DEAN OF STUDENTS RETIRES

“One of the greatest joys of my life has been serving as the Dean of Students at GIAL,” said Ruth E. Schilberg upon her recent retirement from working for the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics (GIAL).

Ruth says she grew along with the school. She recalls being responsible for all of the jobs within student services when classes began in the fall of 1999. However, she was supervising a staff of 11 when she stepped down from that position last spring. Ruth shared that “Helping students make wise decisions, praying with them and watching them prepare for a future in missions has been so rewarding, but building a solid team in the student services department was equally satisfying.”

Growing up in rural South Dakota, Ruth felt called to cross-cultural ministry while attending a youth camp in high school. Not sure how to follow that calling, Ruth earned a bachelor’s degree in elementary education and taught in South Dakota for a number of years. During those years, she had the opportunity to visit Cameroon for 3 months and to teach English in Japan for 6 months.

Ruth started her ministry with Wycliffe as a short-term librarian and teacher in the school for missionary kids in Yarinhacocha, Peru. After returning to the USA, she completed SIL training to become a literacy worker and spent 3 years working in Brazil. During that time, Ruth worked with the Nadëb as the first men were beginning to learn how to read and write in their own language. They now have the New Testament in their own language and their story is available at http://vimeo.com/47203273. Ruth was also able to assist in teaching literacy courses for Brazilians hoping to join the Bible translation endeavor. She also was involved in teaching workshops for indigenous groups who were beginning to create literature in their mother tongue.

When unable to continue working in Brazil due to visa restrictions, Ruth began teaching at the SIL training school in Dallas, TX. When the decision to seek accreditation for that school was made, Ruth was asked to become the Dean of Students for the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics, as the new school was named. Ruth held that position for 15 years.

After stepping down from the Dean of Students position, Ruth became the Associate Chaplain for GIAL and has spent the last year helping develop a program which would provide more structured Spiritual preparation for students anticipating cross-cultural ministry.

Ruth is excited about her move to SD this summer to be closer to her family. A life-long learner, she is also seeking her credentials as a chaplain with the Christian and Missionary Alliance.
LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT
Where It All Begins

Five years ago Stephanie earned a Certificate in Applied Linguistics at GIAL and headed to South Asia to work in language assessment. Language assessment is a tool used to determine the need for Bible translation by identifying how many distinct language groups are represented in a region. After discovering the needs, the work of Bible translation can begin. Language assessment also seeks to discover the aims and needs of each language community in order to help them fulfill their own goals.

Stephanie’s team works closely with a major national university, providing training and resources and assisting their linguistic students with research. In return, the linguistics department supports their visa platform. The team also provides the university with final copies of all their research and reports. They view this partnership as an opportunity to help equip the next generation of national linguists and to gain a huge resource for their survey research in remote areas.

Stephanie’s team works with minority languages that have been acknowledged by the government and given freedom to advance and grow. However, few communities have the resources to take advantage of this freedom. The team’s work helps to empower each community to make decisions about their language and language use and to decide what to do next. Often, their research provides the very first recordings and written documentation of a language, showing mother-tongue speakers the importance of their language. The team connects people who are passionate about their language with the right organizations to enable them to advance their goals.

For example, on one survey they met a community volunteer who educates people about the dangers of smoking and drugs. He said that he would like to put public service announcements on the radio in his own language for people to understand. The language assessment team enthusiastically connected him with SIL’s media department so he could receive training to make that dream a reality.

Language assessment team members are also involved in language documentation which helps provide a record of speech communities. The rugged terrain can isolate communities with the same mother tongue from each other. As the team travels from community to community, local people are always very excited to hear the way people in other places pronounce their words (a key tool of language assessment is to have people in different communities pronounce the same list of words to compare dialects). After an assessment is complete, the team always sends a copy of the report along with mini SD cards with all the recordings so they can hear their language spoken in different areas. Having access to hearing how others say their words not only excites communities, but it also starts a conversation among them about their language.

Stephanie’s work in language assessment has allowed her to contribute in many important areas: Bible translation, education, community development, and language documentation.