ADVOCACY DEPOT

COLLEGE FRENCH ADVOCACY: OFFER UP BEST DEFENSE...

Since the founding of AATF's Commission on Advocacy, program rescue efforts have been largely focused on K-12. We had hoped to see potential local advocacy centers in colleges and universities with French programs. As we fought through years of challenges, we began to see that our assumptions were somewhat misguided. College and university programs, though often set in very different political circumstances, can disappear just as easily as those in K-12 schools.

In the wake of the recession, public college foreign language programs are vanishing like smoke. Instability in the equities markets has diminished the once mighty endowments of the nation's private institutions, putting their offerings in jeopardy, too.

College foreign language programs in no less than 35 institutions have recently been threatened or eliminated from Maine to California, from Minnesota to Texas; a number of French programs among them. There are instances where French has been eliminated from all levels, core requirements through doctoral programs.

News of these cuts has been generally limited to local and regional publications, though this loss of epidemic pro-portions has been reviewed in a recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education:* "Foreign-Language Programs, Facing Cuts, Find a Champion [http://chronicle.com/article/Foreign-Language-Programs/65645/].

In the majority of cases where a French program was threatened, cut back, or eliminated, our information did not come from an AATF member. Where there were members in a threatened department, they did not seem fully aware of the Commission or its two Web sites: the French Advocacy Wiki [https://frenchadvocacy.wikispaces.com] and Ideas for French Language & Culture Advocacy in the U.S. [www.utm.edu/staff/globeg/advofr.shtml]. One of the links from the "French Advocacy Events" page, [www.utm.edu/staff/globeg/advocshed.shtml] entitled "Danger Signs for College Foreign Lan-guage Programs," provides a non-exhaustive incident-generated list of the conditions and occurrences which ac-company the elimination or serious re-duction of foreign language programs at the college or university levels. One con-dition, exacerbated by our current reces-sion but destined to financially crowd and eliminate many small programs in public colleges is the unhealthy growth of administration and support staffing. One state university system in 2008 had no less than 418 administrators with "provost" or "chancellor" in their titles. Though there is ample evidence for this bloating of administrative ranks, this is not a simple issue. A number of administrative positions are the result of demands by state taxpayers through their representatives. Some are purely political positions to satisfy perceived desires of voters. This is a deplorable condition the remedy for which is much larger than the scope of our advocacy program. It may well become a matter of concern for state legislators and taxpayers, but we note that some students protesting public university program cuts carry signs which read "Chop from the top."

Another cause for concern is the status of foreign languages in grades K-12. While national leaders and initiatives have labeled foreign language education "core," and there is abundant evidence of its benefits in brain science and cognitive development studies, state and local educators have struggled to make it a required experience, even for college-bound students. Real "core" status in K-12 public schools where students have mandatory language classes is increasingly problematic when balanced with scheduling and staffing demands of STEM Curriculum, NCLB, IB and AP courses. Add to this a state's "Race to the Top" maneuvers for a nearly impossible situation.

On the college level, quite frequently it is these "core" disciplines which have fewer majors than more specialized pre-professional disciplines. Yet a state higher education commission will balk at eliminating a low-producing English or Math program because it is unthinkable to eliminate the chance for students to major in something that has been an educational staple throughout their academic careers. Giving foreign language study real "core" value to the extent that we require all students to participate is, however, as controversial with language professionals as it is with the rest of the educational establishment and those who run or support it. The focus on modern acquisition models tells us that a learner would need considerably more time than a language requirement would yield, and the shortage of teachers tells us that instructional staffing could not meet our "highly qualified" standards. And so, we find ourselves not far form the position of those who oppose the "core" status of foreign language learning.

The "Danger Signs for College Foreign Language Programs" page also outlines a number of other conditions observed in the situations of French program challenges in higher education. In some of these situations, administrations have shown the same lack of concern about student and faculty opinions as was apparent at the K-12 level.

This site introduces the reader to over a hundred people who have majored in French and gone on to interesting and successful careers outside of professional translating and the French classroom.

Another link on the same page takes us to some positive reasons for a college major in French, "You Wouldn't Know They Majored in French" [www.utm.edu/staff/globeg/frenchdegree.html] beginning with general academic, cognitive, developmental, neurological, and psychological, benefits of foreign language learning, and its role in the development of analytical and critical thinking. Instead of a list of career field where a graduate might theoretically apply the knowledge acquired during study for a French degree, this site introduces the reader to over a hundred people who have majored in French and gone on to interesting and successful careers outside of professional translating and the French classroom.

This year the Commission on Advocacy has set a goal to learn how to fight this tsunami of recession-born program eliminations. Much of what is invested will be filed with the resources in the "French Advocacy Wiki," and, yes, we are looking for volunteers. This is a matter that should concern all of us.

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