

The e-LCTL Initiative

For immediate release
February 23, 2005
East Lansing, Michigan

U.S. Universities Offering 226 Languages for U.S. International Needs

Faced with the urgent national need for communicating in hundreds of languages around the globe, the nation's research universities have developed capacity to offer 226 less commonly taught languages through the Title VI National Resource Centers (NRCs).

Michigan State University's *e-LCTL Initiative* has released these data in a major new website inventorying the nation's capacity in the diverse "less commonly taught languages" (LCTLs) in both universities and government training institutes (see www.elctl.msu.edu). For 2001-02, the report reveals that more than 30,000 students enrolled in 128 LCTLs in these 55 universities in 27 states, in centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Title VI international education programs. This long-lasting partnership between the Federal government and these U.S. universities has created an unparalleled capacity to teach both foreign languages and "area studies" about societies around the world - covering all continents. Indeed, for the past decade, the study estimates more than 80% of all instruction in these less commonly taught languages - was in these Title VI-supported centers - excluding the "commonly-taught" languages of French, Spanish, German, and Italian.

A second part of the project has mobilized all of these Title VI centers in reassessing what are the highest priority LCTLs in each world region. "In a time of national and global need for an enlarged pool of speakers and learners of key languages around the globe," MSU Project Director David Wiley noted, "a strategic effort is needed in the United States to make those LCTLs available to learners at the post-secondary level. This requires collaboration among the nation's universities in deciding what LCTLs to offer, at what levels, when and where, in what formats, and what new learning materials will be required. These are the tasks of the e-LCTL Initiative."

In addition, the Initiative has created a new international database of on-line modules available on the Internet for learning the LCTLs and for coordination among linguists planning new distance learning courses. This information recently was reported in a study conducted by the e-LCTL Initiative team on the teaching by universities throughout the country. The study collected information on the variety of languages being taught, number of student enrollments, and language levels offered at U.S. universities in comparison to those offered through federal language training programs, such as the Defense Language Institute and the Foreign Service Institute. The results of this study can be accessed on the e-LCTL website at www.elctl.msu.edu.

The study found that universities which host Title VI national resource centers are enrolling more than 60% of the students enrollments in the 10 languages deemed to be "critical" by the National Security Education Program, U.S. Department of Defense. For example, in 2001-02, approximately 5,580 students were enrolled in Japanese, 5,050 in

Chinese, 2,205 in Russian, 2,045 in Arabic, 1,525 in Korean, 840 in Hindi, and 800 in Persian. Smaller but significant enrollments were found in Turkish, Urdu, Panjabi, Gujarati, and Pashto and other African, Asian, and Middle Eastern languages. Furthermore, the largest number of Title VI Fellowships was awarded to graduate students of Arabic. During the period 2001-04, 226 LCTLs were available through Title VI NRCs while federal agencies were providing 75 LCTLs.

“The federal government provides excellent training in a number of the major LCTLs through the Defense Language Institute (DLI) and the Foreign Service Institute (FSI),” Wiley noted, “but they do not have the capacity or the demand to teach most of the LCTLs. Furthermore, the training offered through these institutions tends to be quite focused and specialized for particular types of learners with specific purposes.” In contrast, the NRCs have the capacity with native speakers and regional or country specific experts in the LCTLs who can speak these rarely taught languages for a national pool of student learners.

The *e-LCTL Initiative* website includes tables for all LCTLs taught at NRCs, by the federal government, and, in a few cases, by other universities. It also reports the information for each of the nine world regions (Africa, East Asia, Eastern Europe, Inner Asia, Latin America & the Caribbean, Middle East, Southeast Asia & the Pacific Islands, South Asia, and Western Europe). Other website pages contain papers on national priorities for teaching LCTLs, demographic information for the LCTLs of the world regions, and useful Internet links for each world region and its languages. The data collected for this study covers the years 2001-2004.

The *e-LCTL Initiative* is a cooperative project of the Title VI Centers for African, Asian, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, International Development, and Women in International Development, in cooperation with the MSU Title VI Center for Language Education and Research. The project was developed in cooperation with the National Foreign Language Center, the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages, and several of the Title VI National Language Resource Centers. The Initiative was funded by the Title VI International Research and Studies Program of the U.S. Department of Education and by Michigan State University.

#

For further details, contact David Wiley, Professor of Sociology and Director, African Studies Center, Michigan State University Tel: 517-353-1700, wiley@msu.edu

The e-LCTL Initiative

~ www.elctl.msu.edu ~