



UC CONSORTIUM FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING & TEACHING

A UC CONSORTIUM FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING & TEACHING STATEMENT ON TEACHING LANGUAGES AT A DISTANCE IN THE UC SYSTEM

This document was prepared by representatives of the UCCLLT Steering Committee, which includes language faculty from each campus of the UC system. Its purpose is to provide the UC Academic Policy Committee and other curriculum committees with background information to assist them in evaluating proposals for distance-taught language courses. The statement first addresses the question of system-wide student access to instruction in the less commonly taught languages. Second, it argues that rectification of the inequality of access can be accomplished only through the development of online courses.

The Current Situation - Now more than ever, the different UC campuses face the crucial challenge of developing and maintaining expertise in the world's languages, especially in the less commonly taught languages (LCTLs), many of which are deemed of vital importance to our national interest. Unfortunately, only two campuses in the UC system, UCB and UCLA, offer instruction in a wide range of the world's languages; the other campuses are limited to course offerings in the major European languages together with Chinese and Japanese, with no or only modest offerings in other LCTLs. Even the LCTLs presently taught on the two largest campuses struggle to maintain adequate enrollments to ensure their preservation. The other individual UC campuses do not have the resources to expand their faculty so as to offer a broad spectrum of world languages, in particular the LCTLs. Realistically speaking, there is little likelihood that this situation will change.

To compound the problem, when students are choosing to apply to a particular UC campus, they rarely know which world languages will be essential to their future research and careers. With respect to LCTLs, the situation is analogous to offering calculus on only two UC campuses. Linguistic and cultural knowledge of the world's languages is as essential for certain careers as calculus is for the sciences. Undergraduates very often select (or are accepted by) their campus well prior to their determination of their respective career paths. The desire to study a particular language often results from a wide array of academic or experiential encounters as diverse as anthropology, business, economics, area studies, political science,

agriculture, literature, history, world events, employment, internships, travel, or contact with fellow students and professors from a particular country or culture. Since the university is fundamentally concerned with intellectual growth and exploration, the concentration of LCTLs at only two campuses constitutes an impediment to its mission.

It is vital for the leading public university in the U.S. to maintain its broad language resources and to continue to provide training in a wide representation of world languages to future generations of undergraduate and graduate students. In order to maintain and expand student access to LCTLs, the UC system must harness all available resources for delivery, including the latest techniques in computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Distance learning alternatives for LCTLs can address both the critical pedagogical issues and real financial constraints.

Implementation of Expanded LCTL Instruction through Distance or Distributed Learning*

No one questions the value of face-to-face instruction as being the optimum mode for language delivery, especially if oral proficiency constitutes the principal goal of instruction. Current best practice also focuses on attainment of equally proficient literacy skills, skills that can readily be obtained via a distance course. Successful second language acquisition – a three- or four-year proposition at least – necessarily implies competence in all of these areas. In addition, language instruction needs today include those of the vast and growing heritage student population who typically have oral proficiency but lack reading and writing skills. Most importantly, for many students in the UC, a distance learning language course may be the only possibility for access to a LCTL.

There is mounting evidence, furthermore, that distance learning need not be a second-class alternative. According to Chris Dede, Professor of Learning Technologies at Harvard University Graduate School of Education, "Many people find their voices in distance media in a way they don't in face-to-face sessions." Instructional technology can enhance the language learning experience in important ways, reading, writing, and aural comprehension being its greatest strengths. This realization helps explain why the U.S. Department of Education has funded a national collaboration to set priorities for instruction in the LCTLs during 2002-2004, and distance learning is one of the priorities of the strategic planning process.

Web-based instruction can offer an engaging array of multimedia input, thereby addressing the common classroom problem that not all students

learn in the same way. A distance taught course can accommodate a spectrum of learning styles, personalities, and goals. One distance-learning Spanish course taught through UC Davis Extension combines CD-ROM multimedia programs, content-based Web readings and activities, Internet communication tools, and a class management system.

Undoubtedly, the design plan for distance taught LCTLs at UC will call for a "hybrid" model that includes limited direct contact between faculty and students through teleconferencing, roving TAs, and/or support from native speaker mentors on each campus, as well as computer-mediated communication (CMC). It must be remembered that classroom-based language courses overwhelmingly concentrate on oral proficiency while distance-learning language courses focus on reading, writing, and listening proficiencies. Successful second language acquisition necessarily implies competence in all of these areas. Accordingly, university curricular and grant committees should expect from each teaching format what it can respectively best deliver, without prejudicial comparisons. The formats are different, but both promote second language learning and increased cultural knowledge. The strength of the distance-learning format resides in increasing access, especially in the case of LCTLs.

Importantly, a distance-learning language program would establish a solid interface with the in-country Education Abroad Program (EAP) language courses. Students who have received basic training in language and culture through a distance-learning course would benefit from subsequent short-term study abroad programs. For the future, distance-learning programs for second- and even third-year study, would provide continuation courses for those students who complete first-year language in the EAP programs. Such a coherent program of study maximizes UC's resources in this manner: textual and listening instruction, the hallmark of computer-supported learning, directly complement the speaking experience optimally offered by the EAP.

The University's charge is to explore and expedite effective means of language instruction to meet the real educational needs of students throughout the system. The present dearth of LCTL resources denies students access to languages that should be key components of a superior higher education in the 21st century. Distance learning that combines the highest quality UC instruction with the most sophisticated instructional technology is not only a pragmatic alternative, but more likely is the only viable solution to a glaring deficit in UC education.

** Distributed learning is a recent term whose precise meaning is still evolving. Some writers consider the term to be synonymous with "distance education," while others insist*

that it has an entirely different meaning that relates to both technology and pedagogy.

Distributed Learning encompasses:

- *A focus upon the learner in order to provide the learner with as much control and interaction as possible*
 - *An emphasis upon technology to counteract the barriers to distance and time (Example: an online course is more "distributed" while a postal correspondence course is more "distance.")*
 - *A growing emphasis on "delivery upon demand"*
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