and assistant director of the newest Russian Flagship Program has said that “the programming initiated and coordinated by this committee has greatly supported our own recruitment and retention efforts both at the secondary and post-secondary levels. The support of these colleagues has been invaluable as we launched our program at UNC amidst the COVID 19 pandemic.”

Capstone in Kazakhstan Leads to Desk Officer for Central Asia Position

Kyle Farrell originally wanted to study Slovak due to family roots but was drawn to take Russian classes from the Russian Flagship program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He completed the Russian Flagship Capstone program in Almaty, Kazakhstan along with a Boren Flagship Scholarship in 2014-2015. Farrell's Capstone internship experience at the news agency 365info.kz8 in Kazakhstan was featured in the Fall 2015 Discourse issue. Farrell is currently a Presidential Management Fellow at the U.S. Agency for International Development as a Desk Officer for Central Asia.

"My career path," Farrell said, "has been tied with the knowledge, insight and downright fascination with Central Asia that I accrued while abroad. But even more than that, the persistence that one develops to not just 'survive' but thrive for a year abroad in another country in another language transfers over into every other occupation one undertakes."

After graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, he worked as a Legal Secretary at a law firm before pursuing a Master's of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. Prior to his current position at USAID, Farrell held positions at the World Bank, U.S.-Russia Business Council, U.S. Development Finance Corporation as well as a three-month posting in Kyiv, Ukraine with the Foreign Agricultural Service. Farrell reflects, "No single event in my life has yet to be as professionally consequential as my decision to study abroad in Kazakhstan."



Russian Flagship alumni Kyle Farrell

Flagship Centers

Arabic	Portuguese
Brigham Young University	University of Georgia
Indiana University, Bloomington	University of Texas, Austin
University of Arizona	Federal University of São João del-Rei, Brazil
University of Maryland, College Park	Russian
University of Mississippi	Bryn Mawr College
University of Texas, Austin	University of Georgia
Arab-American Language Institute in Morocco	Portland State University
Moulay Ismail University, Morocco	University of California, Los Angeles
Chinese	Indiana University
Arizona State University	University of North Carolina
Brigham Young University	University of Wisconsin, Madison
Hunter College	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Indiana University, Bloomington	Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakhstan
San Francisco State University	Turkish Flagship Language Initiative
University of Hawai'i, Mānoa	University of Wisconsin, Madison
University of Minnesota	Azerbaijan University of Languages, Azerbaijan
University of Mississippi	African Flagship Languages Initiative
University of North Georgia	University of Florida
University of Oregon	The West African Research Center, Senegal
University of Rhode Island	MS-Training Center for Development Cooperation, Tanzania
University of Washington	Indonesian Flagship Language Initiative
Western Kentucky University	University of Wisconsin, Madison
Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center	State University of Malang, East Java, Indonesia
National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University, Taiwan	South Asian Flagship Languages Initiative
Korean	University of Wisconsin, Madison
University of Hawai'i, Mānoa	American Institute of Indian Studies, Jaipur and Lucknow, India
Korea University, South Korea	
Persian	
University of Maryland, College Park	

The Flagship Mission

The Language Flagship leads the nation in designing, supporting, and implementing a new paradigm for advanced language education. Through an innovative partnership among the federal government, education, and business, The Language Flagship graduates students who will take their place among the next generation of global professionals, commanding a superior level of proficiency in one of many languages critical to U.S. competitiveness and security.

What We Do

Flagship Centers offer students intensive language instruction to enhance their academic degrees, graduating students with professional-level language proficiency. Programs include periods of rigorous language and cultural immersion at Overseas Flagship Centers. The Language Flagship also funds a select number of pilot K-12 programs designed to provide an articulated path of language instruction for students from elementary school through college.

Flagship graduates leverage their superior language and cultural skills in various careers, offering an intercultural perspective to employers in the federal and state governments, global businesses, and nongovernmental organizations.

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