

THE CHRONICLE

of Higher Education

Letters to the Editor

June 1, 2011

International-Education Programs Should Be Continued

To the Editor:

Mark Montgomery's piece cheering budget cuts for the Department of Education's Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs ("[America's International-Education Programs Need a 21st-Century Makeover](#)," *The Chronicle*, May 5) cries out for correction on several counts. His critique is based on information that is old, incomplete, and in some instances just plain wrong; the programs have evolved substantially since the legislation was first passed in 1958.

Mr. Montgomery writes that three Title VI programs (National Resource Centers, Language Resource Centers, and Centers for International Business Education) "provide excellent resources for advanced research" and suggests that the resources developed over the years now suffice—not acknowledging that all (including the grants to the University of Denver, where he once worked) are primarily training programs that annually impact thousands of undergraduate and graduate students, as well as in-service teachers. He does not even mention the competitive Title VI fellowship program for students who combine study of less commonly taught languages with training in a wide variety of disciplines and professions, or that a significant number of the fellowship program's awardees eventually enter government service.

Nor does Mr. Montgomery appear to fully understand the nature of current Title VI funding for these centers. For the National Resource Center programs, with which I am most familiar, successful applicants must now demonstrate substantial long-term university commitment. Their modest federal funding has been crucial in maintaining less commonly taught language courses—resources that are essential for continued training in critically important foreign languages whose enrollments may be insufficient for continuing university coverage without outside help. The National Resource Center budgets (from Title VI) may also offer temporary incentives for course coverage in key but often neglected disciplines (in liberal arts and professional schools) related to the center's focus; they provide essential funding for outreach to K-12 and postsecondary education and to business and other communities.

Mr. Montgomery does not name the International Research and Studies program, although he does criticize two projects, presumably funded by the program, that could add to foreign-language teachers' pedagogy resource options. Does he really expect that all research grants are sure to produce immediate, game-changing results? Long-term impact is always difficult to estimate when projects are initiated, as are future needs for instructional materials in the 100-200 less commonly taught languages that the program was designed to meet. The longstanding International Research and Studies program, combined with the more recently initiated Language Resource Center program, has produced basic teaching materials in many languages as well as much work on language pedagogy and on enrollment surveys that are crucial documents for language-policy planning.

If Mr. Montgomery's work was funded by the Title VI International Research and Studies program in recent years, he would know that dissemination plans are a part of its application-review process. In fact, for my recent (Title VI/IRS-funded) work on international content in the undergraduate curriculum for K-12 teachers, "marketing" efforts were partially grant-funded, facilitating the study's contributions to planning efforts in a number of teacher-training organizations. Similarly, our widely distributed 1999 (Title VI/IRS-funded) evaluation of the Title VI Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language program not only demonstrated an unusually high degree of success, but was also widely distributed, with recommended criteria for future evaluation and development.

Indeed, Mr. Montgomery appears to be unaware of the Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language program's existence. Initiated in 1972, it has provided seed money for development of international and foreign-language-studies curricula in more than 1,000 programs at the full range of postsecondary institutions, including community colleges. The Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language program, like others in the Title VI and Fulbright-Hays mix, is one that can prepare students for an overseas experience. Yet the Department of Education has just announced that its fiscal-year 2011 competition for this program, like the Title VI research program, is canceled because of the 40-percent cut for all Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs. Is this really the kind of "repurposing" that Mr. Montgomery recommends?

There is little question that the programs that Mr. Montgomery does want to strengthen (including more experience abroad for students) can contribute to improved American global competence, but their success depends on maintaining the international-education infrastructure that has been developed under the several interrelated Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs. The full complement of Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs—a mere 0.2-percent of the Department of Education's initial fiscal-year 2011 budget—has provided essential foundations for all programs preparing an internationally-aware citizenry, and must be continued.

Ann Imlah Schneider
Washington

The writer is a consultant specializing in international education.



lydiack ★ 3 weeks ago

- Ms. Schneider, thanks so much for this letter. I'm studying two so-called critical languages (at the advanced and intermediate level) at a Title VI-funded Center for Middle Eastern Studies. I have been feeling very dispirited in the last couple of months as my classmates and I anxiously await news of the fate of Title VI funding. Perhaps this isn't the forum to air our grievances, but we students, who can only read second or third-hand accounts and twiddle our thumbs, feel quite helpless, and it's comforting to read a spirited defense like yours.

I know that the Department of Education is looking at seriously unpleasant cuts from across the educational spectrum--I don't want to take textbooks away from children, or Pell grants away from students in need. However, I have to wonder at the wisdom of potentially cutting funding to Centers that support study of critical languages at a time when, on any given day, the U.S. has a presence in two or more countries in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Per Mr. Montgomery's article: any program can do with a face-lift, I'm sure. But the Title VI program needs so little money for its upkeep, comparatively speaking, and it performs a unique function. Uzbek, for example, is taught at very few schools in the U.S. today. While we continue a military operation in Afghanistan (Uzbek population 10%), why would we cut funding to the limited number of programs where students can learn this language at the undergraduate and graduate level? Yes, the Department of Defense runs useful institutions like the Defense Language Institute. It would be a sorry state of affairs, though, if enlistment was the only route for critical language acquisition.

My classmates and I study Persian, Arabic, Hebrew, Turkish, Uzbek, and other less commonly taught languages. We are required to take courses that provide in-depth coverage of the history of the Middle East and Central Asia. We are eager to contribute to national life with the skills we are acquiring here at the Center, whether through government service or work in the educational sector. Many of my classmates would like nothing more than to work for the federal government, if they can get through the year or more-long application process and background check. (No educational paradigm shift will hasten that process, Mr. Montgomery.)

If our Center and places like it are no longer able to award FLAS scholarships, support staff, or fund contract language instructors, it will be a real loss for a nation that should pride itself on preparing at least some of its citizens for dialogue with the world. Unfortunately, articles like Mr. Montgomery's give policy makers an excuse to gut this valuable program without a second thought. We need cheerleaders, not detractors!

- [Flag](#)

- 5 people liked this. Like



policyperson ★ 3 weeks ago

- Thank you for a thoughtful response to Mr. Montgomery's opinion piece. The U.S. can ill afford to lose any of the traction gained since 2001. We can only hope that the Department of Education will seriously consider the NAS Title VI report, the JBLA International Research and Studies evaluation and AIR's evaluation of the Language Resource Centers. By making the latter two reports available, we can focus our energy on improving our efforts rather than losing ground.

- [Flag](#)

- 5 people liked this. Like



Ed McDermott ★ 3 weeks ago

- Thank you Ann for adding clarity and perspective on Title VI and Fulbright-Hays impact, and demonstrating how the prior piece misrepresented the contributions of these programs.

It is very hard to capture the total contribution of the 14 programs funded by and through the Department of Education's "International and Foreign Language Education" (IFLE, formerly IEPS and CIE) office. Data demonstrating the contributions and performance of all of these programs is readily available through the Department of Education's International Resource Information System - <http://iris.ed.gov/iris/ieps/i...> A brief review of some data shows that Title VI continues to support instruction in more than 120 key foreign languages, that more teachers 80,000 annually participate through NRC/LRC/CIBE outreach and training activities, and that this outreach directly reaches more than 200,000 K-12 students nationally.

This contribution can also be found in the research and materials development undertaken through Title VI funding. Contributions such as the "ACTFL" common language proficiency measure, every higher education and K-12 enrollment survey conducted, seminal research on study abroad programming and effectiveness and minority participation in foreign

study were all funded by Title VI. Not to mention that nearly all critical foreign language dictionaries, textbooks and learning tools would not exist but for the funding of Title VI.

The cancellation of all of the FY2011 program competitions, and the total cancellation of the Technological Innovation and Cooperation for Foreign Information Access (TICFIA - <http://www.ticfia.org/>, and <http://www-apps.crl.edu/ticfia...> program will have a profound effect on our national ability to meet long-term language resource and language training needs.

Should the government again find itself needing expertise, resources and training for Pashto, Sudanese Arabic, Somali, Bosnian, Haitian Creole, Aceh and other languages/cultures that have demonstrated strategic importance in the past 20 years that have fallen in current importance - the only place housing this expertise and ensuring the necessary U.S. capacity has been Title VI and Fulbright-Hays centers and programs. It is short-sighted to lose the critical expertise in languages, regions and cultures, especially given the fact that we do not know what resources or expertise will be needed in the future.