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ABSTRACT

A course on modern France designed for presentation in English at the college level uses four books to approach an understanding of the country through autobiography, philosophy, sociology, and history. Students with reading ability in French are assigned readings from French-language periodicals and others read from English-language periodicals. Each student is assigned a francophone country to study and report on periodically during the course, focusing on current events as well as history and culture. Most of the class hours are spent in student-led discussion. The teacher's role is that of an informed monitor who adds or corrects information and introduces new topics. At the course mid-point, an anonymous evaluation is taken of both the work and the procedures, and students have an opportunity to identify any topics of interest not yet covered. Experience with the course has shown that student interest and confidence grow in this format, and it has the potential for adaptation for other educational levels and for presentation entirely in French in a second language program. (MSE)

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Session Abstract for ACTFL 1984  
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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES  
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Modern France: A Course Model

This session will describe a successful course that I have developed during the past three years, and offered both at Mills College, Oakland and at Cabrillo College, Aptos. All required readings and discussions during the course are in English, and thus it is open to the entire college community.

The session will be aimed at teachers at the post-secondary level who would be interested in developing such a course, but should be of interest as well to K-12 teachers of French seeking an update on France in the 80s.

This will be a practical session, presenting those attending with a model for teaching this course:

1. A rationale for such a course will be given - the role it plays in introducing those outside our field of study to France and the francophone world, and in encouraging students to enroll in language classes. (What is lost in teaching outside the target language will be discussed, and the ways in which this course must necessarily differ from one taught in French will be examined.)
2. A book list including texts used by the students and references for the teacher will be distributed. French periodicals assigned as reading to those who already read French will be discussed.
3. The student-led discussion mode of our class sessions will be examined. The role of teacher as guide and resource will be shown. This active role of students in discussions which are personalized, contextualized, and communicative will be seen to lead to proficiency in handling cultural data - not just achievement of discrete points of knowledge.
4. Student research francophone countries, and prepare 10-15 page papers to present to the class. The importance of this work is discussed as is student reaction to it.
5. Helpful classroom materials to supplement texts will be detailed.

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#### ABSTRACT

The article explores details and rationale of a French Culture Course in translation. Four books used in the course approach an understanding of France through autobiography, philosophy, sociology, and history. The reading of periodicals and work with Francophone countries are described. Student reporting is presented as an organizing principle of the course.

## A French Culture Course in the Humanities Curriculum

There exist valid arguments for and against offering the Culture, or Civilization, course in translation. Some feel that teachers of French should teach the course in the language and not dilute department offerings. They stress the lost possibility of language skill development, and the limits placed on cultural understanding. Others see value in the giving of a course which is open to the entire college community, and which has the potential of interesting students in other fields in French language and literature. A recent survey of the "state of the art" of teaching French Civilization did not inquire whether the courses described were taught in French or English.<sup>1</sup> The two types of courses, in French and in translation, are by essence different in that they address separate audiences.

It would appear that, on another level, two major objectives of the Humanities curriculum might be served by the French Culture Course in translation: that of learning about oneself and one's own culture, and that of learning about the world in which we live. The study of another culture, with its inherent breaking of the limiting shell of those whose knowledge extends no further than their own society, has the possibility of providing a tool for the discovery of the nature of one's own.

Howard Nostrand, in "Empathy for a second culture: motivations and techniques," discusses the need for a sensitivity to differences in people's values, assumptions, and modes of thought and feeling.<sup>2</sup> Tora Ladu, in "Developing Cross-Cultural Understanding: The Teacher's Responsibility," warns that "Every

culture is unique and must be understood in terms of its own concepts. The ability should be developed in every foreign language student to view another culture as the ideas and actions of another society and not as something which can be understood in our terms."<sup>3</sup> And Nelson Brooks states, in "The Analysis of Foreign and Familiar Cultures," that "The student who learns to look closely at a foreign culture with friendly understanding gradually makes the important discovery that he himself lives in a culture too."<sup>4</sup>

Each of the three times I have offered ~~this~~ course, since developing its concept and procedures ( the books have varied from semester to semester ) during sabbatical work in 1980, it has attracted students whose major fields have included history, political science, international studies, computer science, Spanish, restaurant management, business, and of course French. It has been given both at Cabrillo College, a public Community College, and at Mills College, a small, private woman's college. In each case, student reaction has been positive, and some have chosen to begin study of the French language after the course. Others, in third year French literature, composition, and conversation courses, have stated that this class made much clearer the context of their other work, and reconfirmed their interest in a specialty in the field. Clearly, knowledge about France and the francophone world yielded a desire in many of these students to continue learning in this area.

In the course, Contemporary French Culture, assigned readings and class discussions are in English. Those students with backgrounds in French, subscribe to the Journal Français

d'Amérique<sup>5</sup> and report regularly on current events in France. They also read in the library's current periodical holdings (L'Express, Paris Match, Le Nouvel Observateur) and share their findings. The other, non-French speaking students, read news periodicals (Time, Newsweek, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times etc.) in English with the goal of keeping current with world events.. Those who can read in French, rather than resenting an assignment which may take a little more time, seem to relish their role as reporters to the others, and the respect which this brings. For further suggestions about the use of newspapers and magazines in the classroom, see "Newspapers and Magazines in the Second Languages Classroom," by Helen Jorstad.<sup>6</sup>

With the goal of at least introducing students to the Francophone world, each is assigned (or picks) one country where French is spoken as the official language, the language of the schools, and/or the second language. This becomes "their" country during the semester course. Many textbooks offer lists of these countries. One might be structured as follows:

Overseas Departments (DOMS): Guadeloupe, French Guyana, Martinique, Saint-Martin.

Overseas Territories: New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Reunion.

French as Official or Second Language of Country: Algeria, Belgium, Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Gabon, Guinea, Haiti, Ivory Coast, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Switzerland, Togo,

Tunisia, Upper Volta, Zaïre.

During the first week, they report on initial findings, including where the country is located, basic encyclopedia-like data about it, and why French is spoken there. A map of the world is essential at this point, for many of the countries in question fall outside the familiarity of most students. They are encouraged to write to consular and cultural offices maintained by their country to promote tourism. These bureaus often provide current information, difficult to obtain otherwise.<sup>7</sup> Several weeks later, they deliver five minute reports showing the progress of their research. They have been instructed to concentrate particularly on the ways in which French culture ( as they are beginning to understand it in ever more complex ways ) has become a part of the culture of the country, and to seek the current status of language usage. Should their country be in the news for any reason, they are the class expert who explains the background of the event. Such has been the case in recent semesters with Chad, for example. At the end of the course, they are required to complete a twelve page research paper on their country. I have created a file of these papers, which serves as resource for new classes. The idea for this activity was introduced to me by Carmen C. McClendon, U of Georgia, during her NEH consultancy at Cabrillo College. The success of this work has led to its inclusion in all my first and second year language courses.

The current four texts that are required reading in the course have worked well, each in different ways. We begin reading The Horse of Pride by Pierre-Jakez Hélias (New Haven:

Yale, 1978). This book describes life in a peasant family in rural Brittany, in the early part of the century. The Guicharnaud translation conveys the special relationships and sayings of the people of Helias' family. The book recounts techniques of survival of poor, farming families. Students read the autobiographical account with ease, and begin to have a sense for family values, child-raising practices, religion, and education in this area at a specific time. They begin to understand also what the separatists in Brittany and elsewhere may be seeking, and the kinds of prejudices they have encountered.

The second book we read is Least Innocent Blood be Shed, by Philip Hallie (New York: Harper and Row, 1979.) Here the approach shifts to that of a philosopher studying the ethics of the villagers of Le Chambon (in south central France), and their pastor André Trocmé, during the Nazi occupation of France. This village takes on the work of saving thousands of children escaping the Germans. The dangers and moral decisions inherent in their efforts are shown, as are the various groups acting separately during that complex time. Students learn about the maquis, the cimade, the resistance workers, the collaborators, and the Nazis. They begin to see how the war years in France led families to turn inward and to consider all others "les autres", not to be trusted because they might turn them in for any of the many types of illegal activities necessary for survival during those times.

The third book is the classic village study, Village in the



Vaucluse by Laurence Wylie (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974.) This work, begun in the fifties and updated in the third edition until 1974, examines specific aspects of life in Peyrane, fictional name for Roussillon in southern France. The sociologist's method of examining culture ( family, education, sickness, leisure, adolescence, death, holidays, politics, etc. ) brings a new optic to class discussions, and one which adds to the autobiographical and ethical approaches so far experienced.

The fourth book, France in the 80s by John Ardagh (New York: Penguin, 1983,) brings a wealth of information, in a more anticipated history-book manner. It includes a study of the first year of the socialist government of Mitterand, and the changes of this recent time. It is the kind of book that could constitute the sole text for the course, and could certainly become a resource for any teacher of French language, literature, or culture, wishing to understand completely the basis of current events in France. It is so complete and detailed, that many students have remarked that they never would have been able to read it without their prior experiences in the first three books. These, it appears, whetted their appetite to understand more fully and deeply, those trends and characteristics they had begun to appreciate. And so faced with more than 600 pages of text, they were able to plunge in and identify those facts and trends of value to them. Such subjects as the women's movement, the role of Paris in French life, the modernization of agriculture, the efforts at decentralization, the developments of the provincial cities and regions, energy, ecology, the role of the unions, and the specific changes made by Mitterand's government,

are discussed in interesting detail. This book, as a culmination of the other course study, was viewed by students as putting all in perspective, and a volume they would continue to refer to as they studied and read in other fields or in other French courses.

The class hours of this Contemporary French Culture course are spent for the most part in discussions led by the students. There have been as few as seven and as many as twenty-five class members, and the technique varies only as to how many presentations per semester each student makes. It has been my observation after experimenting with a number of presentation strategies, that the students develop a special sense of responsibility to one another, and pride in their work, when it is they who are leading peers in class discussions. This enhancement of self-esteem and identity has been cited by Gertrude Moskowitz in Caring and Sharing in the Foreign Language Class (Rowley: Newbury House, 1978, p.16) as an important element of a model of successful foreign language teaching. This is a very different dynamic from that of the class which is lectured to by its professor. The passive reception can be stimulating and informative, but the creative state of students involved in active discussion and reporting is yet more so.

I usually model the type of presentation expected, by being the reporter for the first chapter or so of the new book. I attempt to stress the variety of methods of presenting material, and the importance of extracting major themes and data from the mass of detail present. Students develop confidence by reporting to their peer group, and experience the satisfaction of

experimenting with different manners of presentation. They create questions to ask one another, and compare lists they have made of important concepts and facts.

The teacher's role is that of informed monitor. He/she can add or correct data, and bring up topics not yet discussed. The teacher also brings in information which deepens appreciation of material under consideration. Slides and films can be shown, if available.

Halfway through the course, forms are distributed which request an anonymous evaluation of class work and procedures. An effort is made to include any subject which has been identified as a major interest of a student and not yet discussed. Reaction is solicited to the various segments of the course, and it has evolved to its present form in response to suggestions.

The model for this course is not presented as the best manner of offering a French culture class, but simply as one which has worked well. The studying of four very different texts, plus the work with Francophone countries of the world, and the reading of periodicals for current events, combine to give the class a clear sense of the complexity of modern France and its people, and a reference framework to understand events in France and the Francophone world. The student presentations yield a very personal involvement in the subject matter. Many students have commented on their heightened understanding of their own family and country's values after beginning to see the basis of those in France.

A MODERN FRANCE: A COURSE MODEL  
References

1 Edward C. Knox, "Report on the Teaching of Civilization," French Review, 56 (February 1983), 369-78.

2 Howard L. Nostrand, "Empathy for a second culture: motivations and techniques," Responding to new realities, ed. Gilbert A. Jarvis (Skokie: National Textbook Company, 1974), p. 319.

3 Tora T. Ladu, "Developing Cross-Cultural Understanding: The Teacher's Responsibility," Essays on the Teaching of Culture, ed. Howard B. Altman and Victor E. Hanzeli (Detroit: Heinle & Heinle, 1974), p. 130.

4 Nelson Brooks, "The Analysis of Foreign and Familiar Cultures," The Culture Revolution in Foreign Language Teaching, ed. Robert C. Lafayette (Skokie: National Textbook Company, 1976), p.19.

5 Journal Français d'Amérique, \$5 per semester per student, 1051 Divisadero Street, San Francisco, CA 94115, or 120 E. 56th Street, Suite 228, New York, NY 10022.

6 Helen L. Jorstad, "Newspapers and Magazines in the Second Language Classroom," The Culture Revolution in Foreign Language Teaching, ed. Robert C. Lafayette (Skokie: National Textbook Company, 1976), pp. 91-103.

7 A directory of foreign government tourist offices in the USA and Canada can be obtained by sending \$2 to: Travel Insider, P.O. Box 66323, O'Hare International Airport, Chicago, IL 60666.