



Flagship Founder Reflects on the Program, With an Eye to the Future

Robert Slater

As I prepare to leave the federal government after 25 years—18 of which with the National Security Education Program (NSEP)—this article represents my last opportunity to communicate officially about The Language Flagship in *Discourse*. I am pleased not only to reflect on our accomplishments as a collaborative community but also to look toward what the future might hold for the program.

The collective progress we have realized since starting a small post-baccalaureate undertaking ten years ago is truly remarkable. In the early days, I would say “It isn’t easy” so often that it became our motto. Breaking down barriers and changing decades of entrenched approaches to language learning required an unparalleled commitment.

Currently, Flagship has 23 undergraduate programs, all poised to change the paradigm of language learning in U.S. higher education. Enrollment is on target, with most programs reaching a steady state of 25 students per cohort, or up to 100 in each program at any time. The post-baccalaureate programs continue to graduate students who reach very high levels of proficiency. Most notably, Flagship programs have collectively busted two common myths:

- American students are not interested in learning languages to professional levels.
- American universities cannot build programs that allow students to attain levels of language proficiency to the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Level 3 or American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Superior level and beyond.

Everyone who has been involved with The Language Flagship should take enormous pride in the many accomplishments and achievements that have disproved these myths and started a growing movement that we hope will continue to spread throughout higher education. But the future of The Language Flagship depends on not where the program is today but how well it will meet the challenges that lie ahead.



Robert Slater (center) converses with former Senator David Boren (left) and Institute of International Education President Allan Goodman (right) at the 2008 Boren Convocation.

- **Collaboration.** We designed The Language Flagship to be a collaborative, evidence-based enterprise that builds on best practices and research. The program’s collective success is based on a willingness to collaborate within as well as across languages. To the best of our abilities, we have tried to create an environment that fosters collaboration rather than competition among Flagship grant recipients. Flagship programs will thrive only if each program and university is able to avoid the “not invented here” philosophy and work toward the greater good of building national programs of advanced language learning.
- **Form versus function.** Flagship programs originally were designed to emphasize the value of graduating post-baccalaureate students with an ILR 3/ACTFL Superior level of language proficiency. Now, with the focus shifted primarily to undergraduate studies, we challenge each program not only to embrace this proficiency goal but also to analyze and document the processes that produce these results. Although output measures are important, how can a responsible program not study and analyze the processes by which it gets to the end state? As its 10-year mark of funding approaches in 2012, The Language Flagship must deliver introspective, rigorous

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McGinn and Brecht Receive Leadership Awards

In spring 2010, Flagship directors presented the Third Annual Language Flagship Leadership Award to two deserving individuals: Richard Brecht and Gail McGinn. Brecht was acknowledged on May 25 at The Language Flagship’s 2010 Annual Meeting in Columbus, Ohio, and McGinn was honored on June 7 at a dinner hosted by The Language Flagship Group in Washington, D.C.

Both awardees have made major contributions to The Language Flagship and its mission. Brecht, who has authored numerous books and articles on language policy, second language acquisition, and Slavic and Russian linguistics, is executive director of the University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Language (CASL) in College Park, Maryland. He was instrumental in founding key national organizations that focus on language learning, including the American Councils for International Education and the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages. He both worked with National Security Education Program (NSEP) Director Robert Slater in conceptualizing The Language Flagship and has provided experience and strategic direction since its inception.

“Richard Brecht ... has advocated training language professionals for many years,” says Herman Von Olphen, codirector of the Flagship Council of Directors. “He has championed The Language Flagship from the beginning and worked closely with NSEP to ensure its success.”



Richard Brecht accepts his Leadership Award at The Language Flagship’s 2010 Annual Meeting.

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ROBERT SLATER

JANET ADAMS

Flagship Founder ... (from page 1)

analyses of the processes that are integral program components.

- **“Show us the money.”** Securing and maintaining federal funding is a complex task. We have strived to build a model based on effective partnerships between the federal government (e.g., NSEP) and universities. Each Flagship program must be viewed as an investment, not an entitlement. The funding approach must reward performance and cost-effectiveness. Because the Flagship model is based on long-term sustainability, continued success will require that each participating university move toward permanent financial and structural support of Flagship programs. Five years from now, each currently existing Flagship program should be well-enough established that institutional funding will support research and collaboration, not faculty positions and program development. If it is assumed that The Language Flagship will sustain but not expand its funding levels, Flagship resources must shift dramatically toward student support.
- **Student recruitment.** In the early years of The Language Flagship, programs relied on recruiting small cohorts of highly motivated students willing to take part in an experimental program. Mature programs must broaden recruitment to a nationwide cross section of students who are attracted to a unique opportunity for language learning.
- **K–12 focus.** Even though it offers mostly higher-education programs, The Language Flagship cannot succeed without continued attention to the K–12 community. We must sustain and expand language education options for students at the elementary



Robert Slater (center) poses with members of the 2006 U.S. Flagship delegation at the port of Qingdao, China, during a site visit.



Robert Slater (left) discusses language needs with New York business representatives at the 2008 Metro Language Series in Manhattan.

and secondary levels; high school students must understand the reasons for studying a foreign language and recognize that Flagship programs offer opportunities that will benefit their future lives and careers.

- **Dissemination.** We have envisioned broad dissemination of the Flagship model throughout higher education since its inception, and early adopters have accepted the responsibility to spread the model to other institutions. In partnership with The Language Flagship Group, we have developed the instruments necessary to achieve this vision. If this mission is to succeed, then each Flagship program must collaborate on the development and dissemination of standards and the design of a system that accredits programs that meet these standards.
- **The next generation.** Much of the success of The Language Flagship has been due to the extraordinary commitment of a small group of dedicated and accomplished professionals. However, a growing organization cannot thrive without broad input and support. On each campus, Flagship programs must carefully cultivate the next generation of leadership.
- **Politics and communication.** The harsh reality of any federal program is that it must effectively communicate its importance in a political context. Each Flagship program and university must continue to articulate the importance of that Flagship effort to that institution.

Paradigm shifts don't just happen; they are driven by agents of change who are dedicated to changing how people think. The Language Flagship has been the most significant opportunity of my career to effect a fundamental shift in the language education options of an entire generation. It has been a distinct pleasure for me to have worked with so many smart, dedicated people, and I look forward to witnessing the new levels of excellence that The Language Flagship will achieve.

Word from Flagship

Michael Nugent
Director
The Language Flagship



This issue of *Discourse* features articles by and about individuals who are dedicated to changing the way Americans learn languages.

Robert Slater has been with the National Security Education Program (NSEP) since just after it was authorized by the U.S. Congress in 1991, and his commitment to creating a cadre of skilled young professionals to take on 21st-century language needs has made NSEP what it is today. Under Bob's direction, NSEP developed a reputation as a can-do organization that tackles tough challenges with innovative approaches. The creation of The Language Flagship is an excellent example of Bob's innovation, determination, and leadership, and all of us at Flagship are grateful to Bob for his service and dedication to improving language education. On the eve of his departure from the federal government, Bob outlines the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead for the program.

Like Bob, Richard Brecht, Gail McGinn, and David Edwards have been instrumental forces in shaping national language policy and practice and have supported The Language Flagship from the beginning. The Flagship idea originated in discussions between Dick and Bob about how to create opportunities for students to reach high-level language proficiency at colleges and universities; those discussions led to a pilot initiative that built the foundation on which today's Flagship now rests. As Senior Language Authority for the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Gail provided strong and continued support to NSEP and The Language Flagship. Through the National Council for Languages and International Studies, Dave has provided an important voice for language educators in national language policy.

Finally, the encouragement of parents like Chad McIntosh, who understands that language proficiency is key in a global workforce, may be just as important as policy- and program-level influence. Without support on all fronts, the success of The Language Flagship would not be possible.

McGinn and Brecht ... (from page 1)

Gail McGinn recently retired after serving 22 years at the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD). She was appointed Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Plans in November 2002. She then served as the Senior Language Authority for the Office of the Secretary of Defense, with responsibility for improving foreign language capability within DOD, starting in 2004. During her DOD tenure, she played a significant role in greatly enhancing the language and culture training of the military service corps. In addition, she was a key DOD advocate for The Language Flagship since the program's inception.

"In her position as Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Plans, Gail McGinn was instrumental in shaping the vision and articulating the mission of The Language Flagship as a unique and pioneering program for advanced language and culture training in the United States," says Mahmoud Al-Batall, codirector of the Flagship Council of Directors.

McGinn had major national impact during her tenure. She conceptualized and supported the National Language Conference (cosponsored by DOD and the University of Maryland) in 2004 and helped lead the DOD delegation in working with the Departments of Education and State and the Intelligence Community on building the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI), a concrete result of the National Language Conference.

"The Flagship directors are leading the way toward a new national approach to foreign language education," says McGinn. "I very much admire their work and am privileged to have had the opportunity to help with the effort. It is an honor indeed to receive the Language Flagship Leadership Award from this distinguished group of trailblazers whose work is building citizens able to interact in our rapidly expanding global environment."



RUDI WILLIAMS

Gail McGinn speaks to an audience about how far women have come in the U.S. military and the U.S. Department of Defense's civilian service during a March 2006 observance of Women's History Month.

Op-ed: National Language Leadership: A Critical Gap*

J. David Edwards, Ph.D.

Executive Director, National Council for Languages and International Studies



DAN E. DAVIDSON

The Defense Language Institute, the Foreign Service Institute, and the U.S. Intelligence Community's language programs commendably train government personnel. After Sept. 11, 2001, the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) was developed to address language needs across the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), the U.S. Department of Education (ED), the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), and the U.S. Department of State. It consists of 15 programs, of which only ODNI Startalk and the State Department's NSLI Youth Study Abroad are new. Meanwhile, some existing programs (e.g., National Security Education Program [NSEP] and Foreign Language Assistance Program [FLAP]) have been refocused or expanded.

NSEP oversees The Language Flagship and the Boren Awards. FLAP, created in 1988 to support "creative and innovative" K–12 programs in foreign languages, is the only federal program of its type and is threatened by NSLI demands to focus on only five "critical" languages. ED oversees Title VI of the Higher Education Act (formerly the National Defense Education Act), which consists of 14 foreign language and international study programs.

Even though many foreign language programs exist, each one is small (in staff and budget), and few have clearly defined missions or methods to assess effectiveness. Also, because communication and collaboration within and between agencies is nonexistent—despite an NSLI interagency task force and the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR)—national language policy is not coherent.

Policies such as the DOD Language Transformation Roadmap and the State Department's Language Continuum have resulted in major improvements; the previous and current Secretaries of Defense and State have been committed to addressing their agencies' language needs. The Intelligence Community has demonstrated inconsistent progress.

Unfortunately, ED does not value foreign language education as highly as other agencies do, treating it as an elective and a luxury. President Barack Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have spoken about the importance of languages to a world-class education, but no policies have been forthcoming. Until the U.S. education system recognizes that foreign language knowledge is vital in the 21st century and builds long-term, sequenced, articulated programs at the local and state levels, the nation's international and security interests will suffer.

**The opinions expressed in this guest-authored article are solely those of the author and do not reflect those of NSEP.*

Flagship Featured at Senate Hearing

On July 28, three Flagship supporters testified at Closing the Language Gap: Improving the Federal Government's Foreign Language Capabilities, a hearing convened by Senator Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii), chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management. Former U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) Undersecretary for Personnel and Readiness David S. C. Chu, American Councils for International Education President Dan E. Davidson, and University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Language (CASL) Executive Director Richard D. Brecht commented on current DOD and U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) efforts to increase government foreign language capacity, the challenges each faces in meeting those needs, and possible solutions. (Read these testimonies at www.thelanguageflagship.org/news-a-reports/news/2010-senate-committee-hearing.) Members of DOD and DHS also testified. Chu and Brecht recommended using The Language Flagship as a model for K–12 and university programs nationwide, emphasizing that it already is leading toward a new paradigm for language education. Davidson commented that Flagship students spend long periods overseas to enhance their education: "Research has shown that language learning in the overseas immersion environment holds enormous potential for meeting the linguistic and cultural training needs of the government workforce in the 21st century. But to function effectively, it must be properly integrated into K–12 and undergraduate curricula and adequately supported by faculties, administrators, policymakers, and funders."

Interview with a Flagship Parent, Chad McIntosh

McIntosh's son Scott is a criminal justice major in the Arabic Flagship Program at Michigan State University (MSU) currently studying at the Overseas Flagship Center at Alexandria University in Egypt.



CHAD MCINTOSH

The Language Flagship: How involved were you in your son's decision to participate in a Flagship program?

Chad McIntosh: Scott chose the MSU Flagship program, and I merely supported his decision. However, I encouraged all my children to study a foreign language to prepare them for living and doing business in an ever-shrinking world. I am fortunate to work for the Ford Motor Company, and after working overseas and having global responsibilities, I encouraged my sons to learn to view issues through the eyes of other cultures.

Flagship: What most pleases you about Scott's Flagship experience so far?

McIntosh: Scott is truly experiencing the culture of his host country, Egypt, while learning Arabic. I believe there is no stronger approach to learning language and culture than immersion.

Flagship: How do you think Scott's Flagship experience will shape his life and career?

McIntosh: The program will change Scott's life for the better. He has already learned how to view issues from multiple points of view. Whatever

career path he chooses, he will make positive contributions based on his understanding of Arab culture.

Flagship: Anything else you would like to add?

McIntosh: I recommend that any student considering a career that goes beyond the borders of the United States—which, I think, includes most careers—should seriously consider participating in a Flagship program.

Flagship Centers and Partner Programs

African Languages

- Howard University
- Ibadan University, Nigeria*
- Zanzibar University, Tanzania*

Arabic

- 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*

Chinese

- Arizona State University
- Brigham Young University
- Indiana University
- 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

- American Councils for International Education
- Bryn Mawr College
- Portland State University Flagship Partner Program
- University of California, Los Angeles
- University of Wisconsin, Madison
- 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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