

## **Departmental Assessment Report: French, 2019**

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### **Recent efforts to improve student achievement in French**

In AY 2018, Dr. Cathy Jellenik and Madame Cottrant-Estell enacted many changes. These changes affected all levels of French: from 110 all the way up to the Capstone, 480. We also foresee adaptations to the management of the French house for AY 2019-2020. Finally, we have engaged students in extra-curricular professional activities in order to better prepare them for careers in French- or language-related fields.

Our direct assessment tools (quizzes, homework, and exams) in FREN 110 and 120 (First-Year French I and II) revealed that students lacked confidence and efficacy in both their speaking and listening skills. We thus changed and increased the number of oral exams students took over the course of each semester. In both 110 and 120, students took 3 oral exams with a partner (which rendered them less anxious than the previous format of individual exams) followed by 2 individual oral exams: one of which focused on pronunciation and the second of which focused on direct discussion with the instructor. In order to gauge how well students had improved their listening skills, we increased the number of listening exercises throughout the semester, and then initiated an extended listening exercise on the final exam. The methods we used in FREN 110 and 120 proved to be successful: the inclusion of partner-work in the oral exams seemed to lower the effective filter which often leads to paralysis in speaking, and students performed better than in previous iterations of the course. Similarly, student aural comprehension improved both quantifiably on the exam results and regarding the number of students who asked the instructor to re-play (again and again) a specific section of audio.

Direct assessment tools (oral exams and presentations) in FREN 340 (Literature and Civilization I) revealed a similar need to improve students' fluency in French. Whereas students at the 300-level are largely capable of expressing their ideas and opinions in French, the French that they deployed had evidence of word-to-word translation, instead of fluency. We thus required them to follow very strict formats for presentations: students read and listened to news broadcasts in French, circled expressions that they had learned, and then used them in their presentations. We distributed the grading rubric prior to the presentations, so students knew exactly what was required for each grade for the presentation. Those strategies proved to be very effective for inspiring students at a high-level to still improve, and the authenticity of their French was greatly heightened.

In all of those levels, we were able to assess student fluency outside of the classroom. Due to several co-curricular activities (conversation groups, films, cooking activities, meals) both instructors interact almost weekly with students outside of the classroom. We are thus able to ascertain the efficacy of the strategies we design to improve student verbal expression and aural comprehension. We are confident, due to the indirect assessment opportunities that co-curricular activities provide that our strategies are improving student performance.

In order to carry out AY 2018's action plan, the French section also made many changes to the curriculum in an effort to increase diversity. We drew inspiration to make those changes

from many sources. First, during the Fall Faculty Conference of 2016, Languages as a whole discussed a desire to improve diversity in our classrooms. That desire was strengthened by President Tsutsui's expressed hope that Languages would be a "model of diversity and inclusion." And finally, the external reviewer of Languages, performed by Elizabeth Skomp, offered some ideas for enhancing the diversity of already-existing courses. Consequently, in FREN 210 (Intermediate French Composition and Conversation I) we added daily presentations whereby students described a different francophone country. Those presentations were not graded, but, instead, sought to inspire open-mindedness and curiosity in our students. Similarly, in FREN 310 we chose the textbook *Francophone Cultures through Film* which offers a collection of Canadian, Algerian, Tunisian, Senegalese, French, and Congolese films. We chose 8 diverse films and asked students to rely on two or three films from different countries to write their compositions—a total of 5 throughout the semester. The students expressed great appreciation for the diversity of films and topics. And finally, in FREN 480, we made drastic changes to the required readings which enhanced both teaching and student learning in several ways. First, we included non-French francophone authors. This meant that we had to include both an anthology and individual books for students to read, since NO upper-level French anthologies contain Non-French francophone authors. This year's iteration included, for example, Ben Jelloun, from Morocco, Mariama Bâ from Senegal, and Anne Hébert from Canada. We also increased the number of female authors, since, like with francophone authors, French literature anthologies tend to ignore women. We thus read authors such as Christine de Pisan, Marguerite de Navarre, de Graffigny, and Madame de Staël, whom we had not included in previous iterations of the course. On my online evaluations, I had included a question addressing the diversity of the class readings, but somehow the question did not appear on the feedback forms. This was one of many problems with the new student feedback process. Fortunately, I made students aware of the course edits, and they were extremely receptive. Specifically, all of the Capstone students were women, and they stated that it was "nice for a change to see themselves represented in literature." Further, two of the students described the Francophone (Bâ and Hébert) authors as their favorite readings from the semester.

In addition to performing well in the class, the Capstone students also attended a conference at UCA where they presented their research. This assessment tool assures us that our program is successful, as our students' papers were amongst the most impressive that we saw. In addition, both of our graduating seniors this year have been accepted into TAPIF (Trenna Lemons and Meredith Warren) to teach in France before they apply to graduate schools for AY 2020-2021.

### **Action plan**

Our action plan this academic year is two-fold. First, based on student feedback requesting more transparent pedagogy, we plan to develop more grading rubrics to distribute to students prior to assignment completion. Secondly, in response to the article "When Grading Less Is More" in *Inside Higher Ed* (and which Dr. Templeton included in the faculty development newsletter in April 2019), we plan to experiment with the "ungrading" movement in at least one of our courses, FREN 461: Literary Translation.

### **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.