

"A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME"—ADVOCACY AND PROGRAM NOMENCLATURE

Juliet's words in Act II, Scene 1 of Shakespeare's famous play¹ are not just a part of her quest for a resolution to the couple's big family-oriented dilemma; they are also emblematic of the problems created by names and our attachments to them. This is apparent in several areas of descriptive nomenclature used in college programs for languages other than English (LOTE) which we will examine through the lens of advocacy. LOTE is too technical. How about Foreign Languages? Modern Languages? World Languages? The negative in "foreign" is its otherness. However, "world" and "modern" should include English. A discussion in the FLTEACH forum brought no consensus or even majority opinion in this matter.²

"Foreign" seems to have the edge in program nomenclature, agency, and association names (Foreign Service, ACTFL, ADFL, foreign exchange, etc.). Some

d'Outre-Mer" and other countries where French is an official or extensively-spoken language? Spanish programs were comparatively quick in giving appropriate weight to non-Peninsular Spanish and its cultural expression.

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We know that many serious students of French have much wider interests than the ones implicit in a literature-centered "French" program, as you can see in those portrayed on this French and careers site.⁶

Fortunately, national standards, ACTFL proficiency guidelines, recognized writing assessments, and portfolios allow focus and targets for programs, preventing the runaway informational disorientation

shaped to be language focused and Francophone-inclusive? If the major is part of a Bachelor's degree in a liberal arts school, it is almost always a BA degree, as opposed to a BS, generally reserved for professional programs such as education or translation. The word "concentration" is often a synonym for "major" when it is not an indication of the discipline-specific courses within a major. Many "foreign language" programs offer a "major" in "French," "French Language and Literature," "French Studies," etc.

The University of Tennessee at Martin is in a part of the state where many high schools offer only two years of foreign language study. If the high school offers French, students with a one- or two-year study hiatus rarely place into our second semester. This fact alone had a negative effect on our graduation numbers in French, which made us a "low-producing" program in the eyes of the Tennessee

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departments are convinced that the label "foreign" carries the weight of otherness and mischaracterizes languages like Spanish, spoken extensively in the US.³ Though resulting name changes are intended to have an advocacy value, debate around this issue will always be inconclusive.

Within these "foreign," "world," and "modern" language programs are labels whose meanings present other difficulties. "French" is one of them. What do we mean when "French" is a curriculum subcategory in a department description? Is it the language of France as it is spoken in Paris? Is it a program which guides students to the canonical literary culture and history associated with the geographic parameters of the language described. The origin of literature as the perfunctory center of French programs and the general goal of learning the language may well date back to a nineteenth-century MLA presentation.⁴

Is "French" a program where students can experience the dialects or *patois* which used to stand as languages similar to French inside the *Hexagone*. Does the word "French" imply this plus the language and culture of "La France

implicit in the widening of geographical context. Students who as freshmen can place in upper-division French courses often choose to double major in French and a discipline representing their career aspirations. This is largely a student designed strategy popular in top tier institutions. Foreign language is the number one or two double major component.⁷⁻⁸ A similar strategy with more institutional structure can be seen in Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies programs.

Students seeking a topically narrow but practical route may also have access to university-designed combined major programs where curriculum streamlining allows concentrations to blend or eliminates less relevant co-requirements. Frequently, this leads to some true cross-disciplinary knowledge. The list of combined major examples cited on the Web page shows the dominance of international business in the career plans of today's students.⁹ Making career-friendly combinations more feasible and crafting a descriptive and attractive nomenclature will increase the prestige of French on campus.

What do you call an average public college French major thoughtfully

Higher Education Commission (THEC). In 2009, the state of Tennessee embraced "Complete College America,"¹⁰ and the Tennessee state legislature ordered public colleges to increase graduation rates to a targeted number by 2015 to be in line with the national average. In all of this, an alternative to "elimination" named by THEC was "consolidation."¹¹ All but one of the Tennessee Regents colleges had adopted what can best be described as an "umbrella" degree, a BA in "Foreign Languages" with "concentrations" in areas which had once been called majors. This change saved all language major programs with less than ten graduates per year. The idea behind THEC's plan was to enhance funding of high-producing majors by eliminating or consolidating low-producing majors. I and some other department faculty had favored the change to an umbrella major for two years. The vote at my institution had to represent a consensus, and there was at least one important faculty member who felt very strongly that a change in the name of the major would discourage recruitment of talented faculty and students. This faculty member was not sure how graduate programs and

employers would view the change. Even after I presented the following list of umbrella majors,¹² I was unable to sway the vote, and we lost our French major. I do not doubt that this was a wrong decision. What is amazing is that it was made in a department of devoted teacher-scholars who are generally excellent program builders.

On a national scale, it is easy to see why the case cited above probably applies to dozens of small to medium sized public four-year colleges. Language faculty need to be aware and involved with layers of possible advocacy actions. Nomenclature options do not mitigate the fact that the merit of any particular degree is the merger of planning, content, work, and result, the same factors that determine its reception. However, departments should not be afraid of the political act of changing a program's name, provided it conforms to what they do and does not confuse the public that will use the skills of its graduates.

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Notes

(All URLs were checked on October 30, 2013)

- ¹ *Romeo and Juliet* In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* [http://shakespeare.mit.edu/romeo_juliet/full.html]
- ² "Foreign Languages: What's in a name," FLTEACH archives (see June/July 2013) [http://listserv.buffalo.edu/archives/flteach.html].
- ³ Jaschik, Scott, "Not So Foreign Languages," *Inside Higher ED* (October 5, 2011) [www.insidehighered.com/news/2011/10/05/colleges_are_replacing_foreign_language_departments_with_world_language_departments].
- ⁴ Sarah E Eaton, "The New 'F' Word in Language Departments: Foreign." [http://drsaraheaton.wordpress.com/2011/10/05/foreign-language/].
- ⁵ "French Forecasts," *Language Magazine* (October 2013) [http://thinkafricapress.com/politics/africa-future-la-francophonie].
- ⁶ TennesseeBob Peckham, You Wouldn't Know They Majored in French [www.utm.edu/staff/globeg/frenchdegree.html].
- ⁷ "Double Majors—Influences, Identities & Impacts" (Pitt & Tepper) [www.vanderbilt.edu/curbcenter/manage/files/Teagle-Report-Final-3-11-13-2.pdf].
- ⁸ "Double majors in the United States," Wikipedia [http://en.wikipedia.org/

wiki/Double_majors_in_the_United_States].

- ⁹ Peckham, Robert D., "French Combination Majors (by Institution)" [www.utm.edu/staff/globeg/frcombo.shtml].
- ¹⁰ *Complete College America* [www.completcollege.org/
- ¹¹ "THEC Academic Program Review" (January 26, 2012) [www.state.tn.us/theac/Divisions/AcademicAffairs/academic_programs/Annual%20Academic%20Program%20Review.pdf].
- ¹² "Naming a Degree in French (GlobeGate Research) [http://webpages.charter.net/tbob/frconcentration.html].