Language Study and Funding Information Guide – A Personal Perspective

Please Note: All of the information provided herein has been based on my personal experience with various African language programs in the past. As all of this information is subject to change, I highly recommend that you contact any program of interest directly to verify requirements and deadlines.

The Application Process (FLAS):
The Application for the FLAS grant (year-long or summer) is very simple and streamlined, only requiring you to fill out a 2-page application, write a 2-page essay, provide 2 letters of recommendation and a set of transcripts. A direct link (see below) to the application can be found on Columbia University’s website. All questions should be directed to Sandra Peters, the FLAS coordinator extraordinaire at GSAS: scp3@columbia.edu. As for a strategy to use when applying, you should clearly outline how the target language will help you achieve your academic goals. It is a short essay, so favor clarity and brevity over jargon and theoretical expositions – again, your goal is to make the reader understand why the language is a critical component of your academic and research plans. For applicable languages, please see website: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/gsas/sub/finaid/cstudents/flas/index.html

Experience regarding learning a new language while being a student:
1. How to balance program requirements with learning the language:
Recommendations: As the FLAS covers the cost of the courses, maximize the benefit by taking a full course load, and prioritize your studies as you need to maintain good grades in order to keep your funding. Try to take your language courses as a masters student or, if you are a doctoral student take the courses prior to the semester you take your exams. Once you are in certification/specialization exam mode it is very difficult to focus on language study!

2. Opportunities that arose because of the language study:
After I had completed my elementary and intermediate study of Swahili, I applied for the Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad, which at the time was an 8-week program in Tanzania that focused on intensive Swahili language instruction. It was an amazing opportunity to receive top-notch instruction while being immersed daily in the Swahili language and culture. Also, as a direct result of my language fluency, I had more credibility and legitimacy in the field when I was conducting my field research in Tanzania in 2008. In other words, my project would not have been successful if I was not fluent in Swahili.

3. How it compliments your education:
Bilingualism has benefits too numerous to list. Besides giving one better access and understanding of another culture, it fosters more meaningful communication between people. Becoming fluent in another language will allow you to have a far more enriching and far less frustrating experience while in-country. Plus, the knowledge you gain, the contacts you make and the friendships you build will be invaluable.

What you may not know… Although you generally must do your academic year FLAS at your university, your summer FLAS can take you all over the country as there are a multitude of intensive programs that exist at universities across the nation. In addition, although your academic year FLAS funding must stem from your university, you can apply for summer FLAS funding from any university that has Title VI funding for a program that is eligible to receive FLAS funds. For example, as a Columbia University Student, I received a summer FLAS from Boston University to study Swahili at Indiana University. Please consult the FLAS Coordinator for further information on summer programs in the US and abroad that are eligible.

Summer Cooperative African Languages Institute, or SCALI:
What is SCALI? It is an eight-week summer intensive program that teaches a pre-determined lineup of African languages. See last year’s offerings here: http://africa.msu.edu/scali/languages.php. The program is usually hosted by a Title VI Institution, with the program rotating every two years. Last year it was at Michigan State University (MSU), so it should be there again this year. The advantages of SCALI are:
1. Intense daily concentration on language study over a period of 8 weeks = 2 full semesters of language.
   (Important: Only graduate-level language courses are transferable for credit at Teachers College, so if you need any language credits to be transferred – even credits from Columbia University, check with the Registrar’s Office before applying! Generally, only advanced-level study is applicable for transfer.)
2. You will be studying with fellow students from all over the country who are interested in your language and geographic region of study, so the networking opportunities are tremendous. There are usually plenty of other academic and cultural opportunities available that range from weekly student presentations on their research and work, to cooking classes, and even African Film Festivals.
3. Leaving NY for the summer offers a fresh perspective and insight into how other universities approach language and regional studies. Plus, the rent is generally far cheaper in the Midwest, where many of these programs happen to be situated.

For more information on the SCALI program and Title VI Universities, please see the following links:
SCALI Home and Contact Information (Currently at MSU):
http://africa.msu.edu/scali/index.php
Title VI Funding Opportunities:
http://africa.msu.edu/scali/funding.php

Summer Institute for Languages of the Muslim World, or SILMW:
SILMW is another language institute which is an eight-week program that focuses on languages spoken in the Muslim world. It is similar to SCALI in all aspects mentioned above, and differs only in its focus on Muslim society and culture. This program is permanently housed in the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and also accepts FLAS funding. Like SCALI, the languages offered change from year to year, depending on demand. For more information on SILMW please see the following link:
http://silmw.linguistics.uiuc.edu/index.html

Group Projects Abroad (GPA, described in earlier section):
The GPA is a Fulbright-Hays funded initiative that sends students abroad to study languages intensively in-country. Regarding African languages, there are currently 3 programs available at the following links:
Summer 2010 Swahili: http://www.uga.edu/afrstu/gpa/
Summer 2010 Yoruba: http://www.africa.ufl.edu/pal/yoruba-gpa.html
Summer 2010 Zulu: http://www.africa.upenn.edu/afl/gpa_announcement.htm

NSEP Boren:
When you are ready to do your Masters or Doctoral research abroad, this fellowship offers an opportunity to get funding for language study in conjunction with funding for your project. Please see the following link:
http://www.nsep.gov/flagship/ or http://borenawards.org/boren_fellowship
They have a webinar on December 2, 2009 if you are interested in learning more:
http://borenawards.org/event/show/boren_fellowship_webinar_183

Other Programs: Although this flyer focuses mostly on African languages, a simple Google search will help uncover other language institutes that are FLAS-eligible, like the South Asia Summer Language Institute (SASLI) at the following link: http://sasli.wisc.edu/funding/flas.htm. Good luck in your search!

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Programs: 1) Summer Cooperative African Languages Institute (SCALI), Elementary Swahili, Indiana University; 2) Intermediate Swahili, Columbia University; 3) Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad in Tanzania, Intensive Advanced Swahili, University of Georgia; 4) NSEP/Boren Fellowship-funded study at the MS-TCDC Center in Tanzania, Intermediate and Advanced Swahili; 5) Summer Institute for Languages of the Muslim World (SILMW), Advanced Swahili, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.
Grants: 1. Summer FLAS from Boston University; 2) Academic Year FLAS from Columbia University; 3) Fulbright-Hays GPA from University of Georgia; 4) NSEP/Boren Fellowship; 5) Summer FLAS from Columbia University 6) Summer FLAS from University of Illinois (unable to accept).