

## PREEMPTIVE STRIKE: THE AATF WORKS TO PRESERVE CHOICE FOR OUR KIDS

Advocacy, in most dictionaries, is the act of pleading or arguing in favor of something; giving active support for an idea, person, policy cause, or program. In the case of educators, it generally occurs as a reaction to a program cut or plans to cut a program, and you do it because you have to.

It should be pretty obvious that begging for a program extension or assailing a government office with protest letters are both strategies with a very limited shelf life, although they must often be done. In order to keep the forces opposing a program at bay or to neutralize them, you have to have the breadth and depth of information to develop a number of different arguments, and thereby be able to advocate on several fronts, geographically, polemically, temporally, etc. In the absence of ready-made arguments, battles are waged again and again by a group of increasingly work-worn volunteers who are continually reinventing the wheel.

The AATF is putting in place the components of a permanent campaign to save existing French programs and to encourage the formation of new ones. This project requires state and national information about the relevancy of French and recruitment of highly motivated volunteers from among members, non-member French teachers, non French teachers, students, parents, even Francophones and Francophiles from the business and political communities. Indeed, the program is built on the expectation of rich human interaction (inter-professional where possible), but it is highly information dependant.

A passionate argument without practical, useable, and pertinent information can be neither effective nor compelling. The same can be said about practical, useable, and pertinent information without a passionate argument. We need ready-to-use or easily accessible information sources, and we need passionate allies of French who will use this information.

In order to fight against Francophobia, agoraphobia, depleted budgets and indifference, we must use "weapons of mass instruction" in advance to minimize the chance of confusion when we are actually threatened. Here, the Internet plays an essential role in gathering and disseminating powerful information for the advocacy of French Language and Culture programs in the U.S. The plan is outlined and information gathering initiated through a national hub site.

Ideas for French Language & Culture Advocacy in the U.S. [[www.utm.edu/staff/globeg/advofr.shtml](http://www.utm.edu/staff/globeg/advofr.shtml)] and state-specific Web

pages, such as "Wisconsin Needs French," "New York Needs French," "Tennessee Needs French," "Illinois Needs French," and others in the pipeline are now or will soon be available.

We now have appointed chapter advocacy liaisons in the following states: Arizona, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, DC, Wisconsin, and a designated webmaster in California. In the case of multi-chapter states, only New York has more than one chapter on board. We need all of it to come together this year in order to capitalize on the momentum created by "National French Week" and "Year of Languages" activities.

A number of six to twenty-five page information packets called "AATF State Advocacy Fact Packs" have been created and sent out to liaisons in states mentioned, to chapter presidents, to individual teachers, or to parent groups. These are intended to be incorporated, along with local information from allies on site, in state-specific Web pages with the kind of information that really matters to local decision makers.

Since many members still ask what an AATF chapter advocacy liaison does, it is worth repeating the expectations:

- (1) Work with other chapter members or with other chapters in your state to make available state-specific advocacy materials on a Web page;
- (2) Organize information pertinent to the status of French in your chapter. This might include some of the answers to queries in the district and state profile lists from Ideas for French Language & Culture Advocacy in the U.S. [[www.utm.edu/staff/globeg/advofr.shtml](http://www.utm.edu/staff/globeg/advofr.shtml)];
- (3) Maintain a contact list of influential people in the chapter (state supervisors, state and national representatives and senators, allies in business, state foreign language association contacts, etc.).
- (4) Identify members and interested allies who are willing to travel and speak, those who are willing to phone, and those willing to write letters.
- (5) Create or be ready to create templates for letter writing campaigns;
- (6) Put the call out that you are interested in any sign that a French program will be cut, scaled back, re-

placed by something else, or that someone is struggling to introduce a French program in a district where there is none.

- (7) If possible, map out where chapter members are geographically, so you can call on those who live near trouble spots;
- (8) Share ideas, successes, and failures with other chapters.

Even as we are building our Web sites and recruiting dozens of volunteers to defend French, calls for help and tales of hard-fought battles arise from teachers, parents, students, and alumni, or from interested Francophiles. All too often our information, our organization, and our connection to potential allies in the region might have been instrumental in saving the day, but the tale is sung like that from the bloody lips of the messenger of Thermopylae, too late to save the opportunity of choosing French for hundreds of kids.

Give us the chance to strike before it's too late. We need to make sure that French teachers everywhere know what we are doing. We need to link hands with advocates in all foreign language organizations, facing common problems in the way many school officials misjudge their own districts in the wake of serious budget crises or "No Child Left Behind."

We are a new breed of warrior for peace and global understanding, engaged in a passionate battle of wits for the sake of our kids. Join us by contacting Robert "Tennessee Bob" Peckham, AATF Vice-President at Department of Modern Foreign Languages, University of Tennessee at Martin, Martin, TN 38238; e-mail: [[bobb@utm.edu](mailto:bobb@utm.edu)].