

The role of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures in positioning the university for significant growth in international affairs

In the University's Strategic Plan the word "international" occurs repeatedly in every major section of the document. As the Plan makes clear, to be a top-30 university in the United States means becoming competitive at an international level. In this, the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures (FLL) is uniquely qualified to help the university achieve its objectives. The FLL is the only department in the university solely devoted to study of foreign languages, literatures and cultures and to preparing students to live and work in an international environment. Several colleges and departments already have sought out our expertise when developing new international opportunities for their students; we welcome the opportunity to share our knowledge and expertise to help VPI&SU become strong internationally.

What is internationalization in the context of VPI&SU

- Strategic Direction 3.5 recognizes that the global marketplace of the twenty-first century requires graduates to be culturally literate.
- “An internationalized campus has more than a series of courses or programs that promote international learning; it links them together intentionally in order to create a learning environment and to provide a set of experiences to as many students as possible” (Madeline Green).

An internationalized campus means working across disciplinary lines as can be seen in the FLL's collaborations with other departments and colleges:

- We already offer a collaborative and interdisciplinary M.A. in Area Studies with the departments of History and Geography.
- We are a part of three cluster hires and/or Ph.D. proposals with numerous departments in the humanities and social sciences.
- We have an innovative double-major option in engineering.
- Our department initiated and received a \$390,000 Department of Education Title VI grant with the Pamplin College of Business. We are discussing three additional grant proposals.
- We are collaborating with the College of Agriculture & Life Sciences (language courses for Agriculture) and the College of Human Sciences and Education.
- The ties we have established with the Institut National des Télécommunications (INT) have led to dual-degree programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels, the internationalization of Pamplin courses, new study abroad programs and internships, and a new FLL-Management course now part of the Core requirements.

Importance of study abroad

- Most students who study abroad feel it is the most important part of their education.
- Study abroad can be one of the best means to prepare students for living and working in a global context when it is integrated into an overall framework of language and culture courses at VPI&SU.
- A recent Pamplin study reveals that its graduates earn \$2000 a year more if they have gone abroad.

Future directions

- Provide channels of input for the FLL to share its expertise in the university's process of internationalization (e.g. participation on university-level committees including search committees involving international positions)
- Continue to create a university culture wherein the administrators, college deans, chairs, faculty and advising staff stress the importance of international experiences.
- Adopt a language requirement of either four years of a single language in high school or completion of four semesters at VPI&SU.
- Enhance opportunities at VPI&SU by offering minors and majors in more languages as well as offering additional languages: this will bring VPI&SU more in line with top-30 universities.
- Institute greater university support for study abroad: it will raise VPI&SU's national standing.
 - Ensure that university literature stresses the importance of study abroad.
 - Encourage faculty and advising staff to decide how and when international experiences will fit the best into their college/departmental programs.
 - Help prepare students for the linguistic and cultural challenges of living abroad by supporting the study of foreign languages and cultures.
 - Encourage faculty and advising staff to actively promote foreign language and cultural proficiency by working with each student to develop an academic trajectory that includes a meaningful study abroad experience pertinent to that student's career.
 - Monetary support: better support of faculty and students to facilitate study abroad. Pamplin can serve as a model in this respect. It spends approximately \$150,000 and has more than 12 times as many students study abroad than the rest of the university. This college has no plans to cut this money even with the budget crisis.
 - Ensure that the funding mechanisms across the university help sustain new and existing study abroad options. (For example, the Arts and Sciences' [which is half of the university] funding mechanism significantly inhibits program creation.)

Our faculty's international expertise and experience

- Our faculty's international background brings a unique vantage point that draws on in-depth cultural knowledge of 22 countries.
- Our faculty's research and teaching concern issues on five continents (South America, North America, Europe, Africa, Asia), representing 46 countries.
- We bring differing critical perspectives to our students, allowing them to explore how social values and norms are culturally determined.
- We develop cultural and linguistic proficiency, which trains our students to navigate through cultural complexities and dissonance. "The goal [of cross-cultural endeavors] is not a balance of opposites, or a moderate pluralism of opinions but a paradoxical, irreducible confrontation that may change one in the process." (Claire Kramsch)

Because of our expertise, The Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures has a vital leadership role to play on university committees and advisory boards that seek viable programs and initiatives that will realize the university's goal of internationalization and the global competitiveness of Virginia Tech graduates.