

RAISING THE VISIBILITY OF FRENCH ON THE COLLEGE CAMPUS WITH PI DELTA PHI

Four years ago, in the face of sliding enrollments, the French faculty at Boston College undertook a multi-pronged—and successful—effort to make the basic language sequence more responsive to the broad range of student interests. (From fall 1996 to fall 1998, the number of students continuing from Intermediate French, a requirement, to our third-year course, an elective, went from 3 to 25 to 50!) We soon realized, however, that it was not enough to realign our basic courses with the National Standards, to promote our business internships in Strasbourg, and to develop an interdepartmental French Studies minor. The academic community as a whole remained uninformed and basically unaware of our contributions to the educational mission of the university. Our next move was to institute a Boston College chapter of the Pi Delta Phi, the National French Honor Society, and to make it a visible part of campus life. The following article describes our activities and their impact on the university.

Setting up a new chapter

In setting up our new chapter of Pi Delta Phi, we received invaluable help and support from the National Office and especially Executive Director, Dr. Mary Gutermuth (Sam Houston State University, P.O. Box 2026, Huntsville, TX 77341; E-mail: [fol_meg@shsu.edu]).

In our selection of Charter Members we not only included our strongest undergraduate and graduate students and named as honorary members all the French faculty, we reached out to honor other members of the Boston College community known to be fluent in French and supportive of our mission: our President, J. Donald Monan, S.J., our Dean of Arts and Sciences, J. Robert Barth, S.J., and the Director of our Center of International Programs, Dr. Marian St. Onge. Given the status of our honorary members, the initial ceremony received press coverage and photographs in our official campus media.

Recognizing the students

The Pi Delta Phi allows us to publicly recognize our best students every year in an open ceremony. The students, some of whom are majors, but some of whom are minors or simply students with a strong concentration in French, are all very pleased that they have earned this honor

which they can include on their résumés when applying for graduate school or looking for employment. This year we are computerizing our data base so that we can maintain contact with our membership through a Pi Delta Phi Newsletter.

Acquiring club status

In summer 1998, I accepted the responsibility of Faculty Moderator and began working with Tim Sullivan, a junior and our new Pi Delta Phi president, who wanted to make the organization much more active on campus. By writing a constitution and gaining recognition as an official student organization, Pi Delta Phi



Tim Sullivan and Rebecca Valette. Photographer: Lee Pelligrini.

was able to open a bank account, to acquire a Web site, and to become eligible for modest financial support from the Office of Student Development. Since it took most of the academic year to make our status official, our activities of the first year were entirely supported by our own initiatives.

Scheduling activities

It was Tim Sullivan's conviction that Pi Delta Phi should organize one major event each semester which would highlight some French-related aspect of the university. His first idea was that we might sponsor a museum exhibit, however, we quickly learned that museums schedule their exhibits years in advance. In summer 1998, therefore, we were fortunate to get the authorization to curate a small exhibit in summer 2000 showcasing some of the French and European fans which the museum has in storage and which have not been exhibited in over fifteen years.

What to do during the academic year

1998-1999? We discovered that the rare books collection of the John J. Burns Library had a beautiful illuminated French medieval manuscript, and the librarian was willing to let our members work with it and also agreed to exhibit the book in spring. This left the calendar open for a fall project. We decided to build our year's program around a medieval theme and to create an outdoor replica of the meditation labyrinth on the floor of the Chartres cathedral. In conjunction with this labyrinth project, we were able to set up a small exhibit on the cathedrals of Chartres and Amiens in the entrance hall of the main library.

In future years we hope to exhibit a collection of Haitian paintings (now in storage), to study selected French works and manuscripts from the special collections at the Burns Library, and to create a guidebook to the French writers, scholars, and scientists whose contributions to Western civilization are celebrated in the stained glass windows of the Bapst Library.

Pi Delta Phi Projects

a) The Labyrinth Project

As a background to the labyrinth project, we consulted library holdings on the labyrinths of French cathedrals and obtained information on how to build a labyrinth from the Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. To paint a labyrinth on one of the campus lawns, we discovered that we first needed to get permission from the Office of Buildings and Grounds who insisted that we obtain official authorization from the President of the University. We had already approached the Athletic Office for their assistance since their staff has extensive experience in painting athletic fields and placing logos on the floor of the hockey arena. Because Pi Delta Phi was a student club, they were happy to help out. Using pictures of the Chartres labyrinth, their painter created the necessary stencils. One fall afternoon in late September, the crew from the Athletic Department and the Pi Delta Phi students got together to paint the labyrinth and set up signs (in French and English). At the dedication ceremony, attended by over 100 people, the acknowledgments, the blessing of the labyrinth, and the music were in both French and English. Again the event was covered in the campus media. The labyrinth itself was a great success and was

written up in the student newspaper, as well as the *Chronicle for Higher Education*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Boston Herald*, and the local *Newton Tab*.

In fall 1999, the labyrinth was recreated in a new location on campus, again with a bilingual dedication ceremony where the Pi Delta Phi banner was floating in the background. The prospects are strong that a more permanent campus labyrinth may soon become a reality.

b) **The Book of Hours Project**

The major project of the year was the publication by the University Press of Boston College of a beautiful four-color, 64-page book entitled *Reflections on the Connolly Book of Hours*. Half of the book consisted of specialized chapters introducing the Book of Hours and its role in medieval life with a focus on the French prayers, which we presented in bilingual format. The central portion of the book contained facsimiles of each of the 32 illuminated pages of the manuscript, together with a background description of the iconography of each image and a personal "reflection" which it inspired. To write these "reflections" we invited Pi Delta Phi members, as well as librarians, members of the administration, and professors in other departments. The Office of Audio-Visual Services photographed the illuminations and did the color separation. We posted these images on a private Pi Delta Phi Web site so that our contributing writers could each select the page they wished to write about. Tim Sullivan and I were the main authors as well as editors and designers. This project also relied on the *pro bono* help of a professional graphic designer who instructed us in the use of Quark.

The Pi Delta Phi decided to dedicate the book to a recently deceased member of the department and medievalist, Professor Normand Cartier. In conjunction with the publication, former students and friends of Professor Cartier were invited to contribute to the establishment of a Cartier Prize to be awarded annually to a deserving Pi Delta Phi student.

The celebration for the publication of the book was attended by the Chancellor (who had written one of the reflections), the Dean of Arts and Sciences (who had written the preface), and many other members of the community, as well as former students of Professor Cartier. Copies of the book were distributed to the Trustees at their June Board meeting, and the medieval manuscript was specially exhibited for them. The project was covered by the local and campus media, and highlighted in a two-page color spread which appeared in the summer 1999 issue of the *Boston College*

Magazine which is sent to all alumni.

c) **The European Fan Exhibit**

June 2000 will see the opening of the exhibit entitled "European Fans from the Collection of the McMullen Museum of Art," an exhibit curated by members of Pi Delta Phi. The technical aspects of the catalog will be written by Tim Sullivan, Pi Delta Phi president and Fine Arts major/French minor. French undergraduate and graduate students, with faculty support, will be linking the scenes on the fans to excerpts from French literary works which will be presented as bilingual exhibit labels. As the museum is next to the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, many prospective students and parents will see that the French department is definitely an active participant in University life. The exhibit will be up until the end of September so that in the opening weeks of the fall semester the exhibit can be integrated into the syllabi of some of our French courses. There are also plans for a guest lecture, sponsored by Pi Delta Phi and open to the public.

Linking with other Pi Delta Phi

chapters

Our members would like to make contact with other Pi Delta Phi chapters across the country. We have a Web site at [www.bc.edu/pdp/] which describes our activities. Our president, Tim Sullivan, would be happy to hear from other chapter presidents; his e-mail address is [sullivtx@bc.edu].

In closing, let me add that we would be glad to send interested chapters more detailed information on our projects. For a contribution of \$15.95 (to cover our costs), we will send you a copy of our publication *Reflections on the Connolly Book of Hours* (which retails at our campus bookstore and on [Amazon.com] for \$19.95) together with a step-by-step description of the Book of Hours project, plus handouts describing the Labyrinth project. Please make your check out to Pi Delta Phi and mail it to our secretary, Nikki Bartlett, Pi Delta Phi, Department of Romance Languages, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, NU 02467.

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