

## Collaboration Leads to Success in Chinese Language Program

Arya Suruwijoyo, Staff Reporter

According to Chinese proverb, "One person's plans are short, but those made by two people are long." Similar to the more familiar English expression, "two heads are better than one," the saying captures the implicit wisdom that collaboration is key to long-lasting success.

Chinese language instructors Jean Wu and Denise Huang Gigliotti have taught Mandarin together for three years in the Department of East Asian Languages and Literature.

Coordinating and carrying out Chinese language classes for first to fourth year students, the two work in tandem to ensure that students stay interested and motivated in what is commonly regarded as one of the most challenging languages for non-native speakers to learn.

Professor Gigliotti — or Huang Laoshi, as she is more commonly known by her students — arrived at the University three years ago. She and Wu Laoshi, who has been coordinator of the Chinese language program since 1997, immediately recognized their professional compatibility and the potential it held for enhancing the program.

"I think one of the reasons that we are working so well together is that we communicate well," Wu said. "We have this mutual respect and trust, and we have this common goal of building a strong Chinese language program."

The Department of East Asian Languages and Literature has entrusted the planning and execution of the program to Wu and Gigliotti with little oversight. From their offices in Villard Hall, the two equally divide the task of teaching various classes.

"What we do is share the responsibility," Gigliotti said. "We take over what each other's left off."

For two years now Gigliotti has taught first year and fourth year Chinese, while Wu has taught second year and third year. This year they have reorga-



*Denise Huang Gigliotti (standing, center) with students. Huang Laoshi coordinates the Mandarin language program together with Senior Instructor Jean Wu (in photo at left demonstrating calligraphy at FLIS 2005).*

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# Study Abroad in Japan: YLC Scholars Reflect

Ariel Olson, Newsletter Editor

Hundreds of students use YLC each term, but few of them have ever met the language center's namesake. Nearly 15 years ago, Mr. Osamitsu Yamada generously donated more than \$300,000 to help launch what has become one of the university's primary foreign language resources. Since then he has continued to enrich the undergraduate experience of between one and three U of O students annually by providing full scholarships for a year of study in Japan.

Three former students shared their experiences on the Yamada scholarship and their impressions of Mr. Yamada himself.

Mariko Selle, a 1995-1996 Yamada Scholar, studied at Keio University in Tokyo. She was grateful that the scholarship not only got her to Japan, but that it enabled her to see the country's diversity as well.

"[It] allowed me to do a little traveling within Japan while I was there. I did a tour of Shikoku Island and the city of Kyoto, and I got to see a totally different part of Japan."

Julia Bossers, a 2000-2001 Yamada Scholar, said that her time in Japan challenged her to widen her comfort zone as well.

"My experience in Japan taught me that there is nothing to be feared from the foreign, but always something to be learned if you have a little compassion and a whole lot of patience," Bossers said.

Cross-cultural communication and understanding is the primary objective of the Yamada scholarship exchange. Students from all majors are eligible for the program and are placed in a variety of Japanese universities depending on their fields

of interest. There they meet other international Yamada scholars, primarily (though not exclusively) from East and Southeast Asian countries, and engage in the challenging and rewarding process of cultural exchange.

Eric McReady, a 1994-1995 Yamada Scholar who currently lives and works in Japan, recalled Yamada's ardent effort to increase cross-cultural dialogue through his varied philanthropic endeavors in countries and universities around the globe.

"He is absolutely committed to language study as an avenue for international understanding and cooperation," McReady said.

Yamada's commitment to his exchange program extends to providing personal support for his scholars as well. Bossers remembered her year in Japan as a period of intense personal inquiry and she said that Yamada always served as an encour-

aging mentor.

"When I told Mr. Yamada that, maybe I didn't want to be a Japanese translator anymore he asked me, 'Well, what do you want to be?' I timidly replied, 'Maybe President? America needs fixing.' He laughed and said in his very best English, 'VERY GOOD!'"

Selle also appreciated Yamada's thoughtful planning to provide for the academic advising and personal support of his scholars.

"He wasn't necessarily a personal mentor to me," Selle said, "but he definitely put members of his staff in place that were. He was a very well respected and effective leader that had the insight to provide those services for the students."



*YLC Director Jeff Magoto and Osamitsu Yamada touring facilities during a visit in 1998.*

## YLC Quarterly

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Cover Photo: Jean Wu teaches Chinese calligraphy at last year's FLIS Day.

# Yamada Language Center: Reflections and History

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controversial use of video, which still bore the onus of an “entertainment” vehicle, as opposed to something educational. Though I was not involved in finding the funds for its establishment, I felt fortunate to participate in some of the decision-making (i.e. design, technology choices).

Trying to anticipate the direction future language learning would take inevitably involved a certain amount of guesswork. Of course, the major electronic companies producing equipment tended to promote their own view of what that direction would be. Amazingly, schools generally only found funds to purchase the lowly VHS player years after it became standard in the home.

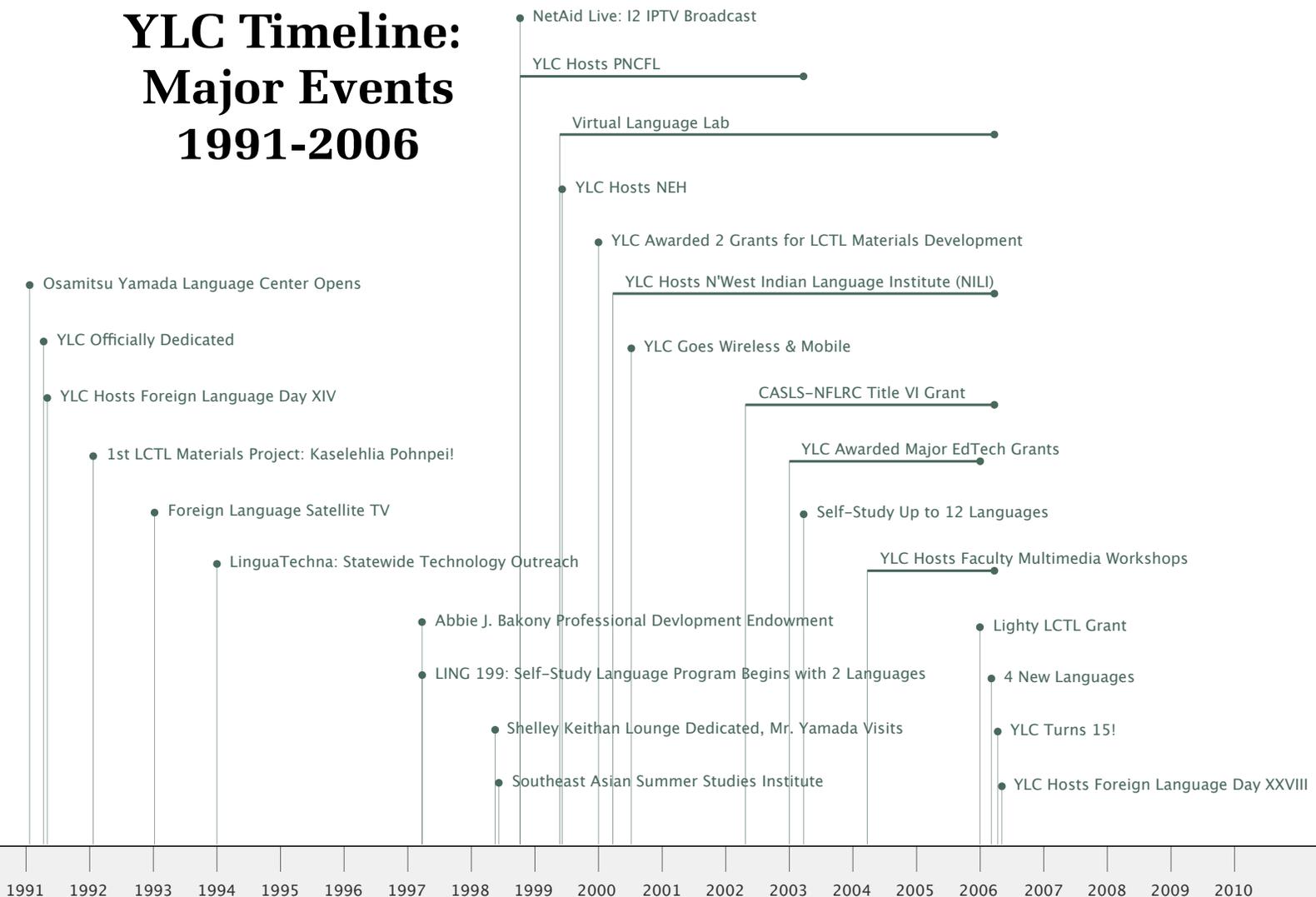
Not all went smoothly at first. The biggest difficulty, as I remember, was in identifying a director for YLC who could work with all the language-teaching constituencies in an amicable and

fair manner. There were at least two individuals who tried, but found the job daunting and went on to other less stressful work. The Center has been lucky to find its current director, Jeff Magoto, without whom it would not have achieved the success it enjoys today.

Others throughout the University may not realize the role that YLC has played in gaining acceptance (i.e. funding) for a series of national language institutes sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH.) Those ended in 1999, but I know other programs have found a home in Yamada as well, including the self-study program, which is especially important for students interested in less commonly taught languages.

*Professor Curland can be reached by email at: david@curland.net.*

## YLC Timeline: Major Events 1991-2006



# A Welcome Challenge: AEI Manages Influx of Saudi Students

*Arya Surowidjojo, Staff Reporter*

Since August, the American English Institute (AEI) has provided English language training for a large number of students from Saudi Arabia, all of whom are funded by a new, national scholarship from the Saudi government. This rapid influx of English students poses new challenges to AEI faculty and staff as they attempt to meet the needs of this new student demographic.

The Saudi scholarship program has made waves all over the country, stirring up many agencies concerned with the integration of these students into American universities. Administered through the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Higher Education and the U.S. Department of State, the scholarship funds five years of English-language study for an estimated 20,000 Saudi students. Roughly 7,000 of these are already en-

rolled at various universities nationwide.

At the U of O there are currently 72 Saudi students enrolled for English courses through AEI, representing 40 percent of the total number of international students under the institution's oversight. This figure is expected to increase spring term, making Saudis one of largest national groups of foreign students attending the University of Oregon.

But the task of facilitating this influx of English-language students has, thus far, been a daunting one.

"The scholarship organization is new," said Pat Bryan, AEI Academic Advisor. "They may not have fully recognized, when they set up their guidelines, how unrealistic it is for some students."

Bryan's concern is that Saudi students are given only one

year to study English as a second language and earn acceptance into their programs. Any student who falls short in keeping to this timeline will have his or her scholarship revoked. Starting with very basic English skills and striving over the course of one year to earn the required minimum of 500 points on their TOEFL exam is a tall order for any undergraduate international student. However, there is more concern for students wishing to enter graduate programs, for which a minimum TOEFL score of 600 is required.

"It's a nation-wide concern," said Martine Wigham, AEI Admissions Coordinator. "Some of the students, especially those already in their second terms, are really nervous."

AEI has been actively reassuring students that case-by-case extensions will be negotiated



## **SELF-STUDY LANGUAGE PROGRAM**

LINGUISTICS 199

**Organizational Meeting:  
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Pacific 115**

Arabic, Cantonese, Catalan, Swahili, Farsi, Thai, Greek, Romanian, Bamana  
Turkish, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Navajo, Wolof, Indonesian, Hindi/Urdu

<http://babel.uoregon.edu>

# Scholarship Gives International Students Opportunity

with the scholarship organizers.

“We’re hoping that the organization will prove flexible, and that we’ll be able to communicate with them about an individual student’s progress, and really advocate for extensions when they’re necessary,” Bryan said.

Saudi students have mixed reactions to the efforts of AEI to best facilitate speedy language instruction and the time pressures imposed upon their study.

Rami Alawami is registered for two months of AEI instruction. With four classes involving reading, writing, grammar and oral skills training, Alawami still wishes to be assigned more homework.

“I feel the classes are good, and all the teachers are professional,” he said. “I think my language is getting better, but I still cannot understand when people speak English fast.”

Muhammad Al-Khraiiji, who is in his second term at AEI, explains some of the more technical challenges to learning English.

“We have a problem in reading and writing,” he said. “We

write from the right to the left.

English language writes from the left to the right. Writing with speed is difficult. Another problem is the spelling. In the Arabic language what you write, you hear, and what you hear you write. But in English, say, they have this word, ‘light’, and I don’t know from where they put the ‘g’ and ‘ht’, and with ‘thought’ and ‘neighborhood’. This is what drives me crazy.”

Despite the many challenges posed the new Saudi students, there is a silver lining for the instructors at AEI. In fact, both Bryan and Wigham say that the influx of Saudi students works to the language classes’ overall advantage.

“Our other big population of students is from the Pacific Rim countries — Japan, Taiwan and Korea,” Bryan said. “What we have found as instructors is that having those two groups in the classroom really nicely complement each other.”

Bryan explained that while Asian students’ are culturally predisposed to be particularly attentive to the details of the

language, such as grammar, they are hesitant to speak up and take risks in the classroom. The students from the Middle East, on the other hand, come from cultures where the oral tradition is strong—the Qur’an being taught orally—and thus are accustomed to learning through dialogue and discussion.

“So what we find in general is that the Arab speaker loves to talk, and they’re not afraid to make mistakes,” Bryan said. Hence providing a role model for the East Asian students. Conversely, the Asian students can become models of meticulousness for the Saudi students in the fine details of grammar and pronunciation.

The Saudi students bring another valuable element to AEI classrooms and to the University in general – their cultural diversity.

“We were really lacking students from the Middle Eastern part of the world for three years after 9/11,” Wigham said. “It’s nice to get them back.”

## *Amiga LiveChat* Ready for Prime Time, Use in Blackboard

Faculty who are interested in doing real time audio or video conferencing inside Blackboard now have an easy-to-use tool to do so. After a term of testing, YLC’s latest web-based speech application, *Amiga LiveChat* is ready for university-wide use. Like other Blackboard communication tools, *Amiga* is administered from the instructor’s control panel. Once an instructor creates one or more rooms, he or she can use *Amiga* to hold virtual office hours, set up tutoring sessions, or encourage students to do peer-to-peer conferencing. YLC plans to use *Amiga* extensively in its self-study and language exchange programs. For more information, see our website: <http://babel.uoregon.edu/amiga>.



# Collaboration Leads to Success in Chinese Program

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nized it so that Gigliotti teaches both the lower levels and Wu teaches the third and fourth year.

Wu says that she has a perfectly complementary relationship with Gigliotti.

“We are always on the same page,” she said. “We keep communications open. Whenever we have a question or issues or suggestions – we just pick up the phone and call each other.”

This compatibility lies not in their direct similarities, but rather in a harmonious balance of complementing differences. While Gigliotti is originally from Taipei, in Taiwan, Wu arrived in 1987 from Wuhan — mainland China’s fourth largest city. The former has a background in English and Chinese literature, while the latter specialized in linguistics. These differences have shaped their divergent approaches to teaching Chinese, from the beginning stages of planning class schedules to their strategies for classroom management.

“I think I am more strict than Wu Laoshi,” Gigliotti said. “She is more free, I feel, in her class. I like discipline, so my class is almost like a script. I like to have my schedule planned out from the very beginning of the term, and then I already have all ten weeks for every lesson — what we are going to do every day. I think Wu Laoshi goes more by week-by-week, so its different.”

In her classes’ daily activities, Gigliotti works to methodically and rigorously drill the Chinese character system into her students. This, she said, is the main difference between Chinese and other European languages, and is what makes it so challenging. In a Chinese

character, she explained, there is one side — the radical — which indicates meaning based on a category related to trees, water, fire, or other basic elements. On the other side is the sound indicator. When a student doesn’t understand radicals, he or she is unable to see the sound of the word.

Students also need to amass a certain amount of characters to begin to grasp basic reading,

**“I think one of the reasons that we are working so well together is that we communicate well. We have this mutual respect and trust, and we have this common goal of building a strong Chinese language program.”**

**—Jean Wu**

writing and speaking. Thus, the learning curve is steep, and Gigliotti admits that the beginning steps are overwhelming.

“You have to learn each character individually,” she said. “So what I do, I try to introduce the characters from the very beginning. Some teachers and schools put off the characters until even as late as the second year. But because our goal is to learn the entire language, including reading and writing, I felt we should bite the bullet from the beginning.”

From the very first day of class, Gigliotti’s students are introduced to some Chinese characters. The topics of class discussion are written on the overhead as script—so if listening comprehension proves difficult, students can attempt to make sense of the spoken words by learning to associate it with the characters. Dictations are routinely conducted for introducing new vocabulary, and at home, students are

to write out characters multiple times each day.

“There is no other way out,” she said with a smile. “Some were suggesting that Chinese should be more than five credits. Because of the reading and writing, you almost need a separate class.”

Wu’s method, on the other hand, leans more to the creative side of Chinese learning.

Although she is also a believer in extensive class planning and disciplined training of Chinese characters, Wu strives to incorporate creative activities into her lessons as a way to engage students. She calls her approach the “integrated method.”

“We use a lot of authentic texts to supplement our regular textbooks, using a lot of materials from satellite Chinese TV, Chinese newspapers and advertisements,” Wu said.

Her goal is to make sure the classes are always lively, using a variety of enriching activities to balance the disciplined drills such as memorization and dictation. Like Gigliotti, however, Wu emphasizes the essential ability to read Chinese characters first.

“Because everything depends on your reading,” she said. “Once you can read then you can input, and then you can learn.”

Both instructors observed that the Chinese language is gaining popularity despite its reputation for being very difficult to master.

“We are in a critical period,” Wu said, “when Chinese is gaining its significance because of the booming economy of China. Both from the short-term and in the long-term, I think there’s going to be a maintained increase in interest in learning Chinese.”

# Yamada: Then & Now

Over the past 15 years, Yamada has undergone more than a few changes while our commitment to helping language students and teachers has remained unchanged. The most obvious changes have been behind the counter in PAC 121 as well as the recent facelift in the language lab, PAC 119. More subtle changes have included the near-constant updating of computer and video technology in the center, including the Virtual Language Lab and the new Amiga web-based chat application. The photos on the left are from 1991; the ones on the right from 2006.



The front counter has gotten a lot busier...and a lot better-equipped!



Pacific 119 is being transformed from a traditional language lab to a digital seminar and conferencing facility.



Pacific 115 was and is our primary teacher training facility; the room is also used for film classes, lectures, and as a home for our mobile laptops.

# Dave Curland: A Retrospective

Editor's note: *Dave Curland was one of the founding Co-Directors of the Yamada Language Center and a pioneer in the use of video for the teaching of modern languages.*

Safely retired in a remote but sunny spot, I was pleasantly surprised recently to get a call from Jeff Magoto asking if I could contribute to a special newsletter commemorating the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Center. It's obvious, judging by the prominence that the Yamada Center enjoys nationally, that the years since its establishment have seen all kinds of achievement. Since I left "active duty" at the University years ago, I have not been part of this activity. I can only offer a few comments on the early years and on YLC's pre-history.

First allow me to mention the special part that language laboratories have played in my own career. While I was teaching Spanish at Willamette High School in the early '60s, the Bethel School District was awarded a language lab under the National Defense Education Act (NDEA)—funds appropriated by Congress when the Russians sent up Sputnik and foreign language study suddenly seemed urgent. (This may sound familiar today, though with quite a different language emphasis.) I was lucky to have the lab implanted in my classroom, a location, which made it instantly useful, at least for students of Spanish.

The school gained notoriety, since it now possessed the only language lab in the state of Oregon. The technology was simple, namely individual tape recorders at each desk enabling the teacher to listen to students' recordings. Nothing was computerized,

nor did the textbooks of the time provide exercises for such equipment. Still, school administrators and faculty enjoyed the sense of being in the forefront of modernity. Students may have also learned and remembered language, (vocabulary, syntax, intonation), more easily, though this was never documented. The most popular activity, as I remember, was listening to Spanish folksongs with a booklet of lyrics I provided, as well as occasionally watching a Spanish-language film with the sound piped in through the earphones.

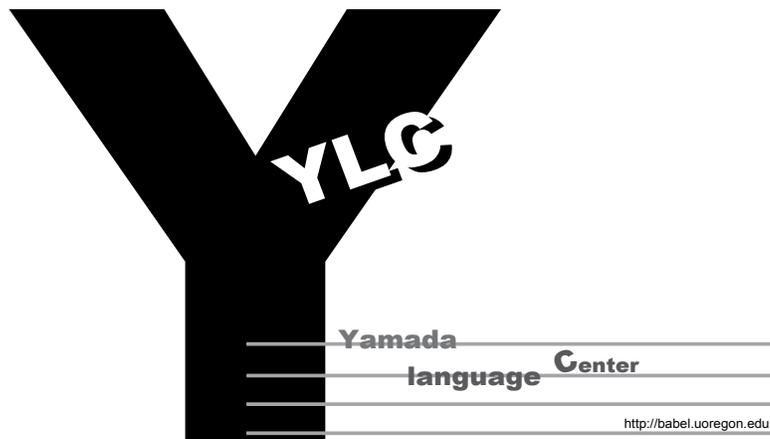
When I came to the University, the language lab was in the basement of Friendly Hall, though it soon upgraded to a special room adjoining the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor Men's Room. At the time, all the language departments were incorporated into one unit, making time allocation of lab use easily resolved. The department head simply decided,

and there was little competition because no real consensus existed on how effective the equipment was or whether it contributed much to the learning process.) Some instructors avoided the whole scene as basically useless, contributing nothing to the main mission of teaching literature. But for many there was certainly a feeling that "times they were a'changing."

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*...a service and technology center for language teaching, study and research*