



## SDLC 105: Introduction to Self-Directed Language Learning

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Regular class meetings: 3:00-4:15pm T in INTC 344

“Language is the most massive and inclusive art we know, a mountainous and anonymous work of unconscious generations.”

~Edward Sapir, *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*, 1921

“The marvelous thing is that in studying linguistics, we find that the universe as a whole is patterned, ordered, and to some degree intelligible to us.”

~Kenneth L. Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior*, 1967

“SDLAP students gain linguistic and cultural competence through interactive endeavors, develop their abilities to adapt and respond to new linguistic and cultural environments in a world of rapid political, economic and cultural change, and they come to see language learning as a lifelong process. Most importantly, by providing their own intrinsic motivation to learn, SDLAP students take full responsibility for their language learning and can take full credit for their success.”

~Maria Kosinski, NASILP President, 2017

“In an era of globalization, it is vital for universities to be responsive to the ever-changing linguistic and cultural needs of their communities, particularly the vital need to introduce language learning, LCTLs or more widely accessible languages. By strengthening their commitment and ongoing support to community outreach, universities can link the pedagogic, linguistic, and organizational skills of their students and faculty with their communities to promote language learning for transnational communication and connections.

~Martha Nyikos and Vesna Dimitrieska, Indiana University, 2015.

## What is the SDLAP?

Established in the spring of 2009, the Self-Directed Language Acquisition Program (SDLAP) provides opportunities for students to pursue less-commonly-taught languages (LCTLs). Students who have completed the COM2 requirement are eligible to enroll in the SDLAP after an introductory consultation with Dr. Michael Marsh-Soloway. The SDLAP is a five-course program, consisting of an introductory half-credit weekly seminar, SDLC 105, along with concurrent or successive full credit units of self-directed study working with a network of community partners in SDLC 110, 111, 112, 113. Students may opt to take as many or as few courses in the program as they choose. Languages routinely offered through the SDLAP include Korean, Persian (Farsi/Dari), Hebrew, and Turkish. Aside from these regular offerings, the SDLAP has also supported students pursuing studies in Amharic, Bahasa Indonesia, Bengali, Czech, Dutch, Greek, Hindi, Kannada, Portuguese, Quechua, Sanskrit, Swedish, and Wolof. In the nine years since its inception, the SDLAP has assisted and advised several hundred UR students in their endeavors to acquire new linguistic skills, global knowledge, and cultural sensitivities. Students preparing for or returning from study or service abroad may also use the SDLAP to begin or continue the study of a language not included in traditional courses.

The SDLAP, on average, annually produces 1-2 recipients of the U.S. Department of State Critical Language Scholarship (CLS), and enrolled students often pursue academic initiatives that coincide with diverse fellowship awards, including Fulbright, Gilman, Rhodes, and others. Students also tend to pursue diverse degrees in Global Studies, LLC, LALIS, and International Business, and they are encouraged to develop interdisciplinary applications of their language skills. The SDLAP is open to students in all concentrations, and students are encouraged to build applied, task-based objectives in their language studies to promote professional readiness.

In supporting the SDLAP, the Global Studio has endeavored to become both a physical and digital hub for autonomous language learners. Reflection and dialogue are crucial components of community building. In the course, you will document your own the Ning (<http://sdlapur.ning.com/>), an online forum, social network, and archive of student e-portfolio projects exploring diverse topics related to language acquisition, intercultural competence, experiential reflection, and the shared aggregation of helpful tools, strategies, and resources. There are separate syllabi for SDLC 105 and 110. The former is a kind of crash course in applied and theoretical linguistics, whereby students engage the abstract structural components of language vis-à-vis Chomsky's Universal Grammar. By considering questions of systematic composition, perception, culture, and social pragmatics, students will then share specific features of their target languages, and frame their own goals, task-based activities, and learning plans (syllabi) relative to unique interests, skills, and applied concentrations. SDLC 110, correspondingly, stresses the communicative activation of linguistic skills obtained through regular contact with Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistants (FLTAs) and community-based language partners coordinated in conjunction with the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement (CCE). **Students may opt to take SDLC 105 and 110 concurrently or in separate semesters.** The SDLAP emphasizes increased linguistic proficiency, community engagement, and learner autonomy. The students in the program enjoy the intellectual freedom to devise their own syllabi, learning goals, assessment metrics, activities, and content selections.

## Course Goals:

Students in this course will gain insights into how languages all function according to systematic principles and structures. Despite the fact that you are each studying a different language, whether it be Korean, Turkish, Hebrew, Malay, Wolof, or something else entirely, languages tend to share more similarities than they do differences. Parsing these relationships will enhance your understanding of a target language, and promote your ability to fulfill individualized goals with increased proficiency across each of the four skills. While we will cover structural concepts, moving from units of sound in the study of phonology and phonemics, to morphology and syntax underlying the basis of grammar, to the more nebulous realms of meaning in semantics and semiotics, you will endeavor to apply theoretical linguistic concepts introduced in class to your pursuit of a new language in an applied, communicative context.

We will explore complex relationships between language, cultures, and societies. We will examine the phenomena of language both together and independently, sharing interests, frustrations, and curiosities along the way. This class emphasizes persistence and creativity, and as its central goal, encourages students to become successful self-directed language learners.

This course stresses task-based activities to help students accomplish real-world objectives and connect more meaningfully with others. Students are strongly encouraged to gain exposure to different tasks in community-based partnerships to stimulate interactions in the target language with diverse native speakers. These task-based activities advance linguistic skills and intercultural sensitivities. Communicative ability remains paramount in language acquisition. **In order to learn a new language, you need to speak it!** The Self-Directed Language Acquisition Program (SDLAP) will be working closely with the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement to identify synergies to help you facilitate language exchanges with individuals and organizations in the greater Richmond area and beyond.

Examples of community partners include

- ReEstablish Richmond
- The International Rescue Committee (IRC)
- The Virginia Interfaith Center
- Capital Area Immigrants' Rights Coalition
- Adult Education Courses led by Prof. Sumi Kim and Rev. Hyunchan Bae at the Lord Jesus Korean Church in Bon Air
- Feel free to suggest others!
  - Once you identify prospective community partners, you should research their activities and consult with Dr. Marsh-Soloway and the Bonner Center to discuss how best to bring these interactions to life.

Working with these organizations will encourage you to activate language skills develop interpersonal communication skills and build both linguistic and cultural sensitivities. You and your community partners should endeavor to overcome problems, work toward your unique learning goals, and contribute to public discourses based on your experiences. You are encouraged to adapt assignments and interactions from the SDLAP into published papers, podcasts, articles, and even short films or digital storytelling projects.

After each meeting with community representatives, students and their partners should come away with knowledge of new words, phrases (collocations), sentence structures, cultural values, etc. The more you use the target language, moreover, the more it will increase your abilities to use the presented linguistic information in other contexts and contribute to the realization of related structures when applied to other tasks. The nature of these exchanges can be framed in such a way to ground the delivery of linguistic content in real-world challenges. UR students should identify language-based content areas that would be of the most significant benefit to community members, and vice-versa. For instance, these areas could foreseeably include college admissions for first-generation families, career development in the articulation of CVs and cover letters, steps to start a business, or explanations regarding governmental documentation, licensure, regulation, etc. Students would then be tasked with the aspect of explaining these cultural concepts in the target language, which would not only help community partners, but also advance foundational linguistic acquisition efforts. The language exchange model is often a helpful framework to bring about mutually beneficial learning outcomes for both students and language partners. In this sense, the activities promote mutually beneficial learning outcomes and increased standards of inclusivity and reciprocity. Just as you learn from your community partners, so too, will your community partners learn from you.

**Course Organization:**

Each class meeting will be organized around a discussion topic and a practice session in which students will acquire new linguistic knowledge and enhanced communication skills. Digital resources across a variety of media formats will be compiled by students in the class across different languages to encourage the shared distribution of meaningful content, learning strategies, and engagement approaches. All activities in the class should help students meet their individual learning goals.

**Course Assignments:**

The calendar of assignments for SDLC 105 is posted on the SDLAP Blog:

<https://blog.richmond.edu/sdlap/>

You will also be asked to document your learning experiences on the private SDLAP e-portfolio platform, Ning:

<http://sdlapur.ning.com/>

**Course Topics:**

- What are the underlying structural components of all languages?
  - Can you identify them in the language you wish to study?
- What does it mean to be an autonomous (self-directed) language learner?
  - What knowledge and skills do you need to develop?
  - How will you become an autonomous learner?
- What is fluency? What is proficiency? How will you define your learning goals?
- Can you identify community partners who would simultaneously advance and benefit from your learning interests?
- What reciprocal, task-based activities will stimulate increased proficiency and intercultural learning?
- What resources will you use to learn?
  - Which strategies will you use to learn from these resources?
- How is 'culture' defined? How are language and culture related?
- How are human languages systematically organized?
  - Are there any properties in your language you find cumbersome, difficult, or even disorderly?
- What is distinctive about the language you are studying?
- What is the purpose of working with a language partner?
  - What are your responsibilities?
  - What are the language partner's responsibilities?
  - Have you coordinated logistics with Dr. Marsh-Soloway and the Bonner CCE?
  - If you are enrolled concurrently in SDLC 110, have you scheduled a minimum of 2 hours per week with your community partners?
  - Are there any special concerns or questions you have about working with community partners and their organizations?
- How are human languages grouped into families?
  - To which family does your language belong? How will this help you learn?

**Course Activities**

Create and implement a learning plan

**\*\*This is a crucial activity that will guide your self-directed learning tasks and objectives in SDLC 110.**

Consider theoretical structural components of language- what do all languages have in common?

Categorize and internalize these systematic properties to start communicating in your target language

Demonstrate your understandings of these concepts on two midterm exams

Practice learning from a variety of resources (print, audio, video, etc.)

Engage readings pertaining to world languages, cultures, linguistics, pedagogy, psychology, cognitive science, and second language acquisition

Deliver presentations and collaboratively engage ideas presented by your classmates

Reflect on your readings and your language-learning progress

Develop an electronic portfolio on Ning to document engagement with class

readings, cultural projects, posts on course discussion forums, learning initiatives.

**\*\*Students working with a language partner in SDLC 110 will create bi-weekly language journals on task-based objectives to reflect on language-learning successes, struggles, investigative questions, and intellectual interests.**

Other aspects of language learning to reflect upon when it's appropriate:

- your emotions about language learning (pride, frustration, enthusiasm, etc.);
- connections between the language you are learning and the culture of where it is spoken;
- experimenting with new learning strategies for listening, speaking, reading, and writing;
- a successful experience in your learning;
- a not-so-successful experience;
- revisions in your task lists and/or short-term and long-term goals.

### Grade distribution

| Requirement   | Percentage                 |
|---|----------------------------|
| <p><b>2 Two-page reflection papers</b><br/> <b>**Papers should be a minimum of 500 words. Upload to your profile on the Ning to submit your work**</b></p> <p>1) Reflect on your experiences as a language learner. What did you enjoy? What did you dislike? Think about the FIRE model and the surveys you have just completed. What kind of learner are you? What kinds of language learning activities suit your learning style? How do you think you should expand your learning activities?<br/> <b>500-word paper due by 5:00pm on Sunday, January 18 (Week 1)</b></p> <p>2) Reflect on your learning experiences this semester.<br/> (a) What insights have you gained about yourself as a language learner and cultural explorer? What did you find difficult? What have you enjoyed? How will you continue your learning?<br/> (b) Which readings and learning activities did you find most useful? What would you like to learn more about?<br/> <b>500-word paper due by 5:00pm on Thursday, April 30 (Week 16)</b></p> | 20% in total<br>(10% each) |
| <p><b>2 Short Take-Home Midterm Exams</b></p> <p>1) Short exam on Articulatory Phonetics and Phonology in class on <b>Tuesday, February 24 (Week 7)</b></p> <p>2) Short exam on Grammar- Morphology and Syntax on <b>Tuesday, April 7 (Week 13)</b></p>   | 20% in total<br>(10% each) |

|  |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
| <p><b>3 Presentations: All presentations will be recorded in class and posted to the course PanOpto collection on Blackboard.</b></p> <p>1) How have you organized your self-directed learning plan and reciprocal exchanges with community partners? Have you identified individuals and organizations, who would simultaneously advance and benefit from your language learning endeavors? What have you learned so far? How will your studies allow you to investigate your target language and culture more deeply? What first prompted your interest to acquire communicative skills, and motivated you to start learning?<br/> <b>Recorded in class on Tuesday, January 27 (week 3)</b></p> <p>2) "You never really know something until you teach it." Prepare a 5-10-minute lesson to teach your classmates a series of key concepts, or even a basic thematic unit from your target language. Would exercises help demonstrate your ideas? Feel free to deliver a short worksheet.<br/> <b>Recorded in class on Tuesday, March 24 (week 11)</b></p> <p>3) Students will complete a research-based project on a cultural topic of their choosing. This project should demonstrate how they have engaged deeper knowledge of this topic by pursuing activities in their learning plans. Students are expected to incorporate 10-20 phrases and expressions from the target language that are relevant to the topic.<br/> <b>Recorded in class on Tuesday, April 14 and 21 (weeks 14 and 15)</b></p> | <p>30% in total<br/>(10% each)</p> |
| <p><b>10 Ning Discussion Posts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The schedule and thematic topics for Ning discussion posts appear in the SDLC 105 calendar of activities, assignments, and deadlines.</li> <li>○ <a href="http://blog.richmond.edu/sdlap/files/2026/01/Spring-2026-SDLC-105-Calendar-of-Course-Activities-Assignments-and-Deadlines-1-1.pdf">http://blog.richmond.edu/sdlap/files/2026/01/Spring-2026-SDLC-105-Calendar-of-Course-Activities-Assignments-and-Deadlines-1-1.pdf</a></li> <li>○ Your posts should be at least 250 words in length. Your submissions should demonstrate thoughtful engagement with course concepts and assigned prompts. Additionally, your posts should stimulate dialogue and debate with other members of the class.</li> <li>○ Throughout the semester, students may earn limited extra-credit towards this grade category for participation in special activities or events concerning language, literature, and linguistics, pending the prior approval of the instructor.</li> </ul>   | <p>20%<br/>(2% each)</p>           |
| <p><b>Collaborative Engagement</b><br/> Throughout the semester, you should look to comment on at least five different classmates' e-Portfolio profiles to share ideas and foster a community of learning.</p>   | <p>5%<br/>(1% each)</p>            |
| <p><b>Participation</b><br/> Students will be expected to answer questions in class, contribute meaningful discussion commentary, and critique content and materials presented by both classmates and Dr. Marsh-Soloway throughout the course. Moreover, attendance in the course is crucial. Be sure to review policies regarding attendance and punctuality on the next page.</p>  | <p>5%</p>                          |



**Attendance and Punctuality Policy**

Student absences can have a major effect on grade performance and overall progress in the course. Therefore, regular attendance is required. **It is your responsibility to notify the instructor whenever you expect to miss our regular weekly meetings or arrive more than 10 minutes late to class.**

Arriving late to class is disrespectful to the instructor and other students. Tardiness (10 minutes or more) on more than two occasions will result in the automatic deduction of 4 points out of 10 possible from your overall participation grade. **Additionally, students who are absent from class more than two class meetings without prior approval from the instructor will be asked to withdraw from the class or automatically receive a grade of Incomplete.**

**Grade Center**

Grades will be compiled in Gradebook on the course Blackboard site. Students are encouraged to check the Gradebook to keep up-to-date tabs on their progress and grade projections in the course.

**Helpful resources**

**Bonner Center for Civic Engagement:** <https://engage.richmond.edu/>

**CAPS:** <https://wellness.richmond.edu/caps/index.html>

**Academic Skills Center:** <https://asc.richmond.edu/>

**Writing Center:** <https://writing.richmond.edu/>

**Speech Center:** <https://speech.richmond.edu/>

**Weinstein Learning Center:** <https://wlc.richmond.edu/>

**Disability Service Office:** <https://disability.richmond.edu/>

**Global Studio:** <https://globalstudio.richmond.edu/>

\*You may send drafts of any and all materials to Dr. Marsh-Soloway for early review. \*

\*\*Extensions may be accommodated pending review of the instructor.\*\*

\*\*\*Any work not submitted by 5:00pm on Thursday, April 30 will be marked with a score of zero.  
Pending the discretion of the instructor,  
missing primary assignments may lead to a final grade of incomplete.\*\*\*