A growing number of institutions are faced with very real challenges when it comes to foreign language study. In best-case scenarios, some institutions find that they are unable to offer instruction in a range of languages broad enough to reflect the global reach of their research and teaching. In worst-case scenarios, other institutions find they are being forced to scale down or even cut existing programs.

We believe developing a shared model of instruction enabled and mediated by technology provides a potential solution to these challenges.

Columbia University, Cornell University, and Yale University recently have had to face a number of continuing challenges to providing instruction in the 100+ languages offered across the three campuses. These include chronically low enrollments in LCTL language sections; limited opportunities for advanced or content-focused language instruction; the loss of federal funding directly threatening the availability of instruction in many LCTL; and the need to provide professional development to LCTL instructors.

To address these challenges our institutions received a grant from the Mellon Foundation to develop a collaborative framework for teaching the less commonly taught languages (LCTL) through videoconferencing and other distance learning technology. Our shared model consists of a synchronous, interactive and learner-centered environment that closely emulates a regular language classroom. Over the past two years, we have designed and offered a number of pilot courses in various configurations to test this model. Starting this academic year, the pilot phase will be expanded to 8 languages with more scheduled for a later inclusion.

In this Roundtable session, we will use a case study approach to briefly introduce the background and rationale for the project and share the preliminary outcomes and “lessons learned” thus far with a particular emphasis on administrative, pedagogical, and technological challenges. We will then invite the participants to discuss their own experiences, compare approaches to distance and blended learning, exchange perspectives, as well as debate the benefits and challenges of using technology to support cross-institutional language offerings.

Some of the questions we are planning to discuss include:

* How can institutions capitalize on a judicious application of video/web conferencing and distance learning technology to support LCTL instruction in particular and language instruction in general?
* What alternative models have been developed and used?
* What are the potential benefits and challenges of different distance learning approaches?
* How can we maintain high-quality LCTL instruction across institutions?
* How can we judiciously utilize technology to expand foreign language enrollments?
* In what ways can technology-mediated learning help develop global competency among students?
* How can we develop shared best practices for language teaching among institutions?

We will exchange insights and experiences with our participants and expect that this session will lead to ongoing networking among institutions engaged in similar innovative approaches to instructional collaboration. We will also invite participants to share contact information and links to relevant project sites, and will follow up by sending out a questionnaire, a detailed summary of the discussion, and links to our project.

Columbia, Cornell, and Yale have developed a collaborative framework for teaching the less commonly taught languages (LCTL) through videoconferencing and other distance learning technology. In this Roundtable session, we will use a case study approach to discuss the background and rationale for the project and to share the preliminary outcomes and lessons learned in our pilot project. We will invite the participants discuss their experiences; compare approaches to distance and blended learning; and exchanges perspectives.