

The Shared LCTL Symposium: A Call to Action

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“It is hard work and it could - likely will - take years, but it will be worth it.”

How can we reimagine foreign language learning for the context of higher education today? How can we make sure that foreign languages remain relevant and an important part of the landscape of education in the United States? By focusing on innovative ways to partner across institutions and collaborate, the participants at the Shared LCTL Symposium in September 2018 discussed these key questions (resulting in the quote above from one of our participants). As a whole, the Shared LCTL Symposium (SLCTLs) focuses on how sharing languages, and, specifically, LCTLs, can work at different institutions, from small liberal arts consortia to large public institutions.

SLCTLs grew out of two independent grant projects focused on LCTLs, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The University of Chicago received a grant to create the Mellon Collaborative Partners (<https://melloncollaborativepartners.uchicago.edu>), which develops shared course sequences in the target language using pairs of instructors from across institutions. Michigan State University facilitates the LCTL Partnership on behalf of the Big Ten Academic Alliance. The goal of the LCTL Partnership (<http://lctlpartnership.celta.msu.edu/>) is to create sustainable models for language instruction through various projects, including collaboratively developing open educational resources across the

Big Ten Academic Alliance. As part of a learning process about each other's grants and aims, the working groups at both institutions shared information about activities, including encouraging attendance at professional development opportunities.

The symposium began with a keynote talk by Stephane Charitos of Columbia University, entitled "The Future of Language Study in the U.S. Short-Term Crisis or Permanent Plight?" He highlighted the state of language study in the United States, showing how the "crisis" of declining enrollments in foreign languages is not a new trend and that institutes of higher education need to focus on promoting language education as a whole, both within and outside of our institutions. Many language programs try to focus on getting students who are already interested in language to choose *their* language, but Charitos emphasized that we should focus on communicating the need for language education to students and administrators, as well as working to match needs with student trajectories. If we can work on this collaboratively, he says, the "rising tide raises all boats," and all languages will benefit from these efforts. Charitos summarized this call for action as "four integrated axes of action."

Inform

The axis of "inform" means that we should better inform students about the value and availability of language education. However, we should not just focus on transmitting information *to* students, but rather focus on both giving out and gathering information. Charitos also advocated for institutions to mine their existing data on language enrollments more extensively and deeply to get a clear picture of trends as well as successes (See the next axis "Advocate"). As an example of a successful information activity, Charitos highlighted the storytelling campaign at Michigan State University that gives a platform for students to talk about the transformative power of language learning.

<http://www.languages.celta.msu.edu/>

Advocate

The axis of “advocate” includes creating compelling arguments to rally support for languages from decision makers. Charitos specified that there is a distinct difference between informing and advocating. Whereas some activities on campus may be called “language advocacy” (activities aimed at getting the word out to students about languages), Charitos would only consider it advocacy if it really targeted decision makers with things like data-driven evidence of effectiveness and showing how language programs align with key institutional strategic goals and priorities.

Innovate

The axis of “innovate” encourages language programs to focus on developing tracks, courses, and activities that meet the needs of current students. This could include things like focusing on language for special purposes (healthcare, business, etc.), experiential learning, heritage language education, and possibly even incentivizing advanced language study. These new initiatives do not necessarily have to come at the cost of more “traditional” offerings, but language programs may find that through the process of this innovation, enrollments and enthusiasm may lead the programs in some different directions that they have in the past.

Collaborate

The axis of “collaborate” calls language programs to work together to enhance language education for all. Opposed to the traditional competition for students that may be interested in language, we should collaborate to make sure that the “total is more than the sum of the parts.” Charitos highlighted current collaborations and initiatives for sharing materials, including the Shared Course Initiative, the Big Ten Academic Alliance, the LCTL Partnership, the Mellon Collaborative Partners project, and the Center for Open Educational Resources and Language Learning (COERLL).

At the conclusion of the keynote, the symposium organizers separated the group into four groups to have a round table discussion on each of the four integrated axes of action. The groups were tasked with

discussing some guiding questions together and then naming their top ideas for action for their axis.

Innovation - Ideas for Action

- Rewrite the curriculum, with a focused look at majors and minors and evaluating the credits needed to get a major. If they started at the beginning of the program as a freshman, could they complete a major without overloads?
- Understand students will not be “mini-professors” and there is a need to listen to the students on their desire to have both language and content at all levels.
- Use partnerships with the community to gain expertise for specialized courses

Inform - Ideas for Action

- Inform students
 - Engage in outreach to new/transfer students
 - Speak with advisors in different colleges about languages and how their students could benefit from language education
 - Invite alumni and employers to give talks as to how a language can be used
 - Encourage students to tell their stories
- Collect data
 - Conducting a survey during placement exams to know student motivations
 - Identify the institutional data that needs to be examined and set up a plan to analyze and communicate that data
- As part of the informational campaign, work to set up competency, practical, and advanced certificates and show how they can be used in the real world.

Advocate

- Use stories collected by current students or alums to illustrate concepts when talking to stakeholders.
- Organize co-curricular activities to be able to highlight the power of reaching across disciplines (e.g., talks, films, etc.)
- Promote scholarships, even non-traditional ones, by tying them to language courses. (Money talks!)
- Find and highlight innovative projects in the classroom
- Bring language to the community, including underserved populations (e.g., prisons), and highlight the transformative experiences there.

Collaboration

- Inter-institutional collaboration
 - Streamline communication across campuses to encourage and develop shared courses
 - Hold focus groups to find innovative ways for on-campus collaboration between LCTL programs
- Working together within the same institution:
 - Institutes should have an overarching unit encompassing all languages and programs so that it serves as a supporting entity
 - Work with this institute to offer professional development for instructors: Train instructors with a week of workshops to give a solid foundation before starting the academic year. Presentations can include best practices, standards, lesson planning, microteaching, tech support for audio/video recording
 - Host a luncheon for all instructors to meet and interact with colleagues across languages
 - Curricular and co-curricular programming across languages (e.g., a graphic novel reading club where many languages could read the same graphic novel, each in the students' L2, then come together for discussion) or develop

- curricular activities around one theme in different language classes. (e.g., Portuguese, Hindi, Korean, and Hebrew develop same activities around International Women’s Day (students create videos, make work visible).
- Bring in international faculty and researchers from across campus/disciplines as guest speakers to language classes.
 - Connect language/culture classes with researchers to inform research questions, as opposed to finding translator after research questions have been developed.

As SLCTLS continued, there were updates on both of the grant projects, a panel on the CourseShare initiative at the Big Ten Academic Alliance from various stakeholder perspectives, and a panel about practical experiences in sharing courses with perspectives from participants in different consortia. We concluded with a “town hall” discussion on the themes that arose from discussions throughout the Symposium. (You can read more about the Symposium as a whole on the LCTL Partnership blog: <http://lctlpartnership.celta.msu.edu/blog/>)

We want to continue and expand the conversation that was started at the Shared LCTL Symposium in September 2018. The call for action is an important one and should be heard and addressed by as many stakeholders in LCTL education (and beyond) as possible. If you want to participate in this conversation or have ideas relating to these four axes that you want to share with the LCTL community, do not hesitate to contact us. We hope to encourage this dialogue and, ultimately, to create a sustainable platform to share these ideas.

The future of language education in the U.S. concerns all language teachers, no matter which language you are teaching. Let’s focus on how to create that “rising tide” that will benefit all foreign language education.