



## THE LANGUAGE FLAGSHIP

Creating Global Professionals

# Discourse

NEWSLETTER OF THE LANGUAGE FLAGSHIP

SPRING 2016

## New Doors Open for Students to Learn African and South Asian Languages

**R**yan Marr says the best parts of his experience in Tanzania have been “the moments I realized ‘I am thinking in Swahili!’” and no longer continuously translating from English. Many students, including Marr, are achieving remarkable gains in proficiency and cultural understanding through the Regional Flagship Languages Initiative, which supports American students interested in learning languages spoken in Africa (Akan/Twi, French, Portuguese, Swahili, and Wolof) and South Asia (Hindi and Urdu).

Now fully integrated under The Language Flagship, the Regional Flagship Languages Initiative grew out of a 5-year pilot program launched by the U.S. Congress in 2010. All accepted students receive a David L. Boren Award, which funds their overseas study and requires a minimum 1-year commitment to working for the U.S. government. Participants in the African Flagship Languages Initiative (AFLI) or the South Asian Flagship Languages Initiative (SAFLI) complete 8 weeks of domestic language immersion during the summer before going overseas. The National Security Education Program sponsors the corresponding dedicated overseas programs in India, Mozambique, Senegal, and Tanzania.

A current AFLI student who studied global security and intelligence studies at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona, Marr says his mentor “offered his professional insight regarding the significance ... the AFLI program would have to my career and supported my reasoning for choosing Swahili.” AFLI students complete the domestic language immersion program at the University of Florida (UF). They quickly develop language skills through daily classroom instruction and frequent meetings with language partners who are native speakers from the community. Co-directors Akintunde Akinyemi, Charles Bwenge, and James Essegbey collaborate with UF faculty, African international students, and other native speakers to create ample opportunity for AFLI students to practice their target languages. AFLI student Marjorie Wass says that during the



Ryan Marr (right) visits with a young patient during his internship at Nkoaranga Lutheran Hospital in Tanzania.

domestic summer program, she “learned about not only French, Wolof, and Senegalese culture” before departing for Senegal “but also a variety of African cultures thanks to weekly ‘Africa Eats’ celebrations, where one class would prepare food from the country they were studying and give a performance.” UF’s co-directors explain that integrating culture with language learning “helps students to start making sense of what they will be experiencing when they go abroad.” They also train language partners and host families “to highlight important cultural aspects that students most likely [will] encounter when they go abroad.”

While overseas, AFLI and SAFLI students enroll at a local university for language and content courses, meet with language partners, and live with a host family. Ann Unsworth, an AFLI student who studied Portuguese in Mozambique, remarks, “My homestay experience was wonderful. I lived with a host mom, twin older sisters, and one little sister. Having grown up with all brothers, this was

Continued on page 2 >

## Domestic Immersion Model Proves Effective for Persian Capstone

**O**verseas study is a time-tested way for students to gain language proficiency and cultural understanding. Does an alternative model exist when an overseas location presents security concerns for U.S. students? The Persian Flagship Capstone at the University of Maryland (UMD), College Park, is proving that a 1-year domestic isolation-immersion (commonly called iso-immersion) program effectively simulates studying overseas for its students.

Persian—a language spoken in Iran, Afghanistan, and parts of Central Asia—attracts students with many majors to the Persian Flagship Program at UMD—College Park. During the 2014–2015 academic year, Flagship Director Nahal Akbari had to balance the students’ desire to complete the Flagship Overseas Capstone and the safety and security concerns associated with studying overseas. As a bold experiment, university staff and faculty created the domestic iso-immersion program to simulate the experience of studying overseas by surrounding the capstone students with Persian language and culture in unique ways. Every morning, students study Persian language and contemporary Iranian culture. In the afternoons, they work on original research projects (supported by local interviews and literature reviews in Persian), intern at an e-learning institute for Iran’s civil society, or attend animation workshops to bring classic Persian stories to life through narration and animation. In the



Award-winning Iranian children’s book illustrator Rashin Kheiriyeh (center front) teaches students animation skills in Persian.

Continued on page 3 >

New Doors Open ... (from page 1)



ANN UNSWORTH

Ann Unsworth (right) enjoys a hug from her host mom at the AFLI End of Program Celebration in Mozambique.

quite the adjustment, but I loved it! They took me in as one of their own and were extremely helpful in terms of my language learning. We developed daily routines of watching *novelas* and playing games, always interacting." By facilitating authentic interactions and experiences, the program structure enables students to truly become part of their communities.

The AFLI program in Tanzania features a spring-semester internship in which students apply their language skills in a Swahili-speaking workplace; AFLI students in other countries may find and secure their own internship opportunities, conduct research, or take additional language courses. To date, AFLI students have interned at health care and community training facilities, centers for women and children, and law firms. Marr says that while he was interning at Nkoaranga Lutheran Hospital, a patient returning from surgery said to him, "*Asante sana kaka, nashukuru kwa vitu vyote*" ("Thank you very much brother, I appreciate everything"). Recalling that moment, Marr says, "the ability to have such a profound and productive impact on someone in such desperate need has left an indelible mark upon my person." Students who participate in the Regional Flagship Languages Initiative quickly achieve advanced linguistic proficiency and a deep cultural understanding, as exemplified in experiences like Marr's.

In 2015, the University of Wisconsin (UW), Madison, was awarded a grant to host the domestic

language immersion program for South Asian languages. Academic Director Lalita du Perron observes that students are increasingly interested in studying Hindi and Urdu because of "India's recent launch onto the world stage, making it a force to be reckoned with." As UW–Madison prepares for its first cohort of SAFLI students, du Perron characterizes the campus as having a "vibrant learner community" with a "language buzz" during the summer. As one of the first U.S. universities to start an overseas study program in India, UW–Madison is prepared to send each SAFLI student to Jaipur Hindi Center or Lucknow Urdu Center with a solid linguistic foundation and strong self-confidence in his or her language abilities.

AFLI and SAFLI students emerge from their respective programs as competitive candidates for careers in federal government. As she prepares to graduate from Villanova University, Unsworth seeks opportunities to leverage her language skills while fulfilling her federal service requirement. Wass is completing a master's degree at George Washington University and "aiming to find a position either with the [U.S.] Foreign Service or [the U.S. Agency for International Development], hopefully starting at a post in West Africa. I love using my French every day, and many West African countries would afford me this opportunity." Marr reflects, "I never could have imagined the impact this experience would have on me, and today I am a far different individual than when I first began my application those many months ago. I have found new purpose, and the people I have encountered, shared meals with, and loved have provided me with a focus that will prove the keystone to the rest of my career and life, no matter the direction."



MARJORIE WASS

Marjorie Wass (center) shares a fun moment with her host sisters in Senegal.

## Word from Flagship

Sam Eisen  
Director  
The Language Flagship



INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

The population of India exceeds 1.2 billion, and projections show it soon will surpass China's. More than 400 million Indian citizens speak Hindi as their first language, and an additional 50 million speak Urdu. Urdu also is the official language of neighboring Pakistan, whose population exceeds 180 million. According to some estimates, English—the official and business language of India—is spoken by only 10% of the Indian population. So how is the United States preparing the next generation of leaders to effectively communicate with these rapidly growing Hindi- and Urdu-speaking populations?

According to results of the 2013 language enrollments survey by the Modern Language Association (MLA), about 60 U.S. institutions of higher education offer Hindi-language curriculum, and the combined number of Hindi and Urdu enrollments in the United States decreased 14.4% to a total of 2,682 from 2009 to 2013. The LCTL [less-commonly-taught languages] database of the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota lists about 30 institutions that offer Hindi study at or beyond the third-year level, which indicates that fewer than 1% of U.S. institutions of higher education offer Hindi study to advanced levels.

The South Asian Flagship Languages Initiative (SAFLI) was launched this year as part of the Regional Flagship Languages Initiative. The goal of SAFLI is to promote intensive Hindi and Urdu study and encourage U.S. undergraduate and graduate students to engage in government service. Accepted students receive a David L. Boren Award for intensive summer language study at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Overseas immersion takes place in Jaipur (Hindi) or Lucknow (Urdu), India, during the fall semester, and students may continue independent study in India during the spring semester. Despite the modest initial scope of the initiative (13 awards), the number of 2016 SAFLI applications far surpassed the number of available awards. We envision SAFLI graduates as policy leaders across many fields who are keenly aware of present and future U.S. needs to engage with South Asia.

## Domestic Immersion ... (from page 1)

Persian House—the on-campus epicenter of the domestic iso-immersion experience—students have opportunities (both scheduled and impromptu) to hold lively conversations in Persian with the house mentor, language partners, and each other. When not studying, students can watch Persian-language news and movies that stream on the house television and prepare recipes from Persian cookbooks.

Jay Ritch, one of the four 2015–2016 Persian Flagship Capstone students, explains that full schedules make the domestic Persian iso-immersion program effective. Strategic program planning helps students achieve professional proficiency in Persian while also mastering informal speech—for example, discussing current events, a film, or how to adjust a recipe to feed more people. Students experience Iranian workplace culture and customs through their internships and interactions with local native speakers.

Resources and experts in the vibrant Persian-speaking community around Washington, D.C., greatly contribute to the UMD–College Park iso-immersion program, says Akbari. They offer capstone students Ida Yousofi and Bahareh Ghonsul Asia, both interested in government and politics, ample opportunity to hold in-depth political discussions. After meeting local Iranian business owners, Ashley Kiani shared the U.S.–Iran business perspective with her international business course classmates. Ritch has explored complex questions about international relations and migration by attending panel discussions and lecture events at D.C. research institutes and think tanks.

At the end of the capstone year, each student presents a research project, in Persian, to Flagship faculty, staff, and students. Results of this bold experiment demonstrate that students who complete the domestic capstone effectively obtain the same results as students who study overseas: achieve professional proficiency and in-depth cultural understanding, conduct and present original research, and complete an internship—all in the target language.



In the Persian House at UMD–College Park, students share Persian snacks they have prepared.

## Op-ed: Georgia Students Get Career-Ready with World Languages

Michaela Claus-Nix, Program Specialist for World Languages and Workforce Initiatives,  
Georgia Department of Education



MICHAELA CLAUS-NIX

According to Asia Society's *Mapping the Nation* (an online interactive map), one in five jobs in the United States is tied to international trade. International businesses in U.S. communities employ approximately 4 million Americans, and 40 million U.S. residents were born in other countries. Language proficiency, diverse cultural perspectives, and intercultural competence are in high demand in both public and private sectors.

Intercultural competence is an essential "soft" skill that prepares students to navigate interactions within a culturally diverse workforce, at home or abroad. It begins with learning a world language, which may be very different from what we encountered as students; communicative skills and proficiency as well as cultural knowledge are priorities in the modern classroom. Creating proficient, confident speakers of other languages is a long-term commitment. Since the Great Recession (December 2007 to June 2009), U.S. schools have been rebuilding the infrastructure of articulated K–12 world language programs with dual-language immersion programs, demonstrating what is possible in language and intercultural education. The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) is a proud partner of The Language Flagship and a member of the Flagship Language Acquisition Network. The Portuguese Flagship Program at the University of Georgia, the ROTC Chinese Flagship Program at the University of North Georgia, and Chinese and Portuguese K–12 language programs align Georgia with the national initiative.

GaDOE encourages language study as a way to prepare students for future careers by promoting dual-language immersion programs; awarding the International Skills Diploma Seal to graduating high school seniors who have excelled in international education; proposing a rigorous Seal of Biliteracy as a signal of bilingualism and biliteracy to higher education institutions and potential employers; and developing the Georgia Skills Roadshow Initiative, an informational campaign that promotes career readiness skills and international opportunities in local schools and communities. GaDOE also encourages schools to engage in partnerships with local (international) businesses and communities abroad. Career, technical, and agricultural education (CTAE) partners have proposed promising collaborative pilot programs, such as creating academies to teach career pathways in conjunction with world languages throughout high school, developing CTAE-model thematic units for world languages, and expanding courses in workplace Spanish across the state. Such collaboration between GaDOE and its CTAE partners is intended to prepare students with both the technical skills and the linguistic and cultural knowledge they will need to be competitive in a global workforce.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Learn more about these programs on the GaDOE website, <http://www.gadoe.org> (Offices & Divisions tab, Curriculum and Instruction, World Languages & Global Initiatives).

## Kazakhstan Offers New Perspective to Russian Capstone Students

Students are discovering the advantages of studying in Almaty, Kazakhstan, since the Russian Flagship Overseas Capstone program moved to Al-Farabi Kazakh National University in 2014. They not only continue Russian studies overseas but also discover a diverse country with the strongest economy in Central Asia. "When I heard that I would be studying in Kazakhstan, I was very excited to see a new country and meet a new culture," says Huell White from the Russian Flagship Program at Portland State University. Before the capstone year, Russian Flagship students complete an online Kazakh language course concurrently with intensive Russian language and culture courses. Developed by the Russian Flagship Program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), in cooperation with the Domestic and Overseas Russian Flagship Centers, this adjunct instruction prepares students to enroll at the host institution, interact with host families, and intern at local businesses. Yelena Muratova interned at a company that produces business and cultural content for national television channels in Russian and Kazakh. She says she gained "some very valuable . . . insight into how the television industry works in Kazakhstan" compared with her experiences in U.S. journalism and studying the sociology of mass media at UCLA. Students have developed new perspectives on the language and region. UCLA's Braunny Ramirez says, "I came back with a further appreciation for Kazakhstan and Central Asia. It is such a unique experience to study Russian in a country other than Russia. I think many [people] tend to forget that there are so many native Russian speakers outside of Russia."

## Russian Flagship Graduate Hits the Ground Running

Shortly after the Russian Flagship Program was established at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Meagan Dunham jumped at the opportunity to take her Russian skills to the next level. Dunham, who double-majored in international studies and Russian language and literature, recalls, "After 3 years of taking classes from the very well designed Flagship curriculum and participating in tutoring and other opportunities outside of the classroom, I felt ready to spend an intensive year abroad" from both linguistic and cultural perspectives. Supported by a 2013–2014 Boren Scholarship, she completed her Flagship Overseas Capstone at Saint Petersburg State University in Russia. Dunham enrolled in a political sociology course with local students. "I found myself really struggling to keep up in the first few weeks with the rapid-fire debates among my Russian peers," she says, "but I was eventually able to not only understand everything they were saying but also to join in from time to time." Now working at the National Democratic Institute in Washington, D.C., Dunham helps design and support the implementation of projects that build and strengthen civil society in Russia and Belarus. Her responsibilities include financial management, donor relations, and preparing reports and briefs to senior leadership on current events and security issues in Russia and Belarus. Dunham looks forward to exploring future employment in government positions that will capitalize on her Russian skills. "I do know for certain," she explains, "that a lot of paths are open to me ... thanks to the Flagship program."



Russian Flagship graduate  
Meagan Dunham

MEAGAN DUNHAM

### Flagship Centers

#### Arabic

Indiana University, Bloomington  
University of Arizona  
University of Maryland,  
College Park  
University of Oklahoma  
University of Texas, Austin  
*Arab–American Language  
Institute in Morocco*<sup>1</sup>  
*Moulay Ismail University,  
Morocco*<sup>1</sup>

#### Chinese

Arizona State University  
Brigham Young University  
Hunter College  
Indiana University, Bloomington  
San Francisco State University  
University of Hawai'i, Mānoa  
University of Minnesota  
University of Mississippi  
University of North Georgia<sup>2</sup>  
University of Oregon  
University of Rhode Island  
Western Kentucky University  
*Nanjing University, China*<sup>3</sup>  
*Beijing Union University, China*<sup>1</sup>

#### Hindi Urdu

University of Texas, Austin  
*Jaipur Hindi Center, India*  
*Lucknow Urdu Center, India*

#### Korean

University of Hawai'i, Mānoa  
*Korea University, South Korea*

#### Persian

University of Maryland,  
College Park

#### Portuguese

University of Georgia, Athens  
*Federal University of São João  
del-Rei, Brazil*

#### Russian

Bryn Mawr College  
Portland State University  
University of California,  
Los Angeles  
University of Wisconsin, Madison  
*Al-Farabi Kazakh National  
University, Kazakhstan*<sup>1</sup>

#### Swahili

Indiana University, Bloomington  
*MS Training Centre for  
Development Cooperation,  
Tanzania*<sup>1</sup>

#### Turkish

Indiana University, Bloomington  
*Ankara University, Turkey*<sup>1</sup>

### 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 Do 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.



## THE LANGUAGE FLAGSHIP

*Creating Global Professionals*

### Contact Us

The Language Flagship  
P.O. Box 20010  
1101 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 1210  
Arlington, VA 22209

Tel.: 571-256-0711

Fax: 703-692-2615

E-mail: [info@thelanguageflagship.org](mailto:info@thelanguageflagship.org)

Web: [www.thelanguageflagship.org](http://www.thelanguageflagship.org)

To receive copies of *Discourse* as they are published, simply email your name and mailing address to [info@thelanguageflagship.org](mailto:info@thelanguageflagship.org) with "Add me to the Discourse mailing list" in the subject line.