

NCIEC ASL Standards Workteam

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In recognition of the central role ASL literacy plays in interpreter education, the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC) has teamed up with the American Sign Language Teachers Association (ALSTA) to sponsor a workteam that is drafting ASL standards for inclusion in an upcoming edition of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' (ACTFL) Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century. First published in 1996, this volume is widely regarded as authoritative by educators, administrators and curriculum specialists. The current edition includes standards for Chinese, Classical Languages, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish for grades K-18.

Recognizing that students come to language study with diverse purposes and needs, the original ACTFL task force identified five “goal areas” for content in language instruction, popularly known as the “5 Cs:”

- Communication
- Cultures
- Connections
- Comparisons
- Communities

The ACTFL standards organize the contexts and purposes of communication into three “communicative modes”—interpersonal, or direct oral or written communication between people who come into contact with one another; interpretive, or receptive communication of oral or written messages where the creator of the text is not present; and presentational, or “productive” communication using oral or written language in a communicative setting where there is no immediate personal contact between speaker and audience.

The foregoing description of ACTFL's 5 Cs and the framework of communicative modes only begins to scratch the surface of this complex topic. For a much more thorough treatment of the ACTFL standards, visit ACTFL.org, or see Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century, which is available for purchase at the ACTFL Web site.

The committee working on the ASL standards is chaired by Glenna Ashton, President of ASLTA, and includes Keith Cagle, Kim Kurz, Bill Newell, Rico Peterson and Jason Zinza. The committee first met in Denver, CO, in May 2007. This meeting included a representative from



ACTFL who provided sound guidance on the development of standards. The full committee met again in Charlotte, NC, in August 2007 and again in August 2008. Team members Kim Kurz and Jason Zinza also met in March 2008 in Rochester, NY, to create a working draft of the standards section of the document, which in accordance with ACTFL practice includes coverage of levels ranging from kindergarten to baccalaureate level.

At this writing, a working draft of the document is near completion. The next phase of the work focuses on disseminating the standards. This has already begun in small measure. An earlier draft of the standards was presented at last year's ASLTA conference, and members of the workteam have begun to present the document in various forums throughout the country. The committee is also contacting content experts on ASL to solicit their feedback. The feedback gleaned from these venues will be organized and considered by the full committee in their final face-to-face meeting, where they will prepare the submission copy for ACTFL.

Once ACTFL has accepted the standards, the committee will continue to work on disseminating the standards and working with schools, programs and faculties interested in bringing their curriculums into alignment with national standards for language learning. ■

For more information about the NCIEC and their goals, please visit their Web site at www.asl.neu.edu/nciec/.

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