

Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Subcommittee on the Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the
District of Columbia
Hearing on “*A National Security Crisis: Foreign Language Capabilities in the Federal Government*”

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Introduction

Good afternoon Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Johnson, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today. My name is Eduardo Ochoa and I am the Assistant Secretary for Postsecondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education. I am pleased to provide testimony for this hearing on national security and federal foreign language capabilities. I particularly appreciate your focus on this issue as I have direct experience having been born in Buenos Aires, Argentina where I attended bilingual schools until my family moved to the U.S. during my junior year of high school. I can tell you I personally understand the importance of foreign language programs as they not only provide students with a better understanding of other cultures, but it also provided me with a unique insight and appreciation of my own culture and language.

Before providing an overview of our programs, let me express the Department’s appreciation of Senator Akaka’s strong, long-standing support for the advancement of foreign language learning in this country.

It is imperative that we improve our federal foreign language capabilities. In 2007, the National Research Council reported that “a pervasive lack of knowledge about foreign cultures and foreign languages threatens the security of the United States as well as its ability to compete in the global marketplace and produce an informed citizenry.”

International Strategy at the U.S. Department of Education

Reflecting these concerns, the U.S. Department of Education recently adopted a fully articulated international strategy designed to simultaneously advance two goals: strengthening the educational attainment of U.S. students and advancing our nation's international priorities. These goals and the underlying objectives reflect:

- the critical importance of a world-class education for all students;
- the need to increase global competencies of all U.S. students;
- a heightened focus on international benchmarking and applying lessons learned from other countries; and
- a renewed focus on education diplomacy and engagement with other countries.

In today's globalized world, no nation can launch a fully effective domestic education agenda without also addressing global needs and trends and nurturing a globally competent citizenry. The reality is that a hyper-connected world requires individuals to have strong 21st century skills and a disposition to engage in the world around them. Such global competencies, including foreign language competency, cannot be seen as an 'add-on' either in higher education or in K-12. They will prepare students, and our nation, for economic competitiveness and jobs, collaboration to address global challenges, national security and diplomacy, and effective engagement in a diverse U.S. society.

A key objective of our plan, which is particularly relevant to the topic of today's hearing, is to increase the global competencies of all U.S. students, including those from historically disadvantaged groups. The need for these competencies, which we think of as "21st Century skills applied to the world", is clear – both for U.S. civil society and for our nation's workforce, and for our national security.

Right now, just 30 percent of U.S secondary students and 8 percent of postsecondary students are enrolled in a foreign language course, a long way from the multi-lingual societies of so many of our economic competitors. Two-thirds of Americans aged 18 to 24 could not find Iraq on a map of the Middle East. And African-Americans and Latinos continue to be underrepresented among those who study abroad.

Many of us are aware of the dramatic decrease in the number of college students who enrolled in any foreign language over the past several decades. Surveys by the Modern Language Association and others indicate that currently only about 8 percent of students at the postsecondary education level are enrolled in a foreign language as compared to about 17 percent of postsecondary education students in the 1960s, and only about 1 percent of students at the postsecondary education level are enrolled in the less commonly taught languages. This downward trend in language enrollment at the postsecondary education level demonstrates the magnitude of the need and the importance of high quality language study starting in the early grades.

The Global Competence Task Force, formed and led by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the Asia Society, has pointed out that, to acquire and exercise global competencies, students must be able to understand the world through disciplinary and interdisciplinary study. They need opportunities to investigate the world beyond their immediate environment and to recognize perspectives – their own and those of others. They must be able to communicate ideas effectively with diverse audiences and take action – to translate their ideas into constructive endeavors.

The development of these skills, including foreign language proficiency, must start early, in elementary and secondary education. U.S. colleges and universities have a responsibility to help students further

develop and deepen these skills, but waiting until postsecondary education to start is too late. This means that that school systems at all levels—from elementary to postsecondary—must place a far greater emphasis on helping students understand their responsibilities as global citizens, helping them work effectively on diverse teams, educating them to acquire cross-cultural competencies, challenging them to make ethical decisions for the common good, and encouraging them to engage in their communities locally and globally. We believe that engaging students in these ways will help our nation meet the President’s 2020 college attainment goal with more graduates ready to lead us well into the 21st Century.

Department of Education Programs: Office of Postsecondary Education

The Department of Education currently awards funds specifically for international learning and foreign language acquisition through the Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE). We support the teaching and learning of foreign languages through a portfolio that consists of 14 discretionary grant programs under Title VI and Fulbright-Hays Act. These programs are grouped into nine programs that received \$66.6 million to operate domestically and four that received \$7.5 million to operate internationally.

Though funding for the international programs has decreased—from \$125.9 million in fiscal year (FY) 2010 to \$74 million in FY 2012—the Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs have managed to keep supporting the most significant needs by being flexible and adaptive. These programs support the Federal government’s investment in the international service pipeline and work in concert with the investments in students through our Federal Student Aid programs that help them access and afford a college education in foreign language and other areas of international importance. In our last survey of postsecondary students in 2007-2008, nearly 270,000 undergraduates majoring in foreign languages received \$1.9 billion in Federal student aid.

By working with colleges and universities, the international programs run by OPE ensure a steady supply of graduates with expertise in less commonly taught languages, world areas, and international studies. Despite the challenges in developing a budget that would provide a world-class education for our students in a tough economic period, the President's FY 2013 budget proposed \$75.7 million, an increase of \$1.7 million over the 2012 appropriation, for the International and Foreign Language Education programs.

One of the primary roles of the Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs is meeting the national need for expertise and competence in foreign languages and in foreign area and international studies. The program particularly addresses the need to develop foreign language competence in less commonly taught languages, such languages as Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Indian languages like Hindi and Urdu, , and African languages like Swahili and Zulu, to name a few. Now, only about 1 percent of students at the postsecondary education level are enrolled in less commonly taught languages.

In 2008, in cooperation with several Federal agencies, including the Departments of Defense and State, as well as selected university linguistics and language professors, our office compiled a list of 78 less commonly taught languages, which were determined to be priority, and posted this list on the Department of Education's Website at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oie/iegps/languageneeds.html>. As required in the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, our office also consults with the other cabinet agencies to obtain recommendations regarding areas of national need for expertise in foreign languages and world regions. These recommendations are also posted on our Website along with the list of 78 priority less commonly taught languages.

The National Resource Centers, supported under Title VI, represent the Department's primary mechanism for developing U.S. language and area expertise on college campuses. The 127 current grantee institutions provide instruction, research and development in over 110 languages from all world areas. Between 2000 and 2008, the number of students enrolled in critical language programs at National Resource Centers nearly doubled. As an example of the effective use of the funds we were given after FY2000, in that year we funded 140 Middle East Foreign Language and Area Studies fellows. In FY 2009 we funded 310—an increase of 120 percent.

Our advanced overseas intensive language program, supported by the Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad program, (and currently funded at approximately \$3 million) gives upper-level undergraduate and graduate students the opportunity to study modern foreign languages overseas. A program assessment completed in fiscal year 2011 for the program found that the majority of students who participated in it between 2000 and 2008 achieved proficiency at the "professional working" level or higher in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The majority of students who participated in the program during that same period are working in positions that allow them to use their language (61 percent) or cultural competence skills (85 percent).

Through their focus on building national capacity to teach less commonly taught languages, especially at the postsecondary level, and developing expertise in area studies especially in strategically important regions of the world, the Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs play an important part in meeting the needs of the Nation's federal workforce, national security, and economic competitiveness needs for individuals with foreign language skills.

In addition to our Title VI National Resource Centers, the companion program—Title VI Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowships (FLAS)—provides funds to colleges and universities for the academic year and summer fellowships to assist undergraduate and graduate students in foreign language and area or international studies. In FY 2011, 735 FLAS students attended summer language programs overseas. These students study at the intermediate or advanced level of their languages. World areas where students study include: Africa, Canada, East Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, Europe/Russia, the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Western Europe. Over 2,600 FLAS fellowships have been given to students to study languages of the Middle East. Title VI funding also supports American Overseas Research Centers. These centers make it possible for our faculty, students, and teachers to enrich their scholarship and research by facilitating the research clearances, making connections to the academic and research communities in strategic regions around the world, and hosting major conferences on topics that are vital to our understanding of the cultures where these Centers operate. In 2010 alone, 11 Centers worked with nearly 1000 social science and humanities faculty and scholars, teachers, and students. The relatively modest funds of \$650,000 are leveraged to do much.

Helping to Build a Competitive Workforce

The Centers for International Business Education (CIBEs), within OPE, serve as resources for the teaching of improved business techniques, strategies, and methodologies that emphasize the international context in which business is transacted; and offer instruction in critical capacity to teach less commonly taught languages and international fields needed to provide an understanding of the cultures and customs of U.S. trading partners. Over 2 million students have taken international business courses through the CIBEs.

Outreach to underserved populations in international education

As we continue to advance international education and foreign language learning through the discretionary grants that we administer, I want to reaffirm our commitment to promoting access and diversity in foreign language learning and international education by serving underserved populations. In FY 2011, over 50 percent of the Title VI National Resource Centers provided outreach services to community colleges and minority-serving institutions. In FY 2012, in order to help promote greater access to international education programs and to diversity in international education, OPE conducted Webinars to reach out to over 300 individuals from community colleges, historically black colleges and universities, and Hispanic-serving institutions (including faculty and prospective project directors) to discuss Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs that could help achieve greater access to diversity in international education for postsecondary education students.

Foreign Language Assistance Program

While Congress chose not to fund the Foreign Language Assistance Program in FY 2012, the Administration is proposing in our reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to create an “Effective Teaching and Learning for a Well-Rounded Education” program. This proposed \$90 million program would support competitive grants to States, local educational agencies, and institutions of higher education and non-profit organizations in partnership with high-needs local educational agencies to develop and expand innovative practices to improve teaching and learning in the foreign languages among other subjects that contribute to a well-rounded education.

Conclusion

The Department has continues to make the case for investing in language and cultural education for all students. The Federal investment in foreign languages and area studies is critical to developing and

sustaining the pipeline of individuals with foreign language and international education skills that are needed to address national security and economic competitiveness needs. These programs also help to enhance the capacity of education institutions and agencies at all levels, including K-12 and postsecondary, to effectively teach and learn foreign languages. We are committed to continuing to improve and refocus our programs to support the goals of the Department's international strategy to strengthen U.S. education and advance the nation's international priorities. We believe firmly that knowledge and understanding of other cultures and languages are, in an increasingly interconnected world, critical to building and sustaining our nation over the coming years.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, for your attention to this important issue, and I would be happy to answer any questions.