L&IT: The Beginnings

By Dr. Pat Wannamaker, L&IT founding director

So, how did L&IT get started at Clemson? Back in 1987, as a Clemson German professor, I had observed that the so-called international business degrees across the U.S. had few or no foreign language requirements. And the undergraduate business curricula were generally restricted to 12 hours or fewer of electives that could be used in language study.

A Liberal Arts B.A. was the answer! And studies show that liberal arts grads are well prepared to succeed in business. I envisioned a Clemson L&IT degree that would combine humanistic and technical learning to develop cultural sensitivity as a marketing tool in global business.

These students could already double major, for example, in German and marketing, but their major would still officially be listed as "Languages." Most recruiters don't take a second look at "Language Majors," but would, I believed, be interested enough to interview "L&IT" majors.

My next step was to write a grant proposal that would be funded by a highly competitive agency (FIPSE) that funded only four percent of the proposals submitted. The key was that Clemson was a "land grant institution." The land grant colleges were originally established "to promote the liberal and practical education." This fit perfectly with my goal of developing an interdisciplinary B.A. degree.

Further support came from an unexpected source when I discovered that Clemson's forward-looking founder, Thomas Green Clemson himself, had received a graduate degree in France as a mining engineer and also served as ambassador to Belgium under four U.S. presidents. So Clemson’s founder laid an international foundation for the future of the University, and L&IT fit perfectly into his vision.

The original L&IT curriculum included the development of 13 new international courses in six departments in four colleges. There was a domino effect throughout these colleges as they signed on to support the L&IT curriculum. Not only did L&IT initiate the internationalization of these six departments, but also influenced the hiring practices as they recruited new faculty with international business credentials.

In the Languages Department, the L&IT major more than doubled the department enrollments in the first year. And in a time when language departments were shrinking nationwide, Clemson's was dramatically expanding, with L&IT attracting 75% - 90% of the majors.

In the intervening years, Clemson’s L&IT program has been officially adjudged by a peer committee of university faculty across the nation (SCCHE’s Review of Language Programs in S.C.), and I quote “to be a bold and creative idea, which has born much fruit and made Clemson’s name known throughout the country. The L&IT majors have been a tremendous success for the department and for the entire university. The L&IT degree program distinguishes the department and the university.”

It has been a pleasure to see my vision realized and indeed evaluated by my peers in such glowing terms.

The strength of this degree program lies in the L&IT curriculum being built on three foundational components:

1. Language Studies
2. Business Studies and
3. Internships in International Settings

Partnerships with supporting agencies and multinational firms was also a vital part of the success of L&IT: eg. the S.C. State Development Board; the S.C. Ports Authority; the U.S. Dept. of Commerce, and the Upstate’s many multinational firms and their parent companies around the world, also HS recruitment visits throughout the state and on campus.

In the L&IT curriculum, Clemson established the "gold standard" for applied-language baccalaureate degrees. The L&IT degree could be a big plus in your job search.