

ACTFL Update

July 2011

ACTFL Annual Convention and World Languages Expo

All systems are “go” for the ACTFL Annual Convention and World Languages Expo to be held for the very first time in Denver, Colorado from November 18-20, 2011. Barbara Mondloch, ACTFL President, will preside over the gathering in the “mile high city” which promises to be especially exciting as the theme “Empowering Language Educators Through Collaboration” will provide the backdrop for this year’s program. With Milton Chen, Senior Fellow and Executive Director of The George Lucas Educational Foundation, as the keynote speaker, Barb notes, “In my discussions with Milton, he seems energized by our collaboration theme and is prepared to offer his own suggestions about maximizing our initiatives to an even broader audience than just our own profession.” More information, including the entire program, may be viewed and/or downloaded from www.actfl.org.

ACTFL Headquarters

The search is underway for a new Executive Director for ACTFL. The search committee, chaired by Barb Monloch, ACTFL President, hopes to have a new person in place by the time the language profession meets in Denver in November.

Research Priorities

ACTFL has undertaken an initiative, under the direction of Immediate Past-President Eileen Glisan, to first look at the current status of research in our field regarding critical topics that can inform language learning and teaching. A task force identified the topics and then selected authors to review the research in the various areas and write up a report of their findings. These papers will become a special issue of *Foreign Language Annals*, edited by Eileen Glisan and Richard Donato, which will be published next spring thus finalizing phase two of the project. The recommendations made by each paper for further research will provide the basis for the next steps of the project.

Position Statements

The ACTFL Board approved the Position Statement on the Use of Technology after incorporating input from the ACTFL Organizational members provided at the Assembly of Delegates at the November meeting in Boston and online from the general membership. It reads as follows:

Position Statement

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) acknowledges and encourages using the potential of technology as a tool to support and enhance classroom-based language instruction. ACTFL also acknowledges the potential of well supervised and articulated distance learning programs to fill a need where classroom teachers are not available. However, because language is one of the most complex of all human activities and interactions ACTFL also recognizes the pivotal role of a qualified language teacher to incorporate and manage the implementation of technology so that it effectively supports the language learning experience.

The use of technology should never be the goal in and of itself, but rather one tool for helping language learners to use the target language in culturally appropriate ways to accomplish authentic tasks. Further, all language learning opportunities whether provided through technology or in a traditional classroom setting, should be standards-based and help develop students' proficiency in the target language through interactive, meaningful, and cognitively engaging learning experiences, facilitated by a qualified language teacher.

Therefore, ACTFL strongly advises school and university administrators to place the responsibility for language instruction in the hands of qualified language teachers rather than solely in technology programs. Cost-cutting measures such as replacing teachers with software or online programs for language learning or launching new language programs using language software or other technologies will disadvantage language learners if learners will have significantly fewer opportunities to develop language proficiency under the necessary conditions of a dynamic environment and interaction with and guidance from a qualified language teacher.

The position statement on Alternative Teacher Certification and Add-on Certification or Endorsements is still undergoing review and revision and should be finalized by November.

Legislative Update

ACTFL has been working to advance two issues with Congress: first, addressing the Title VI cuts to international and language programs which includes the National Foreign Language Centers and second, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), formerly known as “No Child Left Behind.” In regard to the Title VI cuts, ACTFL has signed on to the letter written by the Coalition for International Education along with JNCL. ACTFL also wrote its own letter supporting Title VI and has information on its website regarding how others can contact their congressional representatives to promote the restoration of funding.

ACTFL has supported Congressman Rush Holt and Paul Tonko’s introduction of H.R. 1994, the “Excellence in Innovation in Language Learning Act”. The bill provides American students with access to high-quality world language instruction starting in the early grades, creates state language councils to share best practices and coordinate language programs across the state, and establishes a national coordinating body made up of leaders from different agencies to ensure that evolving national security and economic needs are met. . Information is on the ACTFL website about how members of our profession can contact their congressman to sign on to the bill. ACTFL has also been working with members at the local level to contact their Senators about sponsoring a similar bill in the Senate. Please contact Marty Abbott if you are interested if you or your state would like to reach out to your Senators.

Modern Greek SIG Proposal

The ACTFL Board approved the establishment of a new Special Interest Group (SIG) for Modern Greek. This is a conditional approval pending the SIG meeting the conditions of a new SIG and having a successful business meeting at the annual convention in Denver.

21st Century Skills Map

ACTFL in collaboration with the Partnership for 21st Century Skills released the World Languages 21st Century Skills Map on March 29, 2011 in a press conference held on Capitol Hill. Among key spokespersons for the map launch were Tony Jackson from the Asia Society and Charles Kolb from the Committee on Economic Development. The highlight was the lesson demonstration by students from Mount Vernon Woods Elementary in Fairfax County, Virginia from a Chinese FLES class focused on geography and math. The skills map can be downloaded from http://www.p21.org/documents/Skills%20Map/p21_worldlanguagesmap.pdf and a video of the entire program including the elementary class can be viewed at www.actfl.org on the main page.

New Technology Award for K-12

The ACTFL Board approved a new award for excellence in the integration of technology into language instruction at the K-12 level. This new award was established to complement the existing similar award for postsecondary. The award will be given for the first time at the 2012 Annual Convention in Philadelphia.

Common Core Standards/Standards for Foreign Language Learning

With the task force on the impact of the National Standards for Foreign Language Education wrapping up its work after the three-year grant and finalizing its report, the ACTFL Board approved an effort to “refresh” the existing language standards based on the 21st Century Skills map and other innovations that have occurred since the release of the original standards in 1996. In addition, this effort will include developing a companion document to the Common Core standards for language arts and mathematics that will identify how the national standards for language education support and reinforce the concepts included in the Common Core. It is important to remember that the term “Common Core” refers to those subjects that will be tested at the federal level and does not refer to whether or not the subject area is a core subject. “Foreign Languages” is listed in the legislation as a core subject. However, similar to social studies, science, the arts, and other subjects, it is not tested at the federal/national level. The development of this document will assist language educators and administrators to promote the case for integrating language education into instructional programs K-16.