Teaching and Learning Critical Languages

From Kurdish to Macedonian, and from Albanian to Kazakh, new IU programs in strategic and critical languages continue to give IU international prominence in the preparation of global scholars.

**EASTERN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA**

IU has become the first university in North America to offer a class in the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish. Spoken by nearly 15 million of the estimated 30 million Kurdish speakers worldwide, the language is used in several areas of the Middle East including Iraq, Iran, and Syria, as well as in Turkey, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. A million Kurds who relocated to Western Europe brought Kurmanji Kurdish with them. The IU course is taught by Kutbettin Kiliç, a doctoral student from Turkey.

“Until recently, few Kurdish areas were accessible to scholars,” said John Walbridge. “However, now the Kurdish area in northern Iraq is prospering, and the Kurdish areas of Turkey are largely at peace and more open. This gives our students and faculty a unique opportunity to acquire the language skills to work with an important and understudied group.”

Programs like IU’s Summer Workshop in Slavic, East European, and Central Asian Languages (SWSEEL) have made Bloomington the destination for more than half a century of individuals studying the regions of the world where European and Asian cultures meet. This year’s list of languages taught includes Albanian, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Czech, Hungarian, Macedonian, Polish, Romanian, Ukrainian, Azerbaijani, Georgian, Kazakh, Pashto, Tajik, Turkmen, Uyghur, Uzbek, and Mongolian. IU specialists and native speakers from other universities and abroad work together to provide IU students with the tools they and the country need to understand an increasingly important part of our world.

IU has also won a two-year federal grant to provide strategic language and culture training to undergraduate students in the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs. The Institute for International Education, on behalf of the U.S. Department of Defense, selected IU’s ROTC Strategic Languages and Cultures Program to participate in this new initiative that aims to improve the abilities of future military officers to speak and understand strategic languages and cultures. The languages covered by the program are Arabic, Russian, and the Central Asian languages Azerbaijani, Kazakh, Pasto, Tajik, Turkmen, Uyghur, and Uzbek. Under the program, 24 cadets received scholarships to study at IU’s intensive summer language workshop, and then continue training in the 2007–2008 academic year either at IU or their home institutions.

**CHINA**

Fifteen prospective and practicing teachers of Chinese met at Indiana University in late June for the Chinese Pedagogy Institute. IU Bloomington and its East Asian Studies Center sponsored the two-week, intensive course on teaching Mandarin Chinese at the secondary level. The program was funded by the National Security Language Initiative’s STARTALK, a federal program to increase the number of Americans learning critical need languages. Participants earned graduate-level credit through the IU School of Education, and their studies included methods and techniques of teaching Chinese, instructional materials, curriculum design, instructional planning, and classroom management. During the second week, the teachers practiced with local high school students, who had applied to take part in the program.

**AFRICA**

For the 2007–2008 academic year, the IU African Languages Program will add training in the Senegalese language Wolof to its regular offering of African languages. Fabienne Diouf of the Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, Senegal, will spend 2007–2008 teaching Wolof at IUB as a Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant. IU hosted the Summer Cooperative African Language Institute (SCALI) in summer 2006. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the program attracted more than 80 students from across the nation gathered to study Igbo, Somali, Wolof, Xhosa, Yoruba, Bambara, Kiswahili, Twi, and Zulu.

Language skills are a valuable first step towards cultural understanding and engagement. The United States has been accused of not giving sufficient priority to language learning in its schools, and it is true that we can find more and continued on page 16
dignitaries went to Sarasota to celebrate the gala premiere and “Teresa Kubiak Day.”

“I want people to know how much I enjoy sharing music between Poland and the U.S.,” Kubiak explains. “It would be wonderful to bring Polish students here and send our students and faculty to Poland. These exchanges enhance mutual understanding between our cultures, benefit our musical study, and encourage the recruitment of good students to the School of Music.”

Teresa Kubiak receives the Doctorate Honoris Causa from Professor Anna Wesolokowska-Firlej, dean of the School of Music, and Professor Wlodzimierz Zalewski, chair of the Vocal Department, University of Łódź.

better ways to expose new generations of Americans to language and cultural understanding that will assure that the U.S. does not find itself falling behind in global pursuits. IU’s programs in critical and strategic languages have already gone a long way to assure that we have the collective ability to stay in touch with our neighbors throughout the world.

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