

THE AFRICAN FLAGSHIP LANGUAGES INITIATIVE: CHALKING 6 YEARS OF SUCCESS

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The African Flagship Languages Initiative (originally the African Languages Initiative) (AFLI) is an initiative of the National Security Education Program (NSEP) which is administered by the Institute for International Studies (IIE). Its central goal central is to increase the ability of Americans to communicate and operate effectively in major African languages and cultures. This is to part of the strategy to prepare the nation for the new challenges of a global society which include sustainable development, environment degradation, diseases and hunger, rapid population growth and migration, and economic competitiveness. AFLI comprises two components: a domestic intensive summer and an overseas immersion fall programs. Since 2011, we have been running the domestic component.

We won the grant to host the first AFLI in 2011 for only two languages, i.e., Swahili and Yoruba. This period coincided with UF hosting of what turned out to be the final Summer Cooperative African Languages Institute (SCALI). As a result, not only did we teach other languages but we also had other students, mostly FLAS fellows, join Boren scholars and fellows who are awardees of AFLI scholarship.

A year after we began, we were asked to increase the number of languages on offer to include Akan/Twi, Wolof, and isiZulu, making a total of five languages. Because of its impressive performance, the program has continued to grow in the number of languages we offer: Hausa in 2013, Advanced French (with survival Wolof) in 2014, and Portuguese in 2015. Owing to the unfortunate circumstance of SCALI being discontinued, AFLI has become one of the main summer program for offering African languages in the summer.

Currently AFLI offers eight languages, most at all levels of college curriculum – beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels— and a few at the first two levels. The 8-week intensive coursework program comprises 4 hours of classroom instructions per day, five days a week, and 6 hours per week of supervised conversational practices as well as other language and cultural interactional activities. It provides the equivalent of two regular semesters’ language instruction, thereby enabling participants to earn UF credits (10 credits for beginning courses and 6 credits for intermediate and advanced courses). Although AFLI caters for students from across the nation with various sources of funding, the majority remain Boren scholars and fellows whom the program prepares for the AFLI overseas immersion. Over the 6 year period, we have had a total of 223 students, with the breakdown as follows:

Year	Boren Scholars & Fellows	FLAS Fellows	others	total
2011	16	-	-	16
2012	32	14	-	46
2013	28	-	-	28
2014	29	9	4	42
2015	37	9	2	48
2016	29	13	1	43
TOTAL	171	45	7	223

The success of AFLI has been due to the tremendous support that we have received from the Directors and staff of the Center for African Studies, and the Chairs and staff of the Department

of Languages, Literatures, & Cultures. Collaboration with our funding agency, IIE, and AFLI partner, American Councils, who administer the AFLI Overseas Immersion Fall program, has ensured not only a successful 8 week program but also a smooth transition for Boren scholars and fellows from domestic settings to overseas environments (both social and academic). Last but not the least are the over 20 committed and professionally-oriented instructors, conversation assistants and host families who have worked tirelessly with us over the years.

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