

During a recent afternoon in October, a class of students at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLI-FLC) listens intently as their instructor reviews a recent Pashto article from an Afghan newspaper.

Pashto, used by the Pashtun people of Afghanistan in everyday life, is one of the newest languages taught at DLI, the military's language school in Monterey, California.

The article is flashed on an electronic chalkboard, or Smartboard, and the native-speaking instructor uses a marker-shaped stylus to electronically highlight sections and write notes on the side. Students ask questions in Pashto and write their answers on the tablet PCs the school has issued them. As the lesson ends, the instructor reminds everyone to review the lesson's multi-media exercises stored on their iPods.

Pashto is one of the 24 languages taught at DLI's Monterey campus. DLI students are typically young enlistees from all branches of service who aspire to join the military intelligence community as signal intercept

operators, intelligence analysts and counter-intelligence agents. They spend eight hours a day, five days a week in class with additional time dedicated to homework, military training and physical exercise. Depending on the complexity of the language, students can be at DLI as little as six months for Spanish, and up to a year and a half for Arabic.

This Pashto class exemplifies the many changes instituted at DLI over the past few years. Along with adding new languages, DLI has increased the size of the student body, hired many new instructors, added new facilities, incorporated new technology, revamped many curricula, and raised the standards for linguists to graduate. For many returning DLI alumni like me, today's DLI looks nothing like it used to.

DLI's reputation was made during the Cold War by teaching Warsaw Pact languages the military would have needed if tensions had heated up in Europe. Languages such as Russian, German, Polish and Czech were the school's mainstay for decades.

Soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the military's need for linguists



Construct-ive Language Learning

Sean Patrick Marshall describes how the famed Defense Language Institute manages to efficiently teach some of the world's more obscure languages while receiving a complete makeover

trained in Eastern European languages began to wane. The requirements on DLI declined, and the student population was decreased. Russian, Chinese, Korean and Arabic remained part of the school's inventory, but the need for German diminished. Eventually Polish and Czech disappeared from DLI's Monterey campus all together.

Today the DLI faculty takes on new challenges, what many call the "9-11 effect." Input from the commanders in the field, who rely on trained linguists, have determined a new set of requirements for DLI.

"Now, it's Arabic and Central Asia," says Dr. Donald Fischer, DLI's Provost. "Not only do you have Arabic, but Persian Farsi. You have Dari, Pashto, Urdu, Uzbek, Hindi. You are going along the Silk Road, so to speak, now with languages we never had to deal with before. And of course, along with that are cultures we have not had a lot of access. So, now it is up to us to infuse these new languages into our curriculum and get our people up to a very high level of proficiency with it before they leave here."

The Proficiency Enhancement Program (PEP) was developed to regulate the changes and new standards for student achievement. The government uses a five-level scale called the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale for measuring foreign language fluency, where a level three indicates a linguist is capable of maintaining continuous language understanding and function in everyday roles. The Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) along with the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) is the three-part test to determine a student's listening, reading and speaking capability.

For the DLPT given at graduation, DLI aims for current students to achieve a 2+ in listening, a 2+ in reading and 2 in speaking. Owing to PEP, this is an increase from a 2, 2 and 1+ respectively. In the coming years, the standard will increase to 3, 3, 3.

"What we are being asked to do at the Defense Language Institute is get people almost to the professional level with no extension of time to study the languages," says Dr. Fischer.




What is DLI's plan to provide the military with more linguists possessing better skills?

The military's requirement for Pashto was recognized with the attacks on 9/11. Soon after, DLI's Emerging Language Task Force (ELTF) began developing a course and teaching students.

As military operations expanded in Southwest Asia, the ELTF began developing courses necessary to teach Dari, Kurdish (Kurmanji and Sorani), Uzbek, Hindi, Urdu, Turkoman and, most recently, Indonesian.

Pashto was released to the multi-language school in 2006. The military's immediate need for trained Pashto linguists required the faculty to move quickly and develop a system that simultaneously teaches students as they developed the curriculum.

"It's a lousy program, but it is the best program in the world," jokes Dr. Zhu, dean of the Multi-language School, about the uniquely developed course.



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— Monica Lavelle
Multi-language School Program Manager

"We have officers now from Denmark, because we teach Pashto better than anywhere else," says Monica Lavelle, program manager with the Multi-language School. The Pashto team completed the first semester's text book and material in April of this year and the second semester in September. The school plans to finish the third semester by March 2008. Until March, instructors will still be using folders of authentic materials and drafts of exercises.

The growing program already consists of 32 instructors, four curriculum developers and fewer than ten administrators — all teaching a student roster that ranges between 90 to 130 students.

To meet the increased graduation standards without increasing the course length, many of the established course curricula are being made to work harder. DLI's Curriculum Development Directorate, working with the various teaching faculty, recently finished updating the basic courses for Arabic, Mandarin, Persian-Farsi, Russian and Serbo-Croatian. They are now updating Korean, Thai and Hindi.

"We couldn't wait for the new curriculum to be written. We do not have the luxury of waiting years," says Madlain Michael, associate dean for Operations and Academics at DLI's Middle East School III (Arabic Studies). "So what we did was all three (Arabic) schools got together and we looked at what we had. We had semester one and two and three. We took semester three and mixed it with semesters one and two. We removed material. We consolidated material. We made two semesters out of three."

Teachers, students and Curriculum Development then developed a new semester three curriculum together, which will be delivered to the next classes to start the Arabic Basic Course.

DLI focuses on student-centered instruction for all courses. This method actively involves the students with exercises and activities using relevant topics and realistic scenarios. With the use of the

