

THE IMPACT OF THE ATLANTIS DOUBLE DEGREE PROGRAM ON FRENCH MAJORS AT CANISIUS COLLEGE

The Atlantis Double Degree program at Canisius College was established in 2007. The program links Canisius with the University of Strasbourg in France and the University of Antwerp in Belgium in the awarding of Bachelor's degrees in international business. As the program is now designed, Canisius students can choose to spend one academic year at either European institution and in that time earn a European Bachelor's degree from the host institution. Those credits transfer back and are used to fulfill the degree requirements for a Bachelor's degree in international business at Canisius. Conversely, students from the European institutions come to Canisius for a year and earn the U.S. degree. The credits transfer back to their home institutions and are used to fulfill degree requirements in Europe. Thus, the students earn double degrees in international business without extending the length of study for their programs. The program was developed under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Education through their Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education (FIPSE) and the European Commission.

One of the stipulations of the funding from the U.S. government was that Canisius students also be required to study a language of the European Union other than English such that they can demonstrate a professional level of proficiency. Thus, students who are motivated to seek the double degree in international business are also provided the incentive to improve their language skills. Given that the two European languages spoken at the E.U. partner institutions are French and Dutch, Canisius students must demonstrate their language proficiency in one of those two languages. French language proficiency examinations are conducted and scored by Eileen Angelini according to the ACTFL Proficiency Standards. On average, those students with no prior knowledge of French before entering the Atlantis program, leave the program with a proficiency rating of Intermediate-Mid, and those students with prior knowledge of French complete the program with a rating of Advanced-Mid.

As the program has developed, it has been the case that Canisius students have chosen to develop their French language skills. This is to be expected because the College does not offer courses in Dutch as part of the regular curriculum. So, students cannot develop their language proficiency in Dutch before they go to Europe. However, Canisius offers a full range of French courses that lead to a major in French. In

addition, many students come to the College with strong backgrounds in French language from their high school studies. We have even had students with no French backgrounds who have been motivated to study intensively to bring their proficiency up to the required level. Thus, it is not surprising that students in the Atlantis program have worked hard both before and while they are in Europe to improve their French language ability. What has been surprising is the number of students who have chosen to double major in International Business and French.

It is an understatement to say that the success of the Atlantis Double Degree program has led to a significant increase in the number of students majoring in French. At the start of the 2007-2008 academic year, the approximate number of French majors (whether single or dual) was eighteen. Of these eighteen majors, roughly one-fifth were dual majors with International Business. As of the 2009 spring semester, there were thirty-two French majors, of whom twelve were participating or were eligible to participate in the Atlantis program. Clearly the students are motivated to learn or enhance their French skills because they see an added benefit to their chosen career. The practical nature of learning French is key for these students. As such, another popular dual major at Canisius is French and International Relations.

The Atlantis program exemplifies the *National Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the Twenty-First Century*, most especially connections with other disciplines. Furthermore, the French Language Initiative promoted by AATF and the Cultural Service of the French Embassy stresses that "learning French opens the doors to dozens of countries and cultures and millions of French-speakers" [TheWorldSpeaksFrench.org]. Canisius students have the advantage of earning a degree from a U.S. institution of higher learning as well as one from a European one, all while being immersed in the French and Dutch languages.

It is clear that the Atlantis program has had the greatest impact on the study of French and the number of students majoring in French at Canisius College. While in Antwerp, students take introductory language courses in Dutch and thus begin their immersion process in the Dutch language and culture. However, it is important to note that even though the students do not major in Dutch and do not take their proficiency examinations in Dutch, they are required to take both languages—just not both to the same level of proficiency.

Many of the Atlantis program students choose to go to Strasbourg for a full academic year and then to Antwerp for a summer or fall semester of study, and we miss having them in class. The reward is when these students return from their time abroad; the wealth of experiences that they share with fellow classmates is invaluable. How better to encourage other students to study French than to have first-person testimony from one of their peers?

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