

## The eLCTL Initiative

### Southeast Asia World region Progress Report

//DRAFT ONLY Feb 12, 2004//  
//for discussion at the Santa Fe CNRC meeting//

#### Part One: historical perspective

This part needs to be fleshed out, including

1. a brief history of teaching Southeast Asian languages in U.S. institutions,
2. the effect of Title VI in expanding numbers of courses and levels of instruction, and
3. the origin and development of SEASSI from inception to the present
4. the “system” of Southeast Asian language teaching as it now exists, including languages and levels of instruction offered on-campus at Title VI institutions, languages and levels available at SEASSI, and both academic year and summer offerings under various study abroad programs

#### Part Two: the e-LCTL Initiative

Michigan State University (MSU) received an initial grant under the International Research Studies and Projects (IRSP) program of the U.S. Department of Education to consult among the Title VI centers concerning instruction in the less commonly taught languages. This project, then known as “Innovation in Language Instruction,” with additional funding from the Office of the Provost at MSU, sponsored the conference on Distance Learning and the Less Commonly Taught Languages held in Arlington, Virginia in February 2002.

At that time, there was interest in whether distance learning or other distributed forms of instruction could expand the nation’s capacity in foreign languages and especially access to instruction in the LCTLs. That conference was held in conjunction with meetings hosted by the International Education and Graduate Program Service to assist institutions in preparing the NRC proposals that would be due in Fall 2002. Because of this, we were able to bring together four important constituencies: area studies specialists, experts in language instruction, distance education practitioners, and the program officers responsible for managing the Title VI program.

During the Southeast Asia breakout sessions at that conference, those present agreed that discussion of expansion of language instruction should be taken up at the annual meetings of the Association for Asian Studies and other venues.

Immediately following the February 2002 conference, the national steering committee met to consider what ought to be done next. This meeting was attended by the director of the Center for Advanced Research in Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota, a representative of the National Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC) at the University of Hawaii, the director of the National Foreign Language

Center (NFLC), the director of the National Council of Organizations of Less Commonly Taught Languages (NCOLCTL), and the principal investigators and project managers from MSU. It was decided to seek additional funding for a database of existing and planned distance learning courses in the LCTLs and electronic materials for teaching the LCTLs that might be drawn on by instructors developing distance learning courses. It was also recommended that a broad consensus be sought among Title VI concerning the criteria that ought to be considered in setting priorities for expanding the number of LCTLs to be taught and increasing the number of students who might reach advanced levels of proficiency. MSU applied for and received additional IRSP funding for the 2002-2004 period to accomplish these objectives.

Consulting both within the Title VI community and with language experts, the project, which had by now changed its name to *The e-LCTL Initiative*, developed a set of criteria under three general headings: demographics; political, cultural, and social importance; and relevance to broadly-defined interests of the United States. For the demographics category there was interest in the number of speakers, distinguishing where possible between first- and second-language speakers. The second large category of criteria aims to assess the importance of each language within those countries where it is spoken. The third category considers usefulness for research by U.S.-based scholars and graduate students, for U. S. business and media, for technical and scientific exchange, and for such U.S. government programs as assistance or security.

Roger Bresnahan sought the advice of those attending the meeting of the Council of Teachers of Southeast Asian Languages (COTSEAL) at Madison in July 2002. With respect to applying such criteria to the languages of Southeast Asia, Roger Bresnahan made a presentation at the July 2003 COTSEAL meeting and discussed them with the Southeast Asian studies community at the 2003 meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS). Some NRC directors and other Southeast Asianists were skeptical about the usefulness of setting priorities among the languages of Southeast Asia and, frankly, the criteria for prioritization did not meet with enthusiastic approbation by the NRC directors either at the March 2003 AAS meeting or the September 2003 NRC meetings. Nevertheless, alternate criteria that might be better suited to Southeast Asian languages have not been put forward.

Of more interest at the 2003 AAS meeting was the suggestion that the interests of Southeast Asian language instruction would be better served if there were a Title VI-funded Language Resource Center (LRC) for this area. It seemed especially pertinent to those in attendance that of all the critical area of the world, Southeast Asia is the only one without an LRC focused solely on its languages. Especially attractive to the fifty or so present at this meeting was the model of the recently funded South Asian Language Resource Center (SALRC) because it is a joint project of all the South Asia NRCs and the broader community of South Asian studies programs. It was pointed out that most of the components of a Southeast Asia LRC already exist in scattered fashion and that such an LRC could function as an umbrella organization to provide consistency and coherence while also making advances in areas that are sorely needed but at present not well served, including materials development and on-going teacher training, and that in addition such

an LRC could serve as an “honest broker” among institutions cooperating in on-line instruction. Prawet Jantharat, President of COTSEAL, and Roger Bresnahan were asked by those present to investigate the issue and bring a report to the AAS meeting in 2004. In dividing their tasks after this meeting, Roger agreed to coordinate with the NRCs to determine the degree of interest in a Southeast Asia LRC and also to investigate whether there is an institution interested in being the headquarters of an LRC that would be a joint project of all the Southeast Asia NRCs. Prawet took on the task of coordinating with the NFLRC at the University of Hawaii or other currently funded LRCs who might be interested in taking on the task.

The issue of promoting a Southeast Asia LRC occupied most of the discussion at a breakout session at the NRC meeting in Washington in September 2003. Dick Schmidt and David Hiple, director and assistant director, respectively, of the NFLRC, represented the view that a separate LRC for Southeast Asia is unnecessary in light of the substantial attention given to Southeast Asian languages by the NFLRC. Subsequently, in January 2004, the NFLRC and COTSEAL sponsored a two-day workshop on “New Visions for Southeast Asian Language Teaching.” In attendance, besides David Hiple and Dick Schmidt, were Prawet and Roger, as well as representatives from UC-Berkeley, UW-Madison, NIU, University of Washington, Arizona State, UC-San Diego, University of Michigan, the College of San Francisco, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, and a number of language and area studies specialists of UH-Manoa. Extensive discussion of the LRC issue, as well as other concerns, took place over these two days.

As for the project of prioritizing the LCTLs of Southeast Asia, shortly after the September Title VI meeting, the language faculty of the NRC at Northern Illinois University (NIU) communicated to Roger Bresnahan their collective position that ranking any languages other than the national languages would be a highly political move likely to be contested by the national governments. In this arrangement, therefore, all the national languages of the eleven countries plus Hmong, Hokkien Chinese, and Malaysian would be in the first group. The full schema proposed by the NIU language faculty would be as follows:

#### GROUP A

Burmese  
Hokkien Chinese (Min Nan)  
Indonesian  
Khmer  
Lao  
Malaysian/Malay  
Tagalog/Filipino  
Tamil  
Tetun  
Thai  
Vietnamese

#### GROUP B

Balinese  
Batak  
Buginese  
Cebuano  
Ilokano  
Javanese  
Mon  
Shan  
South Vietnamese

GROUP C

Achenese  
Arakanese  
Cham  
Chin (including Karen)  
Hiligaynon (Ilonggo)  
Maranao  
Tausug  
Northern Thai  
Southern Thai

GROUP D All other languages of Southeast Asia