



Business as Unusual: Aiming for Superior in the Russian Language Flagship

Dr. Sandra Freels, Portland State University

A business-as-usual language program is typically built from the bottom up. You offer First-Year Russian, see what you get, and then start Second-Year either from where you left off, or worse, hand off your First-Year students to a Second-Year teacher who has no idea what they learned in First-Year but deeply suspects that all of it was wrong. Flagship Programs develop differently.

We know from the outset that our Flagship students are expected to achieve Superior (ILR 3 “General Professional Proficiency”) in Russian by the time of graduation. Our task, then, is to work backwards from that goal to determine what skills and abilities they need in order to progress from each level to the next. “Backward planning,” as it is known, is highly recommended for all language programs but not often practiced in real life.

Flagship students typically spend three years in a Domestic Program preparing for a Capstone Year at a Flagship Overseas Center. In order to qualify for admission to the Overseas Center students must achieve Advanced or, better yet, Advanced High proficiency in Speaking, Reading, and Listening. Ideally, students enter Domestic Programs as freshmen already knowing some Russian, but in reality, because Russian is taught at so few secondary institutions in this country, most of them enter as true beginners: Novices or ILR 0.

The task of the Domestic Program, then, is to bring students from Novice to Advanced or Advanced High within a period of three years, and because Advanced High implies partial control of Superior functions, they, too, must be cultivated to the greatest extent possible during that three-year period of time. Working backwards, then, from an end goal of “General Professional Proficiency,” we realize that prior to their Capstone Year our students need to be able to communicate with tolerable accuracy and fluency on just about any topic that might arise in polite conversation. We can no longer



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focus exclusively on the literature and culture of the languages that we teach but must instead broaden our offerings to include a much wider range of topics and materials.

Although Flagship programs cannot afford to focus narrowly on the study of literature per se, literature and increasingly cinema continue to play a significant role in the undergraduate curriculum. Works of fiction have unparalleled ability to introduce diverse subject matter, to provide models of verbal and social interaction, including the tailoring of language, and—something I think is tremendously important for Russian—to foster the ability to read between the lines. I would also argue that a well-structured discussion of the issues raised in works of fiction is the most natural way to elicit Superior level functions in an academic setting.

Flagship students can and do major in subjects ranging from Musicology to Microbiology. During their Capstone Year they will be expected to take mainstream university courses in their major

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UGA Portuguese Flagship Alumni Gained Life-Changing Confidence, Experiences, Employment

Jonathan DuPre, a native of Augusta, Georgia, graduated from University of Georgia (UGA) in 2018 after attending the Portuguese Flagship Program. Jonathan is currently pursuing a career in International Trade.

DuPre said the best part about being in the Flagship program was becoming more self-confident.

“I gained not only a fluency in a foreign language but interpersonal and business skills that I still use to this day,” he said.

DuPre noted that though he had an obvious accent, his associates were able to understand and encourage him.

“My internship was with World Conquer International Consult Ltda. aka River Global,” DuPre explained, “Working in an office environment with an American accent made some communication difficult. The most difficult conversation would be giving my contact information to a Brazilian business over the phone. I think communication over a phone is already difficult to understand clearly. Once you add an accent that makes pronunciation more difficult, confusion is sure to follow.”

By combining a multitude of activities, DuPre said he shortened the time between learning and practicing which increased his language skills immensely in a much shorter period of time. While working for ExportGA at UGA, DuPre said he used all of the skills learned through the program to help a small farmer from Georgia plan to export internationally.

“The opportunities provided by the Flagship program include great business and graduate school contacts,” DuPre said. In the future, I hope to be considered an expert in trade compliance and international business.”



UGA Portuguese Flagship Student Jonathan DuPre

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discipline. Inevitably, then, a Domestic Flagship Program must not only add breadth but also depth to the undergraduate curriculum. Flagship programs approach this question of disciplinary depth, or “domain training,” as it is commonly known, in various ways depending on their resources. Some programs are able to offer independent Language for Special Purposes courses, such as “Business Arabic,” for example, but the majority rely on Individualized Language Instruction, aka “tutoring,” provided by native informants.

Students may graduate from business-as-usual programs with no clear career prospects, but a Flagship student fully expects to pursue careers where they will be able to put their language skills to use. This expectation leads to what I think of as a third distinguishing feature of Flagship programs: an emphasis on applied language skills. Flagship students almost always are required to conduct research and write papers in their target language, but just as frequently they also are asked to share their work publicly perhaps in an in-house publication or a public presentation, or perhaps at a larger undergraduate research conference, or even in a virtual format across Flagship institutions.

Experiential learning experiences, when successful, can expand the students’ understanding of the language and the culture of the workplace, but in order to be effective they require that the host organization have realistic expectations about the time constraints and linguistic abilities of the language learners, and they require the academic institutions to provide not only linguistic support but also opportunities to process and understand the experiences that they have had while working in the community. To my mind these three things—increased breadth and depth along with a clear emphasis on applied language skills—are the hallmarks of Language Flagship Programs, but

they bring with them other distinguishing features. Accountability is another hallmark of Flagship Programs and another significant deviation from business-as-usual. One of the effects of repeated testing is to create realistic expectations about the language learning process and thereby to engage students as partners in their own education.

Finally, Flagship is collaborative. Faculty in business-as-usual programs sometimes find themselves working in isolation. Second-Year language teachers have no idea what goes on in First-Year, and literature courses, even when taught in the target language, may be developed without any consideration for the proficiency levels of the participants. Faculty within a Flagship program, work closely together if only out of necessity, but we also find them working closely both with faculty from other disciplines within their own institutions and with Flagship faculty from other institutions both within and across individual language programs. Their sense of shared purpose and collaboration extends to their students.

Almost everything that I have mentioned—teaching subject matter that we were never trained to teach, teaching to levels of proficiency that require new methodologies, sending our students into the world to use their language in environments over which we have no control, interacting with students who *know* things that we don’t know, and subjecting our programs and our students to *constant* evaluation—take teachers far outside of their comfort zones, but on the bright side—the business is always unusual, no one will ever be bored, and the results are truly “*S*/superior,” in both senses of the word.

Presented on May 31, 2019, Los Angeles, CA, at the Memorial Honoring Olga Kagan.

Word from Flagship

Dr. Sam Eisen
Director
The Language Flagship



The Language Flagship program expanded and reached major milestones in 2020 despite the evacuation of students, disruption of overseas programming, and the quick response to switch programming into an online environment. Nevertheless, enrollment remains strong and the Flagship model is being adopted more widely. In 2020 the Language Flagship program completed open grant competitions for all domestic and overseas centers. In the process as noted in this issue the University of Washington (UW) joined the Chinese Flagship group for a total of 13 domestic centers, and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (UNC) and Virginia Tech joined the Russian Flagship group with a total of 8 centers.

In another major milestone for the program, the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC), in partnership with the Middlebury Institute for International Studies, launched a domestic Chinese Flagship Capstone immersion program for Boren Flagship students. This initiative strengthens the application of domestic immersion models for the Flagship capstone programs as global challenges continue for overseas programming. In terms of national security, expansion of the Chinese and Russian programs directly supports the National Defense Strategy. In terms of the language education field, adding UW, UNC, Virginia Tech and DLIFLC to the Flagship community of innovators along with the continuing programs adds to the momentum of this movement to reform the role and expectations of language learning in undergraduate education.

As campuses across the country face financial challenges, there is little room for what Sandra Freels so aptly describes in the issue as the “business as usual” language programs. Innovators like Sandra Freels and her colleagues created and demonstrated a language program model that works for higher education as a whole as it greatly increases expectations and student outcomes for undergraduate language learners. We look forward to using the lessons learned from the online learning experience to disseminate the Flagship resources and practices more widely in the future.

Flagship Alumni ... (from page 1)

Alejandro Espinosa graduated from UGA in 2017 with degrees in International Affairs and Romance Languages and a certificate in Global Studies.

In 2017, he participated in the Portuguese Flagship Capstone program and spent time living in São João del Rei and São Paulo. During his time in Brazil, Espinosa worked as an intern, primarily in the Public Affairs and Advocacy department of Imagem Corporativa.

"My main jobs as an intern for Imagem Corporativa," Espinosa explained, "revolved around the B3, which is the Brazilian Stock Exchange. I was in charge of reading and going through the four biggest newspapers in Brazil and scanning for mentions of 32 of the biggest companies in the country. I was the sole person in charge of this and had to communicate directly with the B3, create monthly reports, and press releases. I also worked on translating major proposals."

Espinosa said the best part of being in the Flagship program was combining aspects of both professional and personal development, the ability to immerse himself in both academic and professional settings with full support from the program.

"The combination allowed me," Espinosa said, "to learn the more technical aspects of Portuguese in a work environment and the Portuguese more commonly used in higher education. Fortunately, I really enjoy language learning and academia, so for me, it was both exciting and a challenge."

Espinosa said the Flagship system supported him with resources, classroom learning, and through cultural activities, saying, "The experiential learning was especially valuable to me because the learning extended beyond the walls of a classroom and into real life situations that really encouraged me to learn the language and culture to the best of my ability."

Since participating in Flagship Espinosa has gone on to intern or work at organizations and institutes, including the Organization of American States and Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, National Democratic Institute, National LGBT Chamber of Commerce, and United Nations Information Center. He graduated in May 2020 with an MA in International Affairs from the George Washington University and currently works in due diligence research.



ALEJANDRO ESPINOSA
UGA Portuguese Flagship Student Alejandro Espinosa

The Language Flagship Welcomes New Undergraduate Domestic Flagship Programs for 2020-2024 Grant Cycle

The Language Flagship open competition for the 2020-2024 grant cycle resulted in 31 successful domestic program awardees representing 23 institutions across 19 states. The proposals were reviewed by independent panels of experienced faculty, administrators, and language experts. Panel reviewers were impressed by the high quality of the proposals and remarked on the notable maturation in the proficiency-based language teaching programs in recent years. All applicants received detailed feedback and recommendations based on the panel review.

The domestic Flagship awards by language are Arabic (6), Chinese (13), Korean (1), Persian (1), Portuguese (2), and Russian (8). Grantees represent a diverse set of institutions, both small and large, rural and urban, Senior Military Colleges and Minority Serving Institutions. For the 2020-2024 grant cycle, the Language Flagship welcomed three new partner institutions: University of North Carolina (Russian), University of Washington (Chinese), and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Russian).

Dr. Chan Lü, Director of the new Chinese Flagship program at the University of Washington, expressed her optimism for the program to thrive even with the challenges of COVID-19. "This is perhaps the best time to be a Flagship program – assessment tools are maturing, quality language learning technology is also widely available, and the next generation of American students are increasingly more diverse and more globally oriented. Yet, the institutional challenge may persist – the ideological separation of foreign language learning from the STEM curricula, the perception of foreign language learning as fulfilling general education requirements" said Dr. Lü. Virginia Tech is a Senior Military College with a large ROTC population and STEM focus much in demand combined with professional level Russian language skills. Virginia Tech also participates in the DoD sponsored ROTC Project GO program, which supported the development of the Russian major on campus.

The full and open competition for all Language Flagship programs in all languages was conducted for the first time in response to advice from the National Security Education Board to provide broad access to the national program. Previous practice was to compete slots for a given language incrementally as the program expanded and maintain funding based on performance and positive peer review. Peer review will continue to be an integral practice for evaluating and improving program effectiveness.

The Language Flagship Technology Innovation Center Blueprint for Success

The Language Flagship Technology Innovation Center (Tech Center) at University of Hawaii, Mānoa created a Blueprint for Success to help The Language Flagship improve language learning through strategic integration of educational technology. The Blueprint for Success highlights four key Flagship goals to achieve blended technology innovation: Enhancing Proficiency, Enhancing a Community of Innovators, Creating Global Partnerships, and Strengthening Partnerships.

The Tech Center also developed guiding principles to ensure technology innovation is open source, widely used and a spark for collaboration. This Blueprint improves on coordinating and disseminating the DNA of Flagship innovation.

<https://lftic.lll.hawaii.edu/blueprint-for-success/>



Russian Flagship Alumna Now Works to Help Voters Overseas

Clarissa Rodriguez, originally from Los Angeles, California, studied at UCLA and received a B.A. in Russian. Rodriguez completed the Russian Flagship Program in 2015 with a Boren Award to study Russian in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Rodriguez shared her views on her Flagship experience, and how it prepared her for a job with the Department of Defense Federal Voting Assistance Program.

"From day one," Rodriguez said, "Flagship assessed my skills and provided me with individualized attention to strengthen them. Flagship students receive support and guidance from dedicated professors and staff during the domestic program, the Capstone Year abroad, and beyond. Flagship relies on a holistic approach to language learning that focuses on reading, writing, speaking and listening skills."

"My Flagship experiences tremendously improved my language and professional skills," Rodriguez said. "For the 2017 Expo on Future Energy in Kazakhstan, I was one of forty student ambassadors who worked at the USA Pavilion that summer. I used my language skills to welcome visitors to the pavilion and engaged with groups of people who were interested in American culture. This experience was especially wonderful because I worked with an amazing set of students from all across the United States who had different connections to the language."

Due to her experience overseas, Rodriguez said she was drawn to the mission of the Department of Defense Federal Voting Assistance Program, because it "assists, informs, and educates U.S. citizens abroad; including military personnel and families, federal employees and students, on how to exercise their right to vote even when they are far from home, making sure they can participate in the democratic process."



Russian Flagship alumna
Clarissa Rodriguez

CLARISSA RODRIGUEZ

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 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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