



LANGUAGE LEARNING

# Profiles

Exclusive Licensor of Sony Language Learning Software



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE

## HOW A UNIVERSITY IS USING FEDERAL FUNDING TO GIVE VOICE TO LANGUAGES LESS SPOKEN.



A UMES student using the Sony digital language lab technology.

The Foreign Language Instructional Center (FLIC) at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) is both a place and a program. At its core is a 20-seat, state-of-the-art computer lab; at its heart is an inspirational program that, according to Tammy Gharbi, M.Ed, Acting Program Coordinator, is “changing the landscape of the foreign language offering that UMES is able to give its students, faculty, staff and community.” UMES is a four-year, Historically Black College and University (HBCU) located about three hours from the Baltimore/Washington metropolis in the small community of Princess Anne, Maryland. It is part of the University System of Maryland, which consists of 11 universities and two research institutions.

Just a few years ago, the UMES foreign language program consisted of only Spanish and French. Today, thanks to a Title III, Part B Grant from the U.S. Department of Education, FLIC has the capacity to enhance teaching in over 100 languages, some of which were targeted and outlined in the Title III grant proposal.

### Funding from Title III, Part B made the program possible.

The Title III Institutional Aid Program was created as part of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) to equalize educational opportunities for disadvantaged students by assisting eligible colleges and universities. Eligible institutions are Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Historically Black Graduate Institutions (HBGIs), and other institutions with limited financial resources that serve a high percentage of students receiving need-based federal financial assistance. UMES was awarded the Title III grant for the purpose of creating a program that would address less commonly taught languages, especially those that are deemed critical needs languages. Based on the

exact languages written into the fabric of the proposal, FLIC at UMES now teaches credit-bearing classes in Arabic, Chinese and Haitian Creole as well as the Spanish and French which were already in place at UMES. Several more languages are in development including Russian, Akan-Twi and Yoruba.

“This is really answering the call that’s been put out by the government that says folks in education need to produce more speakers of foreign languages, and they have identified these languages in the less commonly taught language pool, which are critical need,” said Gharbi. “And we are ‘plain and simple,’ answering that call to produce more graduates with foreign language skills.”

The grant proposal was written to create a program, and within the program was to be a space – an actual physical lab – devoted to teaching the less commonly taught languages. So they built the language lab from the ground up. For the technology to run it, they chose the Sony Virtuoso™ and Soloist® digital language learning software acquired through their local SANS authorized reseller, Chester Technical Services, Inc. Two years later the language lab was up and running.

### Answering an unmet need in the community.

In their mission to teach less commonly taught languages, FLIC serves UMES students, the campus community, which includes faculty and staff, and the business community at large, which is currently mostly law enforcement and healthcare. “And we’re also working with the K-12 community,” said Gharbi. “Our goal is to bring less commonly taught languages to all these groups. What we believe we’re able to do by marrying the technology with qualified instruction is to make every day, every semester, every course more valuable for every single learner, whatever group they fall in.”



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*University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES), the State’s Historically Black 1890 Land-Grant institution, emphasizes baccalaureate and graduate programs in the liberal arts, health professions, sciences, and teacher education. In keeping with its land-grant mandate, the University’s purpose and uniqueness are grounded in distinctive learning, discovery, and engagement opportunities in agriculture, marine and environmental sciences, technology, engineering and aviation sciences, health professions, and hospitality management. Degrees are offered at the bachelors, masters and doctoral levels.*

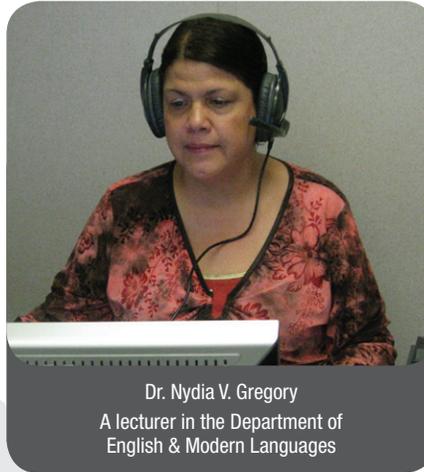
Although not every language class at UMES is taught in the FLIC lab, several instructors teach Spanish, French, Haitian Creole and Arabic classes, which meet two to three times a week; the 20-seat lab is often fully booked. In addition to the for-credit classes, they also use the lab for non-credit classes, which are determined by local community needs. These classes include Spanish for healthcare personnel and law enforcement and Haitian Creole for social work, health professions and mission travel. They also offer personal enrichment classes, such as a 10-week session in Arabic. Moreover, the campus community is served in other ways that include training faculty engaged in overseas projects.

## Achieving the mission through digital language lab technology.

The Sony Virtuoso and Soloist digital language lab proved its value in helping meet the FLIC mission, when the FL instructors started realizing the software's many features and benefits. Dr. Nydia V. Gregory, a lecturer in the Department of English & Modern Languages, utilizes the lab every day in her Spanish classes. She feels there are some class management activities that could not be realized before the digital lab technology was implemented, such as pairing students without having to move around the classroom and giving students more "one on one" interaction for their practice.

In addition, the lab aids instructors with assessment because they get instant feedback either by a student's completion of a scored exercise or by the instructor listening to pronunciation "station by station." Without the lab, the instructor would need a great deal more time to check pronunciation via one-on-one conversation, whereas the technology allows the instructor to listen in while the student completes a task.

Dr. Gregory also believes that the technology provides efficiencies in preparing students for "real-world" communication in the target language. "Students are not just getting classroom instruction and interaction, because they are able to use the language program to practice listening, speaking, reading, and conversational skills on a one-to-one basis. This has tremendously assisted our more shy students," she said.



Dr. Nydia V. Gregory  
A lecturer in the Department of English & Modern Languages

As Dr. Gregory has integrated the Sony Virtuoso and Soloist technology into her everyday curriculum, she has discovered ways in which the system enhances the learning as well as the teaching experience:

- Because students log in to the Sony Soloist software with their first names, she can learn their names faster without taking up class time.
- Students are more independent in their vocabulary acquisitions.
- The system allows her to accurately divide the class time to maintain students' interest and focus in the class.
- Students who may be running late do not hinder the class progress with interruptions.
- The system allows students to work in pairs or small groups for their activities.

## It's all about language proficiency.

"I can say that all of the instructors who have used the lab, whether it's Dr. Gregory who uses it the most, semester after semester, or the instructor who has just started bringing in a section of French class, for example... they're very excited about using the technology," said Gharbi. "And most importantly, we're finding that in every case where an instructor has moved their class from a traditional classroom to the FLIC lab, they are seeing improved scores, semester by semester. So it's all about language proficiency, and we are seeing with real numbers that the students are receiving better test scores in the lab versus a traditional classroom," she added.

## Are there major plans for FLIC?

UMES currently does not offer a foreign language major, but their progress in that direction is truly impressive. "To me, it's huge that until only recently, UMES students only had languages like Spanish and French. In a very short time, as a result of the focus that has been put on FL learning, UMES students have more than double the number of foreign languages they can choose from by adding Arabic, Chinese and Haitian Creole."

So what's in the future for FLIC? "It would be nice to think that something like a world language minor might be in our future, but even our present offerings are benefitting students. In return we are hoping to improve the language competency of the students who graduate from the university and go out into the workforce. That includes military service, volunteer work, and graduate school."



And then Gharbi added, "Wherever the UMES graduate is going, we want them to take foreign language with them." And if any university has a program in place to make that happen, it's UMES.

For more information on Title III, Part B grants applications or eligibility, go to [www2.ed.gov/programs/ldquestitle3b/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/ldquestitle3b/index.html).



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