

# PROMOTION IN MOTION

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## PROMOTING FRENCH TO SPANISH SPEAKERS

A growing population of Spanish speakers in the U.S. provides members of the AATF with an expanding pool of potential learners of French. I teach French at a small, open enrollment university close to the Mexican border with Texas where over 66% of our students are Hispanic, and I recruit heavily from this Spanish-speaking population using the techniques described below.

I design posters that describe the family ties between the two languages: "In the family of languages, Spanish and French are sisters." As with all the posters I place around campus, I include facts such as "Beginning classes offered each semester" and provide complete contact information.

I also design flyers that explore the similarities between the two languages. One panel lists cognates such as *bien, mal, felicitaciones*, and *simpático* side by side in French and Spanish. Another panel explores similarities in grammar, for example the distinction between *saber/savoir* and *conocer/connaitre*, placement and agreement of adjectives, placement of direct and indirect object pronouns, and use of reflexive verbs. The cover of the flyer places *francès* directly above *français* and has lines that link the letters that appear in both words to reinforce the connection visually.

Every time I recruit, I distribute flyers to high school seniors, to freshmen at orientation, and to students in "university success" classes. I never miss an opportunity to say that knowing Spanish is an advantage when studying French. Merely asking students to give the Spanish for library and bookstore and then telling them the French underscores the point.

When I teach, I take every opportunity to make connections with Spanish where they exist. Since the Hispanic heritage students at my university have not necessarily formally studied Spanish but rather have acquired it informally at home, many of the connections are not obvious to them. For instance, they are not always sure of the genders of nouns. Similarly, they are not always aware at a metalinguistic level of the difference between *tú* and *usted* or of the Spanish construction for being right (*tener razón*) which parallels the French construction *avoir raison*.

A colleague of mine has taught special classes of French for Spanish speakers with a great deal of success at her high school in San Antonio. AATF member Elaine Maguire has developed materials and activities that exploit the similarities and drill the differences between the two

languages. The administration has not approved such courses at my university.

Our French Club invites the Spanish Club to plan shared activities. The Halloween celebration was a big success; students came dressed as their favorite historical or literary character. Special prizes can be presented to those who represent both cultures: Bizet's *Carmen*, for example. Students made presentations about the significance to Mexicans and to the French of November 1 and 2 when All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day are celebrated with tributes to deceased loved ones. We plan one year to host a joint celebration for *Cinco de mayo*. The French Club students will talk about the role of the French in Mexico.

Casting Hispanic heritage students' knowledge of Spanish as an advantage helps dispel the perception that French is a difficult language. Moreover, promoting French as an add-on rather than a substitute for another language is a more positive approach to the continual challenge of filling French classes at my university.

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