

VIVE LE FRANÇAIS: STRATEGIES FOR RECRUITING AND RETAINING STUDENTS IN FRENCH CLASSES*

INTRODUCTION

Although recent surveys (ACTFL 1994; AATF 1994) show a decline nationwide in the number of students studying French at every level, there are nevertheless some French programs which are thriving (Koop 1995). The number one reason for the decrease in student enrollment in French, mentioned by 37% of the AATF survey respondents, was the "growing popularity of Spanish perceived as being more useful and easier" (AATF 1995:4). Therefore, any attempts to halt or reverse the trend of declining French enrollment must consider these perceptions. Further, if French teachers at all levels of instruction are to recruit and register students for their classes and retain them at advanced levels, then teachers must recognize the characteristics of outstanding programs (Sims and Hammond) and learn to implement features of the almost 20% of programs reported to have increasing enrollment (AATF 1995).

This article first presents the status of French study in the United States. Next, it examines and dispels the myth that Spanish is easier than French. It then presents evidence of the usefulness of French, not only in the business world but also in other fields such as science and math. Finally, the article details the most important strategies for recruiting and retaining students in upper levels of French, thereby providing teachers of French with the information they need to increase enrollment in their programs.

FRENCH ENROLLMENT—PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE (?)

Periodic surveys and tallies of public school enrollment nationwide in the various foreign languages have been carried out since the nineteenth century. A 1905 survey shows 10.1% of students studying French, none Spanish. By the mid-sixties, the percentages are almost even: 10.8% French; 12.3% Spanish. The most recent 1994 survey by American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) (Draper and Hicks 1996) indicates that only 9.3% of students are enrolled in French, while 27.28% are in Spanish. It is evident that as more and more students are choosing a language, they are tending to choose Spanish rather than French or another language.

Another study which includes college- and university-level figures shows a much larger decrease in French enrollment. A relatively small but significant 1994

American Association of Teachers of French (AATF) survey of teachers and administrators shows an overall decline in French enrollment. Over a 3-year period the decrease averaged 45.8%—almost a 50% decrease in students. The ratio of French to Spanish students is approximately 1 to 2.15, showing an imbalance similar to the 1 to 3 ratio of the ACTFL survey. And finally, as predicted from the AATF survey, "colleges and universities will soon feel the impact of this trend" (Koop 1995). The Modern Language Association (MLA) statistics show a 25% drop in post-secondary French enrollment (Valdman 1997).

As indicated in the Introduction, the major reason given for choosing Spanish by 37% of those who responded to the AATF survey is the perception that Spanish is both easier and more useful than French. There are a number of other reasons cited which are related to the choice of Spanish over French or other languages. Respondents commented that there is a decrease in the academic level of students and therefore little interest in French (AATF 1995: 5). It may be that these students are more interested in an "easier" language. It was noted that fewer students take French in high school (undoubtedly because they are taking Spanish), a fact which in turn has an impact on French enrollment in college (4, 14). Also mentioned was the perception that French is too hard and that there are scheduling problems (5, 14), not surprising if there are fewer French than Spanish sections from which to choose. At every level except elementary, from middle school/junior high school to university, the litany of reasons for the decrease in French enrollment goes on, invariably mentioning Spanish.

This influx of students into Spanish has obviously hurt French programs but has not always been positive for Spanish programs either. For instance, as enrollments in French decrease, more people, who may not be fully prepared or willing, are pressed into teaching Spanish. And larger Spanish classes may lead to lower proficiency (Walz et al. 1995b; Walz 1996). Spanish educators report a high dropout rate after the second year, in part due to the students' realization that Spanish is not so easy after all (Kraemer 1995; McKeithan 1997; Staley 1997).

In addition, the suggestions by respondents to the AATF survey (1995) for ways to promote French showed concern for

portraying French as a valuable and important language, while recognizing the status of Spanish:

- develop awareness on usefulness of French
- prepare a videotape of people using French on the job
- do not compete with Spanish
- make Spanish a requirement
- cut back bilingual education, which is always in Spanish
- dispel the idea that Spanish is the only foreign language
- advertise the importance of French in business and as a world language
- make available promotional materials on business and technological developments in French-speaking countries
- show the importance of French for the United States (GATT, NATO).

Interestingly, more than 20% of the respondents suggested developing awareness of the usefulness of French; only one percent of the respondents thought the myth that French is harder than Spanish should be dispelled (AATF 1995:5). Why? Do French teachers themselves believe the myth? Or do they not have the information to discredit the misperception?

AN AMERICAN URBAN LEGEND: "SPANISH IS EASIER"¹

When a group of French teachers was asked which statement was heard more, "French is harder" or "Spanish is easier," the overwhelming majority indicated the latter (Friedrich 1996). This myth,² which discourages students from taking French, must be dispelled. Having reached almost epic proportions or at least the status of an urban legend, what does this myth tell us?

In *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends & Their Meanings*, folklorist Jan Brunvand explains that urban legends are an integral part of our culture and are believed by even the most sophisticated and well-educated folk of modern society (1981: xi). This traditional material is told "in the course of casual conversations" and in special situations such as "campfires, slumber parties, and college dormitory bull sessions" (4). They are unique, unselfconscious reflections of major concerns of individuals in the societies in which the legends circulate (xii), in this case, of students. We can ask ourselves "What are the concerns this myth reflects?"

If we think about the concerns of children, adolescents, young adults, their parents, and perhaps American society in

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general regarding education, we might see that many people want good grades, some do not want to work too hard, or be challenged too much, most do not want to fail or to be embarrassed.

Brunvand explains that urban legends “gratify our desire to know about and to try to understand bizarre, frightening, and potentially embarrassing events” (12). The prospect of studying a foreign language may indeed seem to hold the potential for “strange” experiences and embarrassment for some of our students.

According to Brunvand, we should ask who tells the stories, when, to whom, and why, to understand legends (15). “Spanish is easier” or “French is harder” is usually said by students to fellow students or to an advisor, with anxiety about, or fear of, a new situation, or at least lack of confidence about what to do (what language to take). French teachers and others would do well to address these concerns. One way we can do this is to dispel the myth and show our students that French is actually quite user-friendly.

FRENCH “MADE EASY”

Traditionally, advisors, counselors, and others have routed the better students to French (or German or Latin, if available), and the “weaker” ones to Spanish in the belief that it is an easy language (Granowitz 1994a; Mohanty 1994a; Staley 1997; St. John 1995; Williams 1994). When students of Spanish encounter the inevitable difficulties with the language, as noted earlier, they often feel betrayed, and remark, as one teacher put it, “Boy, if Spanish is easier than French, then French must be impossible!”

So, it is imperative that the French-is-harder myth be debunked. In fact, a recent series of letters to the editor and short articles appearing in the AATF *National Bulletin* have discussed the subject (Granowitz 1994a, b; Mohanty 1994a; Peche 1994a, 1996; St. John 1995; Williams 1994).³ Peche presents the most balanced, although brief, argument. He refers to the belief that Spanish is easier as “unfounded rhetoric.” Although this teacher of both French and Spanish avoids drawing clear conclusions, the chart he provides

offers that opportunity to the reader. An abbreviated version of his chart follows:

This analysis would seem to indicate that French is the easiest, followed by German, then Spanish. Spanish is shown to be the most difficult of these three commonly studied languages. This is information that we, as French teachers, need to share with students, parents, advisors, counselors, colleagues, and others who figure in the students’ decision about which language to take.

A closer look at why French is easier than Spanish may help in discussions with our students, colleagues, and others. How do we talk about one language as being easier or harder than another? First, we are talking about “easier,” (or “harder”) for the majority of our students who are native speakers of English. By “easier” we mean requiring less effort (Webster’s 1990), which is not to say that the study of any foreign language is not a discipline requiring considerable effort.

Languages have been classified according to the number of hours of training required for students to reach proficiency levels from 0 (lowest) to 3 (highest).⁴ For example, after 480 hours of training, a learner with average aptitude studying a Group I language (Romance and Germanic) would be expected to reach level 1+. The same learner studying a Group II language (e.g., Greek) would be at level 1; studying a Group III language (e.g., Hebrew) at level O+; and a Group IV language (e.g., Japanese) at level O+. Thus an English speaker requires less training (time and effort) to reach comparable levels of a Romance or Germanic language than to reach the same levels of other Indo-European or non-Indo-European languages.

So, the answer to the question about whether a language is easy or easier (requiring less time and effort) than another, or difficult or more difficult (requiring more time and effort) than another depends in part on how similar the target language is to the native language or other language the person, or student, already knows. To make the point in another way, consider an Italian woman.

Would it be easier for her, assuming no prior knowledge of another language, to learn Spanish or Chinese? Obviously, she would learn Spanish more easily, with less time and effort.

Since the language our students know is English, then we can first look at what we know about English, and then compare English to French, English to Spanish, and French to Spanish to see how French is easier.

FRENCH, THE USER-FRIENDLY LANGUAGE

Even though we may want to discuss what we know about English, it is, in fact, impossible to talk about the English language and its history without mentioning French. And that fact alone should give a clue as to which language is more similar to English.

English is an Indo-European Western Germanic language, like Dutch, Flemish, Afrikaans, Yiddish, Frisian, and Luxembourgian.⁵ The Norman Conquest of 1066 brought William the Conqueror and the French language to England, where French reigned as the language of the nobility and of the court and introduced thousands of new words into English in many lexical fields. French had a tremendous influence on English for between two and three hundred years. Some of the rulers did not even speak English—they were native speakers of French. Henry IV, who ascended the throne in 1399, was the first English king since the Norman Conquest whose native language was English and not French.

Apart from the enormous amount of English borrowings from French in the Middle Ages, English has continued to appropriate words and expressions from French since the Renaissance. There are considerable numbers of words in lexical fields such as cuisine and restaurant vocabulary, and political and social vocabulary which come from French. In fact, some years ago English dictionaries stated that 60 to 70 percent of English vocabulary came from French. Now 40 to 50 percent is the figure usually cited (Soci 1996). So we can say that approximately half of English vocabulary comes from French.

In the “Foreign Words and Phrases” section of any dictionary are more recent contributions to the English language. Besides Latin, there is no language which has provided so many expressions to English. In addition, from the fifteenth

	French	German	Spanish
Vocabulary	less difficult	less difficult	more difficult
Grammar	less difficult	more difficult	more difficult
Pronunciation	more difficult	somewhat more difficult	less difficult

century on, both English and French borrowed from Latin, and to a lesser extent from Greek, so that even more English and French words resemble each other.

In recent years the borrowings have gone the other way. French has so many words and expressions from English that the *Académie Française* and the French Ministry of Culture have attempted to discourage or even outlaw these borrowings. Lists of words which are identical, or nearly so, in French and English might impress students, parents, colleagues, and others we are trying to convince of the similarity of the two languages. We might ask, for example, the meaning of the following French words: *cuisine, orange, omelette, croissant, T-shirt, week-end* (the Spanish equivalents are: *cocina, naranja, tortilla, media luna, camiseta, fin de semana*).

Another point worth considering is that French, although a Romance language, borrowed heavily from Germanic. So both English and French have many words of Germanic origin in common. Also, both languages borrowed from Celtic and so have still more vocabulary in common.

There are even some similarities in grammatical structure. The French *passé composé*, e.g., *il est venu, il est allé*, is similar to English. For example, although today we usually say "he has come" or "he has gone," English has, or had, the structure "he is come," and "he is gone."

SPANISH, THE "DIFFERENT" AND MORE DIFFICULT LANGUAGE

There is really not much we can say about English and Spanish. They simply do not have the history in common that English and French do. To be fair, we can say that there is vocabulary from Latin roots in both Spanish and English and that many of the words which came into English from Norman French also exist in Spanish, but the French form of the word is invariably closer to the English. There are some words of Germanic origin in Spanish, as in English and French, and even fewer of Celtic origin. Spanish also contributed some vocabulary to English, although not to the degree that French did. But Spanish (Portuguese, too) has something neither French nor English has, an element which distinguishes it from the other Romance languages, and renders it even more different from English and French: about 9% of its vocabulary is from Arabic.

It is perfectly obvious that French and English have much more in common than Spanish and English, and by that criterion alone we can probably say that French is "easier" in the sense that it is less different from English than is Spanish.

FRENCH IS EASIER

But let us compare selected features of French and Spanish briefly. Of course, both are Romance languages with many points of grammar and vocabulary in common, although as we have seen, there are considerable differences, too. The feature cited most often as more difficult in French than in Spanish is the sound/symbol correspondence (Ranson and Carlisle 1996; Valdman 1996c; Williams 1994). It is undeniable that the spelling of Spanish is more phonetic, but it must be noted that French is relatively predictable; for example, *oi* is almost always pronounced [wa], whether *bois, dois, fois, joie, lois, moi, or mois*, and so on through the alphabet. Some teachers (Amey 1996; Friedrich 1996; Graycar 1996) find that the distribution of the poem entitled "Hints on Pronunciation for Foreigners" (Appendix) early in a first-year French course makes students grateful for the relative ease of French spelling in comparison to English.

There are two common reasons often cited as to why Spanish is more difficult than French. The first is that the subject and subject pronoun in Spanish, once the subject has been named or established, is superfluous and not repeated. This absence renders the reading and oral comprehension of Spanish more difficult, and at times impossible, for all but the most fluent of students (Friedrich 1996; Graycar 1996). The second reason concerns verbs (Friedrich 1996; Peche 1996; Valdman 1996c). Both languages have fourteen tenses "on the books" (Kendris 1996a, b), but French teachers do not normally teach for production, and only rarely or at very advanced levels, for recognition, the following tenses: the *passé simple*, the *imparfait du subjonctif*, the *passé antérieur*, and the *plus-que-parfait du subjonctif*. This list reduces to just ten the number of tenses normally taught in French. In contrast, in Spanish, all fourteen tenses must be taught.

One of these tenses, the preterit, is particularly difficult in Spanish, mainly because of the relatively large number of irregular forms and the necessity of using the different endings for each conjugation, person, and number, principles that are especially difficult for students. The subjunctive mood is also of special concern. In Spanish there are four subjunctive tenses and two forms each of the *imperfecto del subjuntivo* and the *pluscuamperfecto del subjuntivo*, all four of which are used in written and spoken form by natives, for a total of six forms, as opposed to only two commonly used in French.⁶

By dispelling the myth that French is

hard(er) and by showing instead that French is actually easier than Spanish, teachers can encourage decisions on language study based on more appropriate considerations, such as student interest, career and travel plans, and cultural interests and heritage (Peche 1996).

FRENCH IS USEFUL AND PRACTICAL

In fact, it is in the area of careers where another near-myth is often invoked, that of the supposed lack of usefulness and practicality of French, a concern expressed by some 20 percent of respondents to the AATF survey (1995).

Fortunately, teachers and others (Romer and Head 1996; Kraemer 1995; Soci 1996) and AATF Task Force committees have been hard at work showing how useful and practical French is. They have produced some wonderful publications for use with students, parents, administrators, and others. Most issues of the AATF *National Bulletin* have a page entitled "Open Your World with French" that contains a wealth of useful information. Romer and Head (1996) have produced fact sheets on the usefulness of French and on the success of their students in putting French to use in their jobs. We must all publicize French in ways meaningful to our students.⁷

What information would be meaningful to our students, in particular to those who are more interested in business, math, or science, or who have no intention of majoring in French? It would certainly help to tell them about college, career, social, and personal advantages of taking French. We must make them aware that there are advantages that begin in high school and continue throughout their careers.

The first hurdle is to convince parents and students that it is not just Latin that will improve their PSAT and SAT scores. Even today, parents will argue that Latin is the way to improve verbal results. We need to make them aware that research indicates that it is simply the number of years of a foreign language that affects verbal SAT scores, not the study of a specific language such as Latin, and we need to tell them that no other subject has the same positive effect. Five years of foreign language study, any foreign language, were associated with higher verbal SAT scores, as opposed to five years of any other academic subject (Cooper 1987). Studies of second language acquisition, again, any language, have also shown that cognition is enhanced as students increase years of study.⁸ Metalinguistic awareness, reasoning ability, verbal intelligence, cognitive flexibility, and divergent thinking have all been demonstrated to improve through foreign language study.

Research has also demonstrated higher aptitude for acquiring computer languages in students who continue foreign language study. Isacco, et al. (1987) hypothesize that as students become more familiar with the syntax and grammar of a foreign language, they may apply this knowledge and logic to artificial computer language, thus facilitating their acquisition.

Some parents of young people who are interested in the sciences often demand German, thinking that it provides a special skill for future scientists. We as teachers need to be prepared with information from doctors, scientists, technology experts, and other scientifically-oriented professionals that disputes this assumption. In fact, we need ammunition that indicates that, indeed, French may well be the language that serves all of these careers best.

In the medical field, for instance, doctors tell us that the only recent foreign medical journals and articles not already translated for them are those from France (Moore 1990), which, incidentally, is pumping huge sums of money into medical research as we write. France and the United States are the two major countries doing serious research on the AIDS virus (Kraemer 1995), surgery techniques, and cardiac problems; the two countries regularly share such information during exchanges, seminars, and conventions. The Pasteur Institute regularly conducts exchanges with the United States, and the greatest number of seminars on surgery and heart research outside the United States or Canada is held in France (Moore 1990).

In computer, cyber-communication, and telecommunications technology fields, a recent graduate of the South Carolina Governor's School for Science and Mathematics, now at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology working on a Ph.D., tells us that he finds that the most interesting new technology, articles, and innovations often come from France (Ullmer 1994). He also notes that literature concerning that same technology seems to be the least likely to be translated into English. Indeed, English and French are the two main languages of cyberspace (AATF 1996).

Why would so many new ideas be coming out of France? One only needs to be reminded of a few facts in order to understand why.⁹ France has the world's second most important defense electronics company, Thomson. Also, Alcatel is the number-one worldwide distributor of electronic components. Stung by international accusations of antiquated telephone and communication technology several ago, France has dramatically increased its funding to research in these fields and is

now a world leader in these technologies. Anyone who has travelled to France in the last decade or two knows that France's advanced technology provided computer chip cards and Minitel services years before similar commodities appeared in our country. Also, new high-definition television was invented in France, which is the world's largest manufacturer of televisions (Mohanty 1994b). These are just a few reasons why students interested in entering the fields of electronics, telecommunications, computers, and other high-tech professions would do well to have an extensive knowledge of French. As an example of exactly how knowledge of French comes into play, it might be useful to relate the following statement by the above-mentioned M.I.T. graduate student:

... Two instances stick out in my mind. In the first, a friend had written pertinent thesis work in French, and it was useful to be able to skim this and several other related documents to get the general drift. More recently, ... I was reading a document by Charles Babbage of analytical engine fame, and in the middle of the document, he cited a long and important passage—in French—by a leading French scientist. Of course, no translation was provided, for of course, all educated people speak "*le français, n'est-ce pas?*" I was able to get through it, if very slowly, and understand it... (Ullmer 1996).

Young people who are interested in professions involving transportation or space exploration should know that France's TGV (*train à grande vitesse*) set the world's speed record in 1991 (Kraemer 1995) and has been sold to other countries, including the United States. Texas and other states are looking at the TGV. France's Renault is the maker of Mack Trucks (Mohanty 1994). The second greatest aeronautics industry in the world belongs to France, and it continues to put satellites into orbit with its Ariane rocket. The United States and France have shared aerospace technology for years, and French astronauts have shared space capsules with Americans several times. These astronauts chatted amicably in both languages during the flights, as television documentaries showed.

For students interested in business and sales, it is important to know that France has the world's fourth largest economy and is the fourth largest recipient of U.S. foreign investment. More than 1,200 French companies have subsidiaries in the United States employing almost half a million workers (Soci 1996). Canada, our bilingual

neighbor to the north, is the largest trading partner of the United States, evidenced by the dual French/English translation on product labels in our stores.

Students who want an advantage in the business world need not only a basic knowledge of French but would do well to pursue the study of commercial French in college. The misconception that French is not an important tool out in the "real world" is one that seriously undermines enrollment and must be corrected.

We need to remind students who like the arts, dance, the food industry, fashion and beauty products, or advertising that all of those professions rely consistently on a vocabulary based on French. The basic lexicon used in all of those fields originates from French and is a needed tool for those who want to rise beyond the lower levels of those professions.

Successful people, especially those in marketing and business, when polled in magazine articles about the language they most wish they could speak in order to enhance their professional, social, cultural, and private lives, invariably choose French. Why? It results from something as basic as being able to pronounce the dish or wine ordered for your boss in a nice restaurant, to something as advanced as knowing how to word a fax to a fellow surgeon in France asking him to send you the details of how he uses his new cardiac stimulator. It is as simple as selling a new foundation makeup without being embarrassed about how to pronounce or translate the French name, and as complicated as not being the only chief of state at a world conference who cannot join in the social chatter in French during the break. (This situation actually happened to President Reagan.) French is a language of culture, politics, diplomacy, art, fashion, publicity, dance, technology, science, and cuisine. It could mean the difference between getting that job and not, between keeping that job and not, and between rising in that job and not.

Testimonials from our students, present and former, will demonstrate the importance of French in the world of employment. As a former French student now working for Polo Ralph Lauren in Paris explains, "My daily office routine and most of my outside appointments are almost entirely in French, and without a solid grasp of the language, I could never function on the level my job requires" (AATF 1997). A Burlington, North Carolina, buyer of fine-quality horses feels that she would be at a disadvantage with other traders if she could not communicate in French, since most of her customers in France prefer to use their own language (Romer and Head 1996). A Dallas airline executive sums up the importance of French when he tells us, "French has opened to me commercial, diplomatic, and

cultural doors which would have remained closed otherwise" (AATF 1997).

But many of our younger students may not yet be seriously affected by data and details involving professional advantages, although their parents, we hope, might be. Students themselves have a huge say in the courses they sign up for, and we are kidding ourselves if we do not advertise to win them over to and keep them in French classes. How do we do that? We use every "trick of the trade" we can, because if we succeed, we are only helping our students to learn skills which enrich their knowledge and lives.

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PUBLICITY

Of course, even with all the convincing information available about the usefulness of French in business, science, and math, and even by dispelling the myth that French is harder to learn, our potential students are unlikely to stumble upon these facts on their own. This brings us to the role of French teacher as public-relations specialist.

As French teachers we must bear in mind that the primary reason cited for an increase in student enrollment in French and one of the main criteria for a successful program is the teacher's personality (AATF 1995; Koop 1995; Sims and Hammond 1981). We must make a conscious effort to publicize French and make its study appealing. If French is perceived by our students as useful and not extremely difficult but not perceived as fun, exciting, and alluring, we have only accomplished part of our goal. As teachers, we know from experience that practical reasons to study French, such as career opportunities, may attract and appeal to older or more mature students and their parents, but younger students are not nearly as impressed by such long-range benefits. French is often just one of many electives offered to students so must compete not only with other languages but also with electives in other subject areas as well. In order to build a strong program that includes advanced courses, we must actively recruit younger students who will continue their study of French beyond the second year, which is so often the point at which second language enrollment drops dramatically. Recruiting as many younger students as possible is of crucial importance in retaining sufficient enrollment to offer upper-level courses, whether on the high school or college level. And encouraging the establishment of FLES programs in French as an equal alternative to Spanish or other languages is a vital part of this task.

When we recruit in elementary and middle schools, it is important to establish a good working relationship with the guidance

and English departments of the schools that feed into French programs. The guidance counselors and English teachers at these feeder schools are often instrumental in helping a student decide which language to study or whether to study a second language at all. The parents of potential students also have a great deal of decision-making power. When we address parents and guidance personnel (advisors at the college level), it is crucial to dispel the myth that French is more difficult than Spanish and to provide information on the usefulness of French in business and industry. The important role that language study plays in increasing success in other subject areas should also be stressed.

RECIPE FOR RECRUITING AND REGISTERING FRENCH STUDENTS

Shortly before registration for the following school year, ask for permission to place posters promoting French in the halls and classrooms of the feeder schools. Posters should also be placed in secondary schools and colleges. Some teachers use already-prepared posters to promote the study of French. Others create their own publicity, such as Romer's "One Hundred Reasons to Study French" (Romer and Head 1996), which reflects the interest of her college and larger community.

Plan to present a short program at an assembly and select the most fun and congenial students to take part. This is a commercial for the study of French and should be cast accordingly. Different levels of students should perform various parts of the program including songs, skits, dances, and cheers. Provide song sheets and have students join in singing simple and fun French songs, such as "Frère Jacques" or "Alouette." Leave the students with something tangible, such as a ribbon, button, or sticker promoting French, and end the program with a bang, such as a lively song or cheer. At the same presentation, you may also choose to discuss plans for future trips and to show slides from previous trips, keeping in mind that trips abroad have proven to be one of the most effective methods of raising student enthusiasm for French (AATF 1995; Sims and Hammond 1981).¹⁰ It is extremely important to reach and recruit elementary school students early. The above-mentioned strategies are particularly effective when used with young students and can be repeated from year to year.

When registration has been completed, obtain, if possible, a copy of the projected enrollment for French and check to see if perhaps there are students who could have signed up for French but did not, and if so, find out why. Many teachers on the high

school and college level, often as part of the placement process, check student and guidance records for this information. Some teachers send a letter to every incoming student or personally contact students to invite them to continue or initiate their study of French (Mohanty 1994a; Romer and Head 1996; Sims and Hammond 1981: 95).

The teachers at feeder schools can be wonderful allies for French programs. They can discuss how the study of French has been useful to them or to their former students. Similarly, enlisting your own current and former French students to recruit younger brothers, sisters, and friends can be very effective.

Upper-level high school or college students can teach basic French once a week to students at feeder schools. The upper-level students can be assigned in teams of two or three and can be required to design a lesson plan to teach the weekly objective and to create materials and visuals to use in teaching. This program can be set up as part of the course requirement for the advanced student, who receives a grade for the assignment and who gains linguistic awareness as a result of the activity. The feeder school teachers, students, and parents appreciate this opportunity for enrichment, and these younger children develop a lasting enthusiasm for the French language and are thus more likely to enroll in French when they get older.

TIPS FOR RETAINING STUDENTS

As previously mentioned, trips are a strong boost to your program. Thirty percent of respondents to the AATF survey identified trips abroad as the number-one activity that raised student enthusiasm (1995). If travel to Europe seems daunting, consider starting with easier destinations. Field trips, fairs, and festivals were named as the number-two activity for raising enthusiasm. Possibilities include outings to a French restaurant in a large city; the French Huguenot Church in Charleston, South Carolina; the Biltmore House in Asheville, North Carolina, for its similarity to French chateau architecture; or trips to New Orleans, Quebec, or Martinique.

Related to the above activities is the implementation of a day-long or weekend foreign language immersion camp. Of course, this is a major undertaking and is more easily accomplished when organized by a team of teachers. In cooperation with state or county parks, arrange to have students stay in cabins over a weekend. Again, enlist your upper-level high school or college students to act as counselors and develop games and activities in French.

Since food-related activities were cited by twelve percent of the respondents as raising student interest, have the campers, with adult and counselor supervision, prepare some authentic French meals and snacks. Any or all of these techniques can help you establish that very important base of students to ensure your program's future success. On the college level, offering the possibility to students of having a "French table" at lunch or in a cafe or coffee house or living on a "French floor" of a dormitory or in a "French house" often increases interest. When teachers recruit at the high school level or when they consider how best to retain French students in advanced study, many of the aforementioned techniques can be effective. Assemblies or short programs, sending information to parents, and establishing rapport with guidance personnel and advisors at the college level are all important. In addition, take advantage of the opportunity to expose the student population to the French language as often as possible. Sims and Hammond (1981: vi) point out that one of the most outstanding characteristics of program success is integrating language into the fabric of school activities and life.

Plan a foreign language week in which French students perform skits, label everything in French, and make and sell French meals or snacks. Sponsor a soccer tournament with language students making up the teams. Invite guest speakers from colleges and professions to address either the entire student body or just the French students. Encourage upper-level high school and college Spanish students to pick up French as a second foreign language by emphasizing the similarities between the two languages. One simple way to do this, if you speak some Spanish, is to converse with a Spanish teacher who knows French, in French, in front of the students, and vice versa. Let them hear and see how the conversation can be conducted in both languages and can be understood, for the most part, by students of both French and Spanish. Similarly, encourage upper-level high school and college French students to begin studying Spanish, German, or another language. While this may at first seem counterproductive, the encouragement of multilingualism is a recognized strategy for increasing student enrollment in French (Walz et al. 1995a; AATF 1995), and, as an additional benefit, you will find yourself with better language students who are more linguistically aware.

The French Club can and should play an active role in tutoring programs. It was the third-rated activity for raising student enthusiasm (AATF 1995). In addition to helping plan and organize a foreign

language week, French club members can design and build floats for homecoming; go Christmas caroling at the homes of faculty members; plan and prepare food for a faculty, counselor, or advisor tea at Christmas or other time (these last two activities are excellent for promoting good relations with colleagues); produce a "Taste of France" in a college dormitory or student center; and undertake fundraising projects which involve the entire student body.

An example of this type of fundraiser is a Noël-gram or Amour-gram. These are messages for Christmas or Valentine's Day which can be mass-produced on a copier. Students are offered a choice of several different messages (with translations provided) from among which they choose the message they would like delivered to their intended recipient. The French Club members assemble these messages, organize them by home room or other administrative division (have the sender specify this), embellish these messages with a candy cane or lollipop attached with a ribbon, and deliver them on the designated morning. The recipient's copy contains only the French message, and French Club members must wear identification proclaiming their ability to translate the message (e.g., *Je parle français* or a small French flag). These can be sold for a nominal fee and can serve to get the student body excited about the romantic aspect of French. Sample messages include: *Tu es mon cadeau préféré*, *Joyeux Noël et Bonne Année* for Christmas; and *Je t'aime, Sois mon Valentin*, or *Je suis fou/ folle de toi* for Valentine's Day. Of course, enthusiastic and industrious French Club members are indispensable for these projects.

One of the best ways to achieve retention in French programs is by explaining the rewards to be found in upper-level French classes. Students are often lured to upper-level classes with the promise of increased opportunity to study French idioms and slang (even off-color expressions). Students should be told that after they have mastered the basics of grammar, more time can be spent pursuing art, cuisine, music, games, history, literature, and other interesting topics. Of course, we should give them a taste of each of those in the beginning levels of language study as well. Many colleges have instituted interdisciplinary majors which combine study in a number of these academic areas. On the high school and college level some North Carolina teachers have created special-interest courses with enticing titles such as Elon College's "French Murder Mysteries" and "Celluloid Culture Wars: Hollywood versus Cannes," and High Point

University's "Love, Honor, and Chivalry" (Romer and Head 1996).

It also helps to remind students at some point about the various benefits of language study and the fact that, although many colleges require two years of language study for admission, a number now recommend three or four years. Thus, students get the message that advanced language study can give them the edge they need in gaining admission to their preferred college or university.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, teachers of French are faced with a multifaceted task. We must acknowledge that the decline in student enrollment in French is due, in large part, to the perpetual misconception that French is more difficult than Spanish. We must increase our efforts to dispel this myth by talking to students, parents, and colleagues and explaining that in fact many features of French (as presented in the first part of this article) are easier for our students to assimilate than similar features of other languages. We must also address a second glaring misconception, that of French's being less useful and practical than Spanish. This misconception is best addressed through a global approach that demonstrates the importance of French in business, science, math, and technology worldwide. Finally, we must actively plan for recruitment and retention of students in French through the use of creative and aggressive strategies that have been proven to help build and maintain successful programs.

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NOTES

1. The authors do not wish in any way to disparage the Spanish language or the teaching or study of it; indeed, one of the authors is a devoted twenty-five year teacher of Spanish (and French). It is the wish of the authors that the decision of what language to study be based on fact, not myth or misinformation. Portions of the discussion on the

- relative difficulty of French and Spanish are based on the presentation by Friedrich (1996).
- Webster's (1990) defines "myth" as "a popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something, an unfounded or false notion."
 - AATF President Valdman often mentions the "Spanish problem" in his "Letter from the President" in each *National Bulletin*. Granowitz (1994a, b) suggests that all students be required to study Spanish, arguing that it is not a "foreign" language, but rather a "second" language in the United States. Mohanty (1994a) maintains that the "Spanish-is-easier" notion is erroneous. St. John recognizes the "prevailing opinion" among students that Spanish is the easiest of the three commonly studied languages: French, German, and Spanish. Williams' article is the most misleading and presents very little understanding of the difficulties of Spanish.
 - Discussed in Alice Omaggio Hadley, *Teaching Language in Context*. 2nd ed. Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 1993). Cited in Judith E. Liskin-Gasparro, *ETS Oral Proficiency Testing Manual*, Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, 1982.
 - Information on the histories of English, French, and Spanish can be found in Katzner (1986) and in dictionaries of the respective languages. Ranson and Carlisle (1996) discuss the similarity of English and French vocabulary.
 - Williams (1994) for instance, mentions some of the other major difficulties such as *ser* and *estar*, both meaning "to be" but each with its specific uses.
 - The AATF, along with its various Task Force committees and their Chairs, has been responsible for creating and distributing some important materials such as the brochures *Top Ten Reasons To Learn French* and *Take a Closer Look*. At least one state, North Carolina, has produced a similar brochure, *North Carolina and Foreign Languages: A Worldly Combination* (FLANC/ASLINC 1996).
 - Soci (1996) summarizes much of this information.
 - Kraemer (1995), Mohanty (1994b), and Soci (1996) list and summarize these facts.
 - In recognition of the importance of study abroad to a vibrant French program, AATF Task Force subcommittee chaired by Sherry Dean has edited a travel guide, now available from AATF headquarters.

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APPENDIX

Hints on Pronunciation for Foreigners

I take it you already know
of tough and bough and cough and dough?
Others may stumble but not you,
on hiccough, thorough, laugh and through.
Well done! And now you wish, perhaps,
to learn of less familiar traps?
Beware of heard, a dreadful word
that looks like beard and sounds like bird.
And dead: it's said like bed, not bead
For goodness' sake don't call it 'deed'!
Watch out for meat and great and threat
(They rhyme with suite and straight and
debt.)
A moth is not a moth in mother
Nor both in bother, broth in brother,

And here is not a match for there,
Nor dear and fear for bear and pear,
And then there's dose and rose and lose —
Just look them up — and goose and
choose,
And cork and work and card and ward,
And font and front and word and sword.
And do and go and thwart and cart —
Come, come, I've hardly made a start!
A dreadful language? Man alive!
I'd mastered it when I was five!

—TSW

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