

Report of Site Visit

Sonoma State University French program

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Since the previous five-year review, the following recommendations of the outside reviewer's report, Dr. Edith Benkov, have come to fruition:

- 1) Faculty work stations are now up to date;
- 2) The French program has access to appropriately-sized and outfitted smart classrooms;
- 3) There are part-time instructors with excellent preparation and skills to help the full-time faculty members further the goals of the program.
- 4) A modern multimedia computer lab now exists in contrast to the aging and essentially functionless facility described in the previous report.
- 5) The French program is now also the beneficiary of two scholarships, of which one is to help a student with graduate study in French. The current beneficiary is applying to the Master's program in French at SFSU. The other scholarship is a substantial amount of funding for international programs. The fact that the French program has such donors speaks well to its quality and potential to attract more funding if it is properly positioned.

Assessment:

The French program complies with the yearly assessment task with embedded assessments throughout the program and shows that it understands the feedback loop necessary for continuing improvement throughout the course sequence of the major.

Moreover, the French program possesses a superior instrument for assessment of the major as a whole. As part of the senior capstone course devoted to study of autobiographical writing, including students' writing of their own autobiographical work, finding their own voices as they write in the style of the writers they study, one of the assignments involves filling out a questionnaire. This instrument delves into students' perceptions of what they are currently doing in this course and what has brought them to this point. It asks them to consider how the steps they have taken to achieve mastery not only of the skills but the analytical habits and the in-depth cross-cultural awareness they developed will serve them in the future. This questionnaire also asks them to assess themselves with respect to the goals of the French program. I read two years' worth of these essay-style responses to these questions and reviewed students' self-assessment on the French program goals. What I discovered merits consideration and admiration not only for the accomplishments of the students but also for those of the French program. Because not one student had graduated following this capstone course without making great strides in abilities, knowledge, and intellectual development owing to the courses

preceding this capstone and during it. These were not essays in empty praise or mere platitudes. Every student took pride in the self-assessment and self-knowledge gained through this course that also transferred to the capacity to reach intellectual milestones in the discipline of French. This capstone assessment pertinent to every aspect of the French program represents a model of the genre.

As opposed to the previous recommendation about the goals of the French program, I find that though they include the skills, they give an appropriately significant place to the cultural and intellectual aspects of studying French.

Recommendation:

- 1) Continue the administration of the capstone course's questionnaire and self-evaluation on the goals of the French major for the detailed insights into the program that it offers.
- 2) Discontinue attempts to revamp the cultural and linguistic questionnaires mentioned in the self-study.
- 3) Maintain the current goals of the program, which are clearly defined and addressed in course-embedded assessment tools.

Budget and resources:

The French program is part of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures that includes German and Spanish. Thus, it is the department that has an administrative coordinator and it is the department's budget in which the French program shares. All evidence indicates that the administrative coordinator is highly efficient and attentive to program as well as department needs. However, the budget is inadequate to the mission of the university, that is, the instructional and advising needs of the students. \$632 per faculty member in operating expenses is not enough to provide for the needs of the program even when it is leveraging online resources and online dissemination of its materials. Furthermore, only a one-time grant devoted to professional development has given somewhat adequate support to mission-critical travel for faculty members, among them the professors of French. That too is inadequate.

One of the professors, Dr. Renaudin, chairs the department. Only one course assigned time is currently allotted to administer the department. That means that only one third of a position is directed toward the administrative tasks whereas the usual assigned time in such departments is anywhere from half a position to three-quarters of a position. It is certain that there is more administrative work involved than the current amount of assigned time indicates. Dr. Renaudin and Dr. Toczyski share coordinating the French program, participating in GE learning communities, and have significant service activities. There are also other tasks that the chairperson should undertake such as planning outreach, keeping department assessment activities current, conducting budget exercises, coordinating events with other departments, undertaking more programming and associate tasks, to

name a few items. The complexity of the modern university assures that one-third time for chairing this department is not enough.

I was also dumbfounded to discover that academic unit budgets at Sonoma State are retrospective and that prior decisions to convert operating expenses to part-time hiring had decimated the budget of the School of Arts and Humanities, and by extension the French program. In addition, there appears to be no plan to refresh faculty computing nor the language lab on the part of the university.

Recommendation:

- 1) Increase the budget by a still reasonable 50% to \$948 per faculty member. At some point the unit budget has to be normalized in order to fulfill the mission of the College of Arts and Humanities.
- 2) Institutionalize mission-critical travel funding.
- 3) Create plans for refreshing faculty computing and special facilities like the language lab.
- 4) Add one course to the assigned time of the chair so that in one semester two courses are devoted to administering the department and in the other semester one course.

Courses and curriculum:

The French program has both a minor and major.

The program of offerings both takes into account standard curriculum, but offers enough flexibility that faculty members are able to take advantage of student interests and developments in the field. Conversation with students reveal that they are interested and high performing. Their comments and conversation, all in French, reveal that their skills and knowledge work in a synergistic fashion thanks to the topics and assignments in courses. Though it would be valuable to have more courses in the program and less of a learning curve, the current slate of offerings integrates skill development and cultural background into every class. In particular, the capstone course offers a very innovative series of readings, discussion, self-reflection, as well as the opportunity for intellectual growth.

At every level of the curriculum students are afforded the opportunity to become acquainted with French and francophone culture, acquire the intellectual underpinnings that allow learning, and do a variety of presentational activities. I saw demonstrations and explanations of various kinds in FREN 102, including a song, games, and how to use a juicer. Students of FREN 202 took certain knowledge that had remained passive and worked on making it active via cultural topics like a reading on the progression of the fast food industry in France. Advanced courses had a robust series of readings, presentations, and discussions.

The institution of four-unit courses throughout the curriculum is having a very positive effect on student learning and achieving the goals of the French program.

Recommendation:

This is an excellent program that should continue as is.

Faculty:

The faculty members of the French program are high performing and very hard working despite strictures on time, money, and library services. One faculty member was already recognized as outstanding teacher and the other is currently nominated for that honor. This speaks well for the esteem with which Dr. Renaudin and Dr. Toczyski are regarded. They have created a very effective, highly structured major that gives students an excellent education in French in particular, but generally in the sense that students leave the program with intellectual and academic background on which they can draw personally and professionally. The two faculty members are well integrated into university service; the list of their committees and roles they have assumed is extensive. Nor do they neglect their scholarship and professional growth. Their cvs detail the on-going evolution of their scholarly career. These are faculty members who have an immense amount of talent. They put it to use in instruction, in service, and in scholarly and creative work. In addition, they participate actively with the students in the French Club and organize many co-curricular activities with them.

There is great potential in the French program for increasing the residential arts and sciences profile of the university and being an example of the integration of creativity as a prominent theme in the humanities. Dr. Renaudin has done several multimedia creative programs. Dr. Toczyski recently brought Heidi Kune to Sonoma for a well-attended lecture.

The two part-time lecturers are also dedicated and intersect well with the student body. All of the instructors of the French program have their students' interests at heart and focus on student learning.

Recommendation:

- 1) Continue to integrate the lecturers in French into the on-going discussion of the French program.
- 2) Make sure that the program gets represented on the Arts and Humanities page in line with the faculty members' contributions and references to the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures alongside currently represented programs.

General education:

Currently, both Dr. Renaudin and Dr. Toczyski are involved with a general education learning community based on the theme of Paris, City of light. This course involves a substantial amount of work and focus on GE goals rather than the goals of the French program. A new general education learning community through the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures will come into being and faculty members hope that this new community will pay dividends to the French program as well as to the other language programs.

In addition, revamping of Area C leaves area C3 as a portion of GE in which the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures figures prominently. This change should bring benefits to the department as a whole and to French in particular. The two faculty members in French desire to participate in the university as widely as possible, witness their cvs, and they plan to continue to be active in the GE learning communities.

Recommendation:

Continue activity in the learning communities program with changes if they become necessary and as long as beneficial to the French program and the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures.

International programs and freshman learning communities:

The goal of the new freshman learning community in Modern Languages and Literatures is two-fold. It both seeks to allow students an early and beneficial start to majoring or minoring in foreign languages and it seeks to raise awareness of international programs. Both the format and course description should be beneficial to students' experience in beginning language. The course creates synergy between languages and international programs. Because of this synergy one could expect more students to declare majors and minors. Advising will be crucial, but the faculty members of the French program have experience practicing quality, in one on one advising sessions for all students involved in the program.

Recommendation:

- 1) Observant of policy, advise students in the freshman learning community of Modern Languages and Literatures of how the community, the beginning language class, and international programs can enrich the university experience of students and their academic profile in, here, majoring or minoring in French.
- 2) At CSU Chico students do not participate in international programs without declaring an appropriate major or minor. I recommend this practice.

Language lab:

The language lab is an excellent facility for language learning. Its equipment is appropriate and allows for the display of more than YouTube clips. There is video display equipment as well as an electronic white board. The number of classes in the department that could benefit from this facility is large and not every course can be scheduled there. Current policy means that the lower division classes have priority. This gives students an excellent start to their program. In addition, peer language learning facilitators and their enthusiasm play a crucial role in these courses by allowing for students to practice their knowledge and skills with sympathetic and trained interlocutors. These peer facilitators enroll in a course to equip them to work effectively with small groups. They then put into practice not only their advanced skills but also newfound abilities in the analysis and theory of language learning. This program serves the French program well. This language presents known difficulties in interaction and so peer mentors play a crucial role in preparing students to be able to function in more advanced classes.

However, this type of equipment should be installed in at least another room. Just like other disciplines, foreign languages and French in particular benefit from certain technologies to help deliver an up-to-date, high-quality program. This current room is not sufficient for the department. Even upper division classes should have use of such equipment.

Recommendation:

Equip one of the other rooms assigned to the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures in like fashion.

Profile and numbers:

Currently, about half the students are male, a significant statistic given that today's American universities as a whole are more than 50% women. Over the five-year period of the self-study the profile of the major was in line with that of the university as a whole.

Certain students are double majors, but at least half of all majors are primary majors. This too is a significant statistic. For this five-year review minors were able to be counted for the first time.

Given that there are only two faculty members, the numbers of majors and minors are large. Given the fact that students have to take all the courses that are offered when they are offered, the numbers of majors and minors are also significantly high. Dr. Renaudin requested information on how many students continue from the general education courses, both under the previous GE system and the new. However, this information is currently unavailable.

Already there are a number of Spanish heritage speakers in the French program. This is a group that could benefit from the French program due to the similarity in

these two Romance languages, but also the French program would benefit from enrolling such students. This would be a win-win for the university and the program. Research shows that students who do not come from the dominant group benefit the most from personal contact with professors and the opportunity to form a community with fellow students. This is what the French program offers.

Recommendation:

- 1) Explore being able to contact Spanish heritage speakers through the admissions process.
- 2) Use contacts formed within the secondary school community in order to advise and recruit students.
- 3) The School of Arts and Humanities website could showcase the French program in line with its priorities which, to this reviewer, appear to focus on the performance aspects of the academic departments which form the School. There are ample examples that could figure on the website and perhaps attract students who have an interest in the performative aspects of French.

Students:

There are a wide variety of student backgrounds in the French program. There are students who have French as a heritage language, those who work full time in order to complete their degree, and others representative of all the ethnicities attending Sonoma State University. The French Club helps integrate all students into the program through the activities that it sponsors which are open to all.

Students speak appreciatively of all the care and concern that the faculty members in French display on a daily basis. Dr. Renaudin and Dr. Toczyski keep a rigorous program going, but are able to make adjustments for individual student needs. The students notice and are also aware of the opportunity that they have.

As far as the draw of Sonoma State University, its smaller size, more bucolic setting, and the intimacy of the campus drew the French majors I met to this campus. The competitors were UC Santa Barbara and Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. In contrast to these campuses, students felt the difference all the more when they entered the French program insofar as it singularly exemplifies exactly what drew students to Sonoma State to begin with. This aspect of the program could pay dividends to the notion of the university as a residential arts and sciences university.

Recommendation:

- 1) Re-consider instituting the French diction competition that drew local French classes to the university to discover what a campus is and what the French major could do for them.

- 2) In smaller format than the former Language Festival this is an activity that could involve the French Club as well and involve students in attracting students suited to the French program.

Conclusions:

The French program of Sonoma State University is well constructed and gives excellent results. The faculty members are high performing and dedicated to their mission. Focusing a few resources on the program has the potential of significantly increasing its pull to students.

Overall recommendation:

Continuation without reservation.