

Departmental Assessment Report: French, 2018

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Recent efforts to improve student achievement in French

Since the arrival, in 2012, of Dr. Cathy Jellenik and Madame Cottrant-Estell, the French section has enacted many changes. With two full-time instructors, the section has been able to expand the curricular offerings in French and Francophone language, literature, and culture, increase enrollment at all levels, and develop a Hendrix-in-Tours, France summer program (every year since 2014), a French-house year-long immersion experience, and teaching/volunteer opportunities for our students in the Conway community.

The changes just noted have greatly impacted student accessibility to French and Francophone studies, which has naturally translated into an improvement in student learning, according to both our direct and indirect assessment tools. For example, enrollment in the nine new courses has been consistently strong. In fact, since 2011, the average number of students enrolled in intermediate level French is 32.7 and 24.3 in upper level French; this reflects a 470% growth in intermediate enrollment and 243% growth in three- and four-hundred level courses. Furthermore, due to the addition of a second intermediate-level grammar course, student performance in the upper-level courses has improved from what it was in 2012, according to student compositions, oral presentations, and oral exams. The Hendrix-in-Tours program, too, has bolstered student achievement, and most noticeably, fluency, as directly assessed by an exit interview performed on-site in Tours and student performance on exams and in presentations during subsequent courses in Hendrix. Indirect assessment of student performance also reveals progress in terms of French fluency, as evidenced by the comments students invariably make on the evaluation they complete at the end of the program, comments such as:

- “Hendrix-in-Tours greatly improved my French abilities in both speaking and writing.”
- “I feel like a month in Tours increased my fluency in French more than any semester of French class I have taken.”
- “My conversational competency has significantly increased.”

Similarly, living in the French House has improved student performance at all levels. This year-long opportunity provides students with an authentic French immersion experience. In the past, Dr. Jellenik and Madame Cottrant-Estell assessed the experience indirectly via a student survey. Dr. Jellenik and Madame Cottrant-Estell noticed that it was sometimes quite difficult for the students to evaluate how much their French had measurably improved. In general, students mentioned an increase in self-confidence and comfort while speaking in French. However, that form of assessment proved imperfect for ascertaining quantifiable improvement in language proficiency. Thus, for the 2019-2020 iteration of the French house, the French program will expand its assessment tools in two ways: students will be required to compile a journal of new vocabulary words and expressions learned during their stay in the house, and they will also undergo a short interview in French. Both of those tools have proved extremely effective with

regards to the Hendrix-in-Tours summer program, and we thus foresee a more accurate measurement of students' language development and tracking of their linguistic progress.

In addition, the French program promotes student fluency while preparing them for professions in French by way of a volunteer program in a Conway public school. Because some French students plan to become French teachers, teaching French at Carl Stuart Middle School gives them an opportunity to prepare for their professional lives. This experience, which also affords students Odyssey credits, helps them to assess their aptitude for the teaching vocation. The opportunity also helps them become more confident about their French proficiency and to practice leadership roles in a French context. For assessment, one instructor regularly attends the French Club sessions and observes students' performance in French.

Action plan

While we had hoped to expand our curricular offerings by creating a "Fast French" course, whereby students could study two semesters of French in a single semester, staffing issues have prevented us from doing so. Nevertheless, we are constantly mindful of ways to improve our program. Thus, in the immediate future, we seek to increase diversity and inclusion in our existing courses. To that end, Dr. Jellenik will spend the summer of 2018 re-working the Senior Capstone class (FREN 480). She chose that course to enhance for two reasons. First, as she taught it during the 2018 spring semester, she realized that not every student had taken the Francophone Literature course and thus would graduate without desirable exposure to non-French writers in French. The anthology that we use in 480 does not include any African, Caribbean, Vietnamese, or Canadian authors, and when Dr. Jellenik discussed that flaw with her Spring 2018 students, they were very critical of the omission. Dr. Jellenik therefore promised the students that she would edit the course so that future iterations would include non-French authors. Our second reason for enhancing that course results from the external review of Languages. When Dr. Jellenik and Mme Cottrant-Estell, along with the external reviewer, Elizabeth Skomp, discussed our need and desire to offer more diverse, inclusive courses in the French curriculum, Dr. Skomp suggested that increasing diversity in existing classes would be a positive first step. Thus, Dr. Jellenik will modify the Capstone course to include non-French authors. This change is supported by the existence of Francophone literature courses and other initiatives at our peer institutions (Kalamazoo, for example, names their department "French and Francophone Studies," instead of simply "French", and they offer a study-abroad experience in Senegal) as well as at major universities (The University of Colorado, Boulder, similarly offers French study abroad programs in France, Canada, Belgium, Mali, Madagascar, Cameroon, Senegal and Switzerland). Francophone authors figure on French majors' reading lists, and while we do offer a Francophone course, discussions of this topic with Languages colleagues and with Elizabeth Skomp have led us to conclude that increasing diversity in all of the French courses is only natural. Our modification of the Capstone for fall 2018 is a step in that direction.

In terms of assessment, Dr. Jellenik will discuss the non-French Francophone course additions with the students in the class, observe whether or not they choose to write on the new authors in their conference papers, and analyze their inclusion of the new authors in their written exam and defense. In addition, the course evaluation will include a question inquiring about how well the course balanced French and non-French contributions.

Relatedly, Mme Cottrant-Estell will spend the summer of 2018 working to increase diversity in our French Cinema and Advanced Composition class. This will include the broadening of the scope of the current cinema class in order to include writers and directors from Senegal, Belgium, Algeria, Martinique, and Canada. Madame Cottrant will spend the summer choosing appropriate films and texts and the first iteration of the revised course will occur in Spring 2019. Students' compositions will be used as direct assessment to determine if they are able to analyze and make connections between the different cultures and their own, and the course evaluation will include a question, like the Capstone, inquiring as to how well the course balanced French and non-French contributions.

Your department's role in achieving the college's shared goals for students

Please explain how your departmental learning goals contribute to the Vision for Student Learning Goals. Feel free to attach a map or other supporting documents.

In French, students further many of the college's shared goals for them. By way of a diverse offering of courses, students access a breadth of knowledge that starts with the creation of France as a country and moves forward to include literature published as recently as 2014. Over the course of their studies in French, students acquaint themselves with the literature and culture of a diverse set of people: Asians, Africans, Caribbeans, Canadians, and French. Throughout each of our courses, we encourage students to make connections between what they know about their native culture and the cultures of others in a bid for a more empathic, just world.