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IRIS Grant Funding Report

When I accepted my offer to attend UW—Madison in 2019, I received an IRIS grant as part of my funding package so that I could study abroad for several weeks and hone my speaking abilities in Swedish. As a scholar of 20th century Swedish literature, the prospect of spending time learning Swedish from native speakers was incredibly exciting, but little did I know in 2019 that a global pandemic was looming just around the corner, waiting to throw my 2020 summer plans off course. Because of the risks associated with traveling abroad during the height of the pandemic, my trip to Sweden had to be put on hold for a couple years, prompting me to consider alternative ways to expand my knowledge both as a Swedish speaker and a language instructor. Given these circumstances, the IRIS funds provided valuable assistance that allowed me to enroll in an interactive online language instruction course at Michigan State University, in preparation for teaching online Swedish for my department from Fall 2020-Spring 2021. With IRIS's help, I was also (at long last) able to attend a Swedish Institute-sponsored language class hosted by *Kalix Folkhögskola* in August 2022, which proved to be an immersive and unforgettable learning experience.

The MSU online training course I took in the summer of 2020 allowed me to engage with language instructors from universities all across the country, all of whom were navigating the increasingly uncertain educational landscape of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each week, the course instructor would challenge us to produce audiovisual content and lesson plan ideas that would keep students engaged with their language learning, despite the mitigations of a computer screen. Because I had never taught a class in an online format before, the process of completing these assignments helped allay my fears about teaching on Zoom, since the course instructor gave me an approachable, innovative framework for teaching online efficiently and engagingly. The curriculum provided by the MSU course was also rich with resources. I learned how to use all sorts of apps I had never heard of before, and I even got to try my hand at producing short-form instructional videos that students could use to review grammar concepts and practice pronunciation. Because I took advantage of this professional development opportunity, my first two online Swedish courses were a success. At the end of the academic year, students reported feeling engaged throughout both semesters, despite the online modality, and many said the courses were a bright spot during an otherwise bleak moment in their educational journeys.

This past summer, I exhausted the rest of my IRIS funds by attending a summer language course in Norbotten, Sweden, an idyllic rural municipality near the Arctic Circle. The course I participated in attracted students from all over the world, who were united by their love and passion for the Swedish language. We participated in several workshops and field trips over the course of three weeks and were asked to complete written and spoken assignments on the regular, constantly challenging us to think about various topics in our shared new language. During mealtimes and our extracurricular activities, the instructors repeatedly reminded us to speak only in Swedish, no matter how challenging it was to keep the conversation going, but, by the end of the course, I found myself chatting with others in Swedish fairly readily, reminding me of how much I had improved. I engaged in lengthy conversations with my instructors about Swedish literature and answered so many questions about life in the U.S. for my fellow students. The whole experience was a valuable lesson in diplomacy, and by the end, I was able to engage in conversations that, beforehand, I would've only felt comfortable having in English. Whether I

was getting my haircut in a Swedish salon, ordering food in a fast-paced restaurant, or navigating the complex schedules of Swedish train stations, my experience this past summer made me feel more equipped to return to the country someday soon, in order to conduct dissertation research and, of course, build deeper relationships with the Swedes in their own language.