



## Businesses Need Employees with Foreign Language Skills

Over the past 3 years, The Language Flagship has led a systematic effort to determine the skills employers need in an increasingly global marketplace. Results indicate that workers who have both subject area expertise and foreign language skills are valuable in developing and maintaining new customers and clients, negotiating solid agreements, and helping companies hold on to and communicate effectively with overseas employees.

These findings are summarized in the new Flagship report, *What Business Wants: Language Needs in the 21st Century*. The report challenges the notion that businesses don't need employees with foreign language skills and confirms that workers with such skills can be critically important for both international business interests and an increasingly diverse domestic market.

The *What Business Wants* report was culled from notes of the 2006–2007 U.S. Language Summits held in Ohio, Oregon, and Texas and the 2008 Metro Language Series sessions held in major U.S. cities. The Metro Language



Michigan State University Arabic Flagship students meet with visiting U.S. Department of State officials to exchange information in Arabic and explore future job opportunities.

Series brought together representatives from a broad cross-section of the American business community to participate in discussions focused on identifying and articulating the specific value and role of bilingual skills and cultural knowledge to achieve business success. Both efforts engaged more than 100 leaders from a broad spectrum of industry sectors (including hotel and travel; banks and law firms; engineering, high technology, and industrial development; food services and health care; transportation; and water and waste management) as well as several economic development agencies.

Leaders quoted in the *What Business Wants* report cite missed business opportunities, internal miscommunications, and compromised negotiations as examples of the problems that can occur when companies lack sufficient in-house language expertise to deal effectively with business needs, abroad and domestically. Most session participants agreed that to compete in today's global marketplace, American businesses need employees who have advanced foreign language skills and in-depth cultural knowledge of the international markets in which they operate.

Business leaders interviewed for this article agree. "Just having English isn't enough," says Arthur Rothkopf, senior vice president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and responsible for its education and workforce initiative. "We

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## Assessing Flagship Effectiveness

The Language Flagship was established with the goal of producing graduates who possess the highest level of proficiency in languages critical to U.S. national security and competitiveness. A central aspect of this initiative is the idea that language programs must demonstrate concrete evidence of achievement, by both individual participants and the program as a whole.

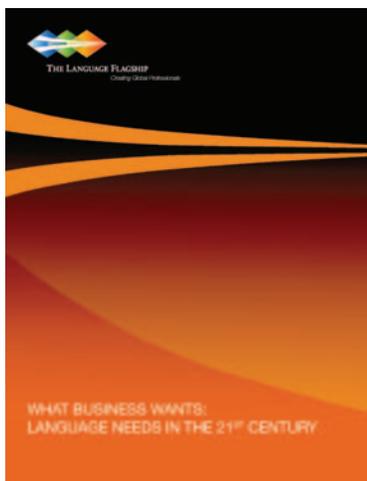
Historically, most university language curricula have relied primarily on achievement tests to measure student success. The problem is that the results of such tests are not meaningful outside a narrow context. The Language Flagship is committed to moving beyond simplistic claims of achievement toward assessment tools that give clear, unambiguous evidence of language proficiency and ability.

Citizens of other countries commonly acclimate quickly to U.S. business culture, but Americans abroad rarely do likewise. The Language Flagship aims to produce global professionals—individuals who can perform their chosen jobs in their target languages. An engineer graduated from a Chinese Flagship program can work successfully in an engineering firm in China. An Arabic Flagship alumnus with a degree in biology is ready to enter a research lab in Egypt.

To enable students to reach this level, Flagship training includes advanced-language work in a student's discipline or major, advanced cultural study, direct enrollment in an overseas university, and a targeted in-country internship. The Language Flagship has implemented and continues to develop tools for assessing whether programs are successful in creating students who meet program standards and become global professionals.

The Language Flagship has many ways of gauging student achievement. Some tools were developed in Flagship programs; others already were used in specific language fields. They include standardized oral and written tests, computerized adaptive tests for reading and listening, surveys of internship providers, exit interviews, and language

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Read the summary and full report online at <http://www.thelanguageflagship.org/business/what-business-wants>.

## Businesses Need ... (from page 1)

ought to be doing more to make sure that our students and indeed our citizens have the ability to speak multiple languages." David Abney, chief operating officer of UPS, says, "Tapping into the tremendous export opportunities that exist for American companies will require a workforce that is geared to think and act with a global perspective. Technology is a powerful tool that can help businesses transcend language barriers but cannot replace the human element of speaking and understanding."

Only about 9 percent of Americans speak a language in addition to English, whereas 48 percent of Europeans speak two or more languages. Michael Byrnes, president of Middle Kingdom Advisors, sums up the situation succinctly: "Frankly, the United States is behind the eight ball." And while the Modern Language Association reported increased enrollment in foreign language classes from 2002 to 2006 in the United States, these levels are only about one-half what they were in the 1960s.

Many advocates of language education agree that to close the language proficiency gap, a cooperative effort that involves the leaders of business, government, and academia is needed. According to UPS's Abney, "Education and retraining must move up on the United States' priority list, with the public, academic, nonprofit, and business sectors all working together." Byrnes adds, "This needs to be a much more important part of the overall business dialogue. ... There needs to be more recognition that in the future, the United States is going to have much more [of a stake] in a global economy ... and that we need to be promoting students going abroad."

Although the consensus is growing that American students need study abroad, language proficiency, and greater cultural sensitivity, many supporters of language education believe that more discussion about the goals and objectives of foreign language education and a better understanding of its purpose also are needed. Paul Ruppert, founder and chief executive officer of Global Point View, Ltd., says, "What we should be focusing on is the production of engineers, lawyers, doctors [and so on] who also have foreign language skills." The Language Flagship initiative was created with exactly this concept in mind. Superior-level proficiency in a critical language increases Flagship graduates' value to employers, but their primary expertise lies in a professional area such as political science or business.



A former Brigham Young University Chinese Flagship student is interviewed by a Chinese TV reporter.

In many communities, parents and local leaders who understand the importance of early exposure to language learning are moving ahead with ambitious programs, despite budgetary restraints and the economic challenges the United States is facing. The Language Flagship has developed pilot K–12 programs designed to create seamless pipelines of language immersion from kindergarten through postsecondary education in Oregon, Michigan, and Ohio. Other K–12 programs also are adding foreign language instruction; the Montana public schools introduced Mandarin Chinese and the Chicago Public Schools received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to expand the Arabic language program, both in 2009. "Without an educated workforce capable of filling the jobs of the global economy, Chicago won't succeed in this century," says Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley. "We must remember that although we're in a recession now, it's our responsibility to position Chicago to reap the benefits of better times to come."

An effective, innovative partnership among federal government, education, and business, the Language Flagship offers American students the opportunity to achieve advanced language skills in less commonly taught languages and thus take an important step toward closing the language and culture communication gap. To move this agenda forward quickly, all of the business leaders interviewed for this article agreed on one thing: Cooperation and concerted effort will be needed on the part of all involved parties—schools, parents, government, and business. "What we're really talking about is how to create a community of action around the impetus of learning foreign languages," says Ruppert. "We need to replace apathy with advocacy."

## Word from Flagship

Michael Nugent  
Director  
The Language Flagship



CABLE RISDON

The need for the U.S. government to hire more global professionals with advanced language skills has been well documented since the National Security Education Program was founded in the early 1990s. Unfortunately, a similar demand in the U.S. business community has been largely ignored. National public policy to enhance language education has been thwarted by an unfounded myth that U.S. businesses don't need professionals proficient in critical languages and are satisfied with work-arounds developed to fill the cultural and linguistic gap.

For the first time, The Language Flagship has produced evidence of language requirements in the business community. Its ground-breaking report, *What Business Wants: Language Needs in the 21st Century*, is based on results from 2 years of in-depth focus groups held in cities as disparate as Salt Lake City, Utah; Columbus, Ohio; and New York City. Michael Byrnes—who enjoyed a successful career overseas working in decision-making positions in both the public and private sectors—underscores the power of this report. As he points out, nothing can replace a knowledge of language and culture when negotiating key business matters in other countries.

*What Business Wants* describes a real-world need for the Flagship's evidence-based approach to foreign language learning. Dana Bourgerie, director of the Chinese Flagship at Brigham Young University and chair of the Flagship assessment team, also emphasizes the importance of using evidence to demonstrate results. Working with Flagship colleagues in other languages, Bourgerie is undertaking ground-breaking research and development in the field of language assessment.

Along with the Flagship-supported Collaborative Innovation efforts highlighted in this issue, the Flagship community of innovators is helping to push the field of language learning and assessment forward in many ways. All of these efforts lead to better learning expectations and opportunities for promising undergraduate Flagship students. The end goal is that they become successful alumni like Daniel Hedglin.

## Assessing Flagship ... (from page 1)



DIANE HOFLAND

Liana Prischenko, a student in the Russian Language Flagship Partner Program at Portland State University, takes her final fall semester oral exam with Flagship teacher's assistant Marina Tsylyna. They are simulating an open house at a Russian university.

proficiency placement tests (before and after overseas study and work).

To be certified as Flagship graduates, students must achieve the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages "Superior" level (Interagency Language Roundtable [ILR] level 3/3+) in their chosen languages. This designation indicates that speakers can participate in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, professional, and abstract topics; are able to discuss special fields of competence and interest with ease, support opinions, and hypothesize; and show an awareness of discourse strategies.

Students also must successfully navigate direct enrollment in courses at major overseas universities, studying alongside native students. Finally, students must demonstrate mastery of relevant cultural norms and of the practices in their area of professional expertise.

According to Flagship assessment data, Flagship graduates are achieving the high levels of language proficiency required to meet program standards. What's more, they are reaching levels of language and cultural competency that are unprecedented in U.S. foreign language education and previously thought implausible for American students. In 2008 and 2009, 100 percent of Chinese Flagship graduates tested using the Foreign Service Institute Language Proficiency Test scored a level 3 or higher, and 25 percent scored a level 4 on the ILR scale. Such results prove that the Flagship approach is successful.



Dana Bourgerie is director of the Chinese Flagship Center and an associate professor of Chinese at Brigham Young University.

## Op-ed: U.S. Globalization Requires Language and Culture Expertise

Brigadier General (retired) Michael T. Byrnes  
President, Middle Kingdom Advisors



MICHAEL BYRNES

Globalization poses a threat to the economic well-being of our nation that is every bit as serious as the strategic tests of the Cold War. Unfortunately, the United States is not well prepared for a 21st-century world in which economic competitiveness, not military power, is central to security. For the United States to remain a strong player, American students need foreign language and culture education. The Language Flagship initiative brings together key stakeholders in government, academia, and business to develop creative solutions to address this global challenge.

I had the good fortune of living and working in China for 20 years: 12 years as a military attaché and 8 years as the in-country head of two U.S. companies. In both government and business, I gained an intimate appreciation for the fundamental value of speaking a foreign language and the cultural understanding that goes with it. It's one of the reasons why I recognize the value of The Language Flagship.

The U.S. diplomats and corporate leaders I observed who best understood what was happening in China were those who were fluent in Chinese and knew the history, traditions, and values of the country's people. However, most American corporate leaders working there did not speak the language or understand the cultural foundation on which the work environment is based. Chinese business relationships are based on trust. Not understanding the business environment cost many U.S. companies significant time, money, and market share. They learned that it was imperative to either hire employees with language skills or initiate intensive language training programs for their staffs.

Companies that desire to go global need employees who can move about the host country with ease. At a minimum, such employees need language proficiency and a fundamental understanding of the culture, but this kind of knowledge cannot be gained overnight. To improve the ability of the United States to compete in a global marketplace, all stakeholders must support language education programs that begin early in a student's life, continue through college and beyond, and are coupled with subject area expertise.

### Innovative Projects to Enhance Language Learning



The Language Flagship has empowered the Flagship academic community to design and develop the tools necessary to achieve its ambitious goals. Since 2007, the Diffusion of Innovation: Collaborative Innovation grant program has been funding collaborative projects that promote technology-enhanced language learning, develop field-wide consensus, and create high-quality assessment tools.

Each Collaborative Innovation project begins with an identified need in the Flagship population. Endeavors funded to date include Flagship Online Proficiency Tests, MyChina, Language for Health: Medicine in Hindu/Urdu, the Arabic Test Consensus Initiative, Content-Based Arabic for Heritage Learners, Arabic Without Walls for Advanced Learners, and the Russian Digital Reference Project. Flagship leaders continually work to fill instructional gaps and address challenges in foreign language teaching. Even though these visionary and innovative Collaborative Innovation projects primarily are intended to address Flagship needs, they also will benefit the broader foreign language educational community.

Collaborative Innovation grants enhance Flagship's ability to provide advanced foreign language education. When completed, funded projects will further support the Flagship mission by changing the expectations and better meeting the needs of language learners seeking to achieve professional proficiency. More information about the program and these projects is available on the Flagship website: [www.thelanguageflagship.org/diffusion-of-innovation/overview](http://www.thelanguageflagship.org/diffusion-of-innovation/overview).

## Flagship Alumni Are “Marketable on an International Level”

A rigorous curriculum, a devoted faculty, and ambitious expectations for student performance drew Daniel Hedglin to the Chinese Flagship Program at the University of Mississippi. Although Chinese didn't come easily, intensive study and practice sessions with friends and instructors helped Hedglin remain passionate about his studies. What's more, Hedglin's overseas Flagship experience was both varied and positively unforgettable. While enrolled in classes at the Overseas Chinese Flagship Center at Nanjing University, China, he performed in an adaptation of a traditional Chinese opera and mountain biked through the karsts of Guilin.

A 2009 graduate with a bachelor of arts degree in international relations, Hedglin now interns at the Shanghai Tenwen Law Firm, which is on the forefront of intellectual property rights law in China and East Asia. His primary focus is research, but he also is a key liaison between the law firm and its international clients. According to Hedglin, the knowledge he gained through the Flagship program allows him to effectively express complex opinions and abstract thoughts in Chinese while on the job.

To students considering a Flagship program, Hedglin says, “You will reach a high proficiency in Chinese, develop a deep understanding of Chinese culture, spend a significant portion of time in China, and gain valuable work experience within a Chinese company. This is a rare combination” — particularly for an undergraduate student to possess on graduation. He adds, “While studying Chinese alone doesn't prepare you for one particular job, it does take other skills you develop in college and make them marketable on an international level.”



Flagship graduate Daniel Hedglin

DANIEL HEDGLIN

### Flagship Centers and Partner Programs

#### African Languages

Howard University  
University of Wisconsin, Madison  
Ibadan University, Nigeria\*  
Zanzibar University, Tanzania\*

#### Arabic

Dearborn Public Schools K–12 Flagship Program  
Michigan State University  
University of Maryland, College Park  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Flagship Partner Program  
University of Oklahoma Flagship Partner Program  
University of Texas, Austin  
Alexandria University, Egypt\*  
Damascus University, Syria\*

#### Central Eurasian Turkic Languages

American Councils for International Education

#### Chinese

Arizona State University Flagship Partner Program  
Brigham Young University  
Indiana University Flagship Partner Program  
Ohio Public Schools K–12 Flagship Program  
Ohio State University  
Portland Public Schools K–12 Flagship Program  
San Francisco State University Flagship Partner Program  
University of Mississippi  
University of Oregon  
University of Rhode Island Flagship Partner Program  
Nanjing University, China\*  
Qingdao University, China\*

#### 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  
Tajik State National University, Tajikistan\*

#### Russian and Eurasian

American Councils for International Education  
Bryn Mawr College  
Portland State University Flagship Partner Program  
University of California, Los Angeles  
University of Maryland, College Park  
Saint Petersburg State University, Russia\*

\*Overseas Flagship Centers

### 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 seeks to graduate 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 superior-level language proficiency. Programs are available at undergraduate and post-bachelor's degree levels and 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

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