K-16 Chinese Language Program Begins in Portland

As the result of the culmination of more than a decade of work on foreign language instruction, the University of Oregon's Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS) will develop the nation's first Chinese language program that begins in kindergarten and continues through the college years.

At a September ceremony in Portland, Robert Slater, National Security Education Program (NSEP) director, awarded CASLS a $700,000 annual grant to develop a national model for a K-16 Mandarin Chinese flagship program. "The approach of this program will be radically different from traditional programs. It will ensure that young Oregonians are prepared to lead in the global economy and society," said Carl Falsgraf, director of CASLS.

The curriculum will integrate academic content, field experience, and explicit instruction to produce linguistically and culturally competent college graduates. Portland Public Schools will partner with CASLS to provide a pipeline of students in kindergarten through grade twelve through its heritage speaker and immersion Chinese language programs. Heritage programs build on the language skills of students who speak Chinese at home. Immersion programs deliver the regular school curriculum in Chinese primarily to students for whom Chinese is a second language.

Beginning in kindergarten, the new program will provide students with direct academic instruction in Mandarin. In elementary grades and continuing through college, students will have unparalleled opportunities to connect with communities of Chinese speakers through service learning, internships, and externships in China. Flagship scholars will receive scholarships, individual mentoring, and a rigorous curriculum of content courses in Chinese supported by advanced-level language courses.

"At the University of Oregon, the program will accommodate students in professional fields such as business and law, social sciences, and the humanities," says Falsgraf. "They will receive a liberal arts education in both Chinese and English and upon graduation will be able to perform at a high level in either language to, for instance, negotiate contracts, write academic papers, or give an executive speech."

"The grant is part of the National Flagship Language Initiative (NFLI)," says Slater, "a strategic partnership between the U.S. national security community and higher education to address serious deficits in languages critical to national security. The Chinese language program proposed by CASLS was by far the best out of an extraordinary set of proposals from top universities around the country. It joins eight other NFLI programs, including programs in Arabic, Korean, Persian, and Russian."

Read more: http://casls.uoregon.edu/home.php