

“A total disconnect:” Disciplinary divides and the teaching of French

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Abstract

Research has emphasized the need for foreign language departments to broaden their curricula beyond the confines of foreign language literature to meet the needs of non-traditional foreign language students (Modern Language Association (MLA), 2007). Studies have also demonstrated a potential shortage of foreign language teachers in the United States (Long, 2000; MLA, 2007). In response to both of these concerns, foreign language and teacher education faculty members at a large

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university in the United States initiated a participatory, qualitative research project to develop an innovative French course of interest to non-traditional students to generate student interest in becoming French teachers. Examining interview data concerning the six student participants’ perceptions of their potential career trajectories as French teachers, we argue that even as students perceived the experience as beneficial, a marked disciplinary disconnect between foreign language and education faculty members’ attitudes about exposing undergraduate language majors to careers in teaching existed—mirroring larger concerns about the insularity of foreign language departments nationally.

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As made evident by the launching of the \$114 million National Security Language Initiative in 2006 (U.S. Department of State, 2006), there is reawakened interest in the teaching and learning of foreign languages in the United States. Almost 7 million students in American public secondary schools were enrolled in a foreign language in 2000, representing 33.8% of total enrollment, compared to just over 6 million students in 1994, 32.8% of total enrollment (Draper & Hicks, 2000). Further, a more recent survey of K-12 schools in the United States conducted by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) revealed that 8% of elementary schools and 17% of secondary schools not offering foreign language instruction in 2008 hope to do so within the next two years (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2009).

More impressive gains were reported at the postsecondary level. A recent survey conducted by the Modern Language Association of America (MLA) and funded by the United States Department of Education indicated that language enrollment has risen 13% from 2002 (Furman, Goldberg & Lusin, 2007).

Teacher Shortage

Accompanying such growth in enrollment is the need for more qualified foreign language teachers. There has been increasing concern among foreign language stakeholders across the United States that the number of qualified foreign language teachers will not keep up with the rising student enrollment. Long (2000), for example, projected that the growth of student enrollment in K-12 foreign language programs will exacerbate what is an already escalating teacher shortage. More recently CAL reported that 25% of elementary schools and 30% of secondary schools were affected by a shortage of qualified language teachers and that more than one quarter of elementary school foreign language teachers in the United States are not certified (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2009). An ad hoc committee established by the MLA (2007) reported that the shortage of qualified, trained teachers is more problematic than ever.

Not having enough qualified foreign language teachers to meet the demands of a growing student population becomes more serious when examined from a historical context. As documented by Rosenbusch, Kemis, and Moran (2000), the popularity of

foreign language instruction has fluctuated greatly over the past 60 years in the United States. While only 5000 elementary students were studying a foreign language in 1941, by 1955 that number had mushroomed to a quarter million. The popularity of foreign language instruction continued to rise until the 1960s, when elementary-level foreign language programs began to disappear across the country. A suggested cause of this reversal in trend was the lack of qualified foreign language teachers (Andersson, 1969; Lipton, 1988). As foreign language enrollments again begin to rise, stakeholders need to address the lack of qualified foreign language teachers in order to avoid repeating previous mistakes.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration for Teacher Recruitment

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Calling for more aggressive, organized, and creative recruitment techniques to attract postsecondary foreign language students into colleges of education, Rosenbusch et al. (2000) suggested that one way of combatting the foreign language teacher shortage would be to have all foreign language professors from both colleges of arts and sciences and colleges of education form an alliance to recruit foreign language students to become foreign language teachers. For example, faculty in foreign language departments should identify promising foreign language students and make them aware of the job opportunities in teaching a foreign language. Faculty in colleges of education should also visit postsecondary foreign language classrooms to share with students the rewards of a career in teaching. According to Long (2000), in order to expand K-12 foreign language teacher recruitment, postsecondary faculty in colleges of

education must be joined by their colleagues in foreign language departments to promote K-12 foreign language teaching as a possible career choice.

In addition to the benefits of such collaborative efforts to enrollment in colleges of education, Long (2000) argued that colleges of arts and humanities, where foreign language departments are traditionally housed, and colleges of education would simultaneously benefit from more students taking foreign language courses in colleges of arts and humanities as they work toward licensure or seek professional development credits. An additional and long-term benefit of intercollegiate teacher recruitment efforts would be that more K-12 students, having been taught by qualified foreign language teachers, would continue their study of foreign languages at the postsecondary level, thus further increasing enrollment in foreign language departments. Long also argued that by easing the foreign language teacher shortage, postsecondary foreign language departments would be helping to ensure the stability of their own teaching staff. Lecturers in foreign language departments are often lured by higher salaries to teach full-time in K-12 settings (Long, 2000).

Obstacles to Collaboration across Institutions

Despite the myriad of potential benefits that cross-college collaboration promises, research suggests that foreign language departments in colleges of arts and humanities do little to promote a career in teaching to their foreign language students (Labaree, 1999; Long, 2000). Long (2000), for example, reported that many professors of foreign languages and literature in colleges of arts and humanities do not wish to associate with colleges or schools of education. As a possible explanation for this reluctance, Labaree (1999) stated that teacher education is often perceived by foreign language professors as their students’ second choice in careers, and professors in colleges of education are viewed as “second-class citizens.” Supporting such claims, Long refers to the “pervasive snobbery” in foreign language departments where professors of foreign language literature look down upon those who teach foreign language skills and foreign language pedagogy (Long, 2000, p. 434).

According to Ortega (1999), tension between foreign language faculty with an expertise in literature and faculty in foreign language teacher programs has resulted in the creation of two separate language “camps,” and this tension prevents foreign language departments from broadening their educational perspectives. Thus, the relative prestige and autonomy sometimes afforded to literature faculty in foreign language departments, prevents those same departments from considering the advantages of expanding their curriculum to include other subject areas and disciplines (MLA, 2007).

In its report, the MLA (2007) recently concluded that the hierarchical nature of foreign language departments, where literature courses traditionally dominate advance-level curriculum, is no longer useful and needs to evolve. To attract students from other fields and students with interests outside literary studies, the report by the MLA (2007) suggests that foreign language departments should offer courses that address a broader range of interests. Heritage language learners¹ and students returning from a study abroad experience, for example, who are not majoring in a foreign language and who are not interested in literary studies, could still be drawn to interdisciplinary courses. Likewise, business programs are now focusing more attention on adding an international dimension to their curricula and would benefit from the availability of non-literary foreign language courses.

Interdisciplinary courses allow non-traditional foreign language students to develop their language skills and cultural knowledge, and may expose them to future careers that require foreign language use. Interdisciplinary courses would also increase enrollment in foreign language departments. Furthermore, in addition to attracting new students, according to the MLA (2007), interdisciplinary courses would develop alliances and connections between departments and colleges and would counter the marginalization experienced by many foreign language departments at American universities.

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Collaboration by Design : FREN 3050/4050

In the fall of 2006 a French faculty member with over 30 years of experience in the foreign language department at a large university in the southeastern United States approached a colleague who had been recently hired to fill a joint position in the College of Education and the foreign language department in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The experienced faculty member was excited about the prospect of having a new and junior faculty member join the ranks of the French faculty in her department. She mentioned that the current French-speaking faculty members had all been in the department for many years, and that prior to this recent hire no new faculty member had been added to the French program in over 20 years. She went on to express concern that due to the age and experience of the current faculty members, the French course offerings may no longer meet the needs and interests of current students. With this in mind, she encouraged the recently hired faculty member to apply for a curriculum development grant and to develop a new and innovative French course.

Although the bulk of his responsibilities resided in the College of Education preparing K-12 foreign language teachers, the new faculty member was intrigued by the discussion with his more experienced foreign language colleague. With the idea in mind of developing a new French course that would also encompass his interests in teacher education he initiated a participatory, qualitative research project in the spring of 2007. In this project he sought the support and assistance of a colleague in the foreign language department, who also had experience as a French teacher, and a colleague in the college of education who had experience and interests in second language teaching.

From a foreign language perspective, the main purpose of the alliance was to develop a new and innovative French course that would be of interest to non-traditional students whose interests lay outside the study of foreign language literature. It was noted that the current course sequence required of French majors was very traditional, focusing heavily on grammar, culture, and literature. Of the 11 required French courses, four dealt specifically with grammar and composition, three addressed literature, one focused on culture and one dealt with phonetics. Students were also to take two advanced-level French electives. Course requirements for French minors were even more restrictive. Of the seven required French courses, four focused on grammar, and the remaining three addressed literature, culture, and phonetics, respectively. No electives were included.

The education faculty members involved in the project, on the other hand, were interested in developing a course that would generate student interest in becoming a French teacher, and would thus possibly serve as a teacher recruitment tool. The education and foreign language faculty also felt that the course would serve as a bridge between the two departments and two colleges and could result in further collaborative efforts in the future.

To initiate the project, the faculty member with a joint position in both the College of Education and the foreign language department in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences secured a curriculum development grant to create an interdisciplinary, postsecondary French course for the foreign language department of the university

involved in the study. This faculty member was a former French teacher and had previously taught several methodology courses to French teachers in Canada.

The new course was advertised in the university’s course calendar, as well as via flyers posted across the campus. The flyers described the new course as one that would introduce students to the possibility of a career in teaching French, as well as further develop their reading and writing skills in French. The flyer also highlighted the convenience-related benefits of taking the online course by pointing out that the above-mentioned goals could both be accomplished from the comfort of one’s home. More detailed and formal letters and e-mail messages were also sent to all current students who were registered as pursuing a major or minor in French. These messages provided an overview of the course content and assignments and informed students of the pre-requisites necessary to take the course. Prerequisites included intermediate to advanced reading and writing skills in French, the completion of at least one intermediate (second-year) French course, such as FREN 2201, and regular access to the Internet, whether on campus or at home, as well as access to transportation to carry out clinical observations. The letter and e-mail message also described the qualifications of the instructor, a former French immersion teacher from Canada with over 10 years of experience teaching French in both online and face-to-face settings.

Course Description

The interdisciplinary online course aimed to introduce students to the possibility of a career in teaching French in a K-12 setting and to further develop their language skills. The course was offered online to be more accessible to non-traditional students who may not be able to attend traditional, face-to-face classes. In the spring of 2008 the three-credit-hour and semester-long course was offered to undergraduate students. As previously stated, to be eligible for the course students must have previously completed an intermediate (second-year) French course.

The course required that students complete 10 modules of work that addressed teaching French in an elementary, middle, or secondary school. All topics were introductory in nature and served to expose students to the following issues: (1) teaching methodologies, (2) communicative language teaching, (3) factors influencing second language acquisition, (4) motivation, (5) classroom management, (6) the integration of French culture in the classroom, (7) the use of technology in second language learning, (8) assessment, (9) the standard course of study for second language instruction, and (10) lesson planning. In each module students were assigned online readings.

All readings were in French with the exception of the state’s standard course of study, which was not available in the target language. In each module, to enhance student comprehension of the topics addressed and to practice and improve French skills the students were required to respond in French to related questions via online postings. Students were also required to respond in French to the comments made by their classmates in each of the 10 modules in order to encourage discussion. In an effort to reduce student anxiety to communicate in French and so as not to stifle creative and expressive use of the target language, the course instructor refrained from overtly correcting student errors—using instead a recasting method of error correction (see Tedick & de Gortari, 1998). In other words, when encountering an error in a

student's writing, the instructor would respond to the comment in French using the correct form of the language. In each module students were also presented with a realistic case study drawn from the instructor's experience as a K-12 French teacher. For each of the case studies students were required to respond in French explaining how they would address the situation in light of what they have learned throughout the module. A translated version of the rubric used to evaluate student participation and student writing is provided in Appendix A.

A final component of the course required students to spend 10 hours observing in a K-12 French classroom and to write a reflection in French based on their experience. The reflection was also evaluated by the instructor on its content and the correct usage of the French language.

Interviews

Upon completion of the first semester in which the course was offered, one faculty member from each of the colleges involved in the study explored student participants' perceptions of a potential career in teaching French in a K-12 setting via semi-structured open-ended interviews. As previously stated, we explored student attitudes' toward becoming a French teacher by means of personal interviews with all student participants. Questions asked included

1. What are your thoughts about one day becoming a French teacher?
2. Have your attitudes toward teaching French changed as a result of this course?
3. Do you feel you are better prepared to be a French teacher after taking this course?
4. Was the possibility of being a French teacher ever presented to you in prior French courses?

For exploratory purposes, a series of additional open-ended questions were asked of the students to learn more about their overall experience taking the course, their satisfaction with the course, and their reasons for taking the course. Below is a list of the additional questions asked of the student participants:

1. Why did you decide to take this course?
2. How did you learn about this course?
3. Describe your overall experience taking this course.
4. Did you enjoy taking the course? Why?
5. Was the course beneficial to you? If so, how?

The 30-minute individual interviews were conducted by one of the researchers at the end of the semester once students had received their final grades. This was done to ensure that the students did not feel obliged to participate and to reassure them that failure to participate would in no way affect their final grade.

Analytic Method

As is typical in qualitative approaches to classroom-based research, data analysis was an inductive, recursive, and ongoing process that accompanied data generation and continued afterwards (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Wolcott, 1994, 2001). The

practical methodological processes for approaching data generation and analysis outlined by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) informed the ensemble of the specific data management and analytic procedures. Specific data compression and analytic strategies included close reading; open and focused coding of interviews; in-process analytic writing; initial and integrative memo writing; and, content analysis of archival data. In coding our data, we did not employ a priori categories. Rather, in open coding, we read interview transcripts one line at a time using the comment function in Microsoft Word or a pencil to assign tags to individual pieces of data.

To Teach or Not to Teach

All students enrolled in the interdisciplinary French course were invited to participate in the study. A total of six students enrolled in the course in the spring of 2008 and all six agreed to participate in the study.² The participants represented a diverse group of individuals. The age of the students ranged from 29 to 57. Four of the students were heritage learners of French who had been living in the United States for an extended period of time. These four students had not used French as their primary language for many years. Three of these four students were originally from Africa, and one moved to the United States from Haiti more than 20 years ago. The two remaining students were from the United States and had some secondary and postsecondary experience studying French.

As a result of their diverse life experiences, the six students possessed a wide range of proficiency levels in French. Even among the heritage learners of French, there were significant differences in French language skills. While all four could express themselves very well orally in French, their writing skills varied greatly. Having not used the language for an extended period of time, three of the four students expressed some trepidation about communicating in French and indicated that their skills were somewhat out of practice. The two American-born students had the weakest French skills. Although they were able to express their ideas in French, their writing contained frequent grammatical and vocabulary-related errors. One of these students had twice spent a month living in France but had since taken only three French courses at the postsecondary level prior to now. The other American-born student was also taking a French literature course at the time of the study, but before that semester had not taken a French course in several years. Five of the participants were female and one was male. For all six participants involved in the study, this was their first online course. Four of the students were majoring in French. One student was pursuing a degree in history and the remaining student was a communications major. All six students enrolled in the course had some prior or current experience teaching or tutoring. Two students in the course had taught English abroad and one student currently taught French in a local high school. The three remaining students either served as tutors in the university's tutoring center or were considering a career in teaching. For a more complete description of participant characteristics see Table 1 on the next page.

While the idea of pursuing a career in teaching French was not new to these students, a majority of the students (5/6) reported that the course led to an improved attitude toward becoming a French teacher and that the course provided solid preparation for how to teach. All the students reported that the course gave them a more concrete

understanding of how to teach and how to succeed as a classroom French teacher than before taking the course.

Table 1. Demographic Data on Student participants

Participant	Sex	Age	Country of Origin	Heritage Learner	French Major or Minor
1	female	41	Congo	Yes	Yes
2	female	47	United States	No	No
3	female	43	Congo	Yes	Yes
4	male	57	Haiti	Yes	Yes
5	female	30	Togo	Yes	Yes
6	female	29	United States	No	No

Students were unanimous in stating that the content of the course helped them have a better understanding of how to teach French and what it takes to succeed as a teacher. The international students who had completed education degrees abroad stated the course better prepared them to teach in the United States while American-born students and students with no prior pedagogical training stated the course gave them a theoretical framework for how to approach the practice of teaching a foreign language. For example, Participant 5, a female student from Togo stated, “I learn a lot how to teach French to students in the United States because I did not know anything about that before” (Participant 5). Participant 3, an international student with a degree from the Congo, reported that she felt more prepared to teach because the course taught her the methods for teaching foreign language. An American student (Participant 2) stated that the course “explained all the different kinds of theories, pedagogies, whatever manners and styles and the theories of intelligence” that, in her words, “were really laying the foundation to explain, okay, this is where you begin, this is the beginning/foundation” for teaching.

Several students with experience as teachers or tutors described how the course helped them improve their pedagogical skills. Participant 4, who worked as a French tutor and who was considering a career in teaching, stated that the course helped him feel more confident in his teaching skills. He commented, “I can actually go in a class and refer to some of the things that we have done in the course.” The same student said, “Even when tutoring, I have noticed that I refer to the class and the methods and the things that we studied to try and apply efficiently and that helped.” Participant 2, an American-born student who tutored English, also explained that she felt the course benefited her work as a tutor: “I tutor over at the writing center with graduate students and undergraduate students, and so just pedagogy in French, English, understanding the different theories, everything was just completely interesting to me and actually beneficial to where I am going regardless of how I use French [in the future]”. Finally, the other American-born female (Participant 6), who was already working as a French

teacher, stated that the course helped her improve her teaching and that “the course was really parallel with the class [she was teaching] and it made it so much easier.”

All the students felt the course helped them become aware of the practical issues associated with teaching. Students explained that the observations allowed them to witness daily issues faced by many teachers: discipline, student motivation, engaging different learning styles, and working environment and schedule. The observations along with the theoretical foundations covered in the discussions gave students a fuller picture of teaching as a career and helped them develop more informed opinions about teaching as a career. Participant 2 provided the following explanation:

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A positive [of the course] would be that you sort of, in my opinion, did a really good comprehensive job of touching on theory, pedagogy, and then doing the practical things of a traveling teacher in and out, and so you hit on the practical in that. So, maybe in thinking about it, it [teaching career] was sort of laid out for them more clearly versus being just ‘I wonder what it is like, I don’t know what I have to do.’ So, if you laid it out, they are either going to like it or not.

According to the participants, the course gave them a realistic vision of what a teaching career entails and allowed them to evaluate that career. On the one hand, Participant 3, who had previously taught English in the Congo, reported the online course reignited her desire to teach. On the other hand, Participant 1, who was also from the Congo, reported that her classroom observations and a low teacher’s salary confirmed her desire not to pursue teaching.

In the interviews, the students elaborated on how the course affected their desire to teach, referring to their prior experience and views about the teaching profession. Participant 3, who said the course increased her desire to teach, explained:

It makes me more interested to teach in the States. [...] Just like I say before, it just brought back ... because I used to do that back home and it brought back this information... and when I did observation, then it just give me more passion to go teach the way the teacher was and the way the student was taught. It made a difference. This teacher just had a way and the student paid attention to him.

Participant 1, who stated that she did not intend to pursue a career teaching French, explained that when she taught English in the Congo she had been discouraged by student apathy toward the subject there. She described lack of student motivation in the classes she observed as off-putting “I sort of see things I had when I first entered teaching in my previous college” and “When we had the student teaching, and I was like ‘You guys are not doing your work right’.”

Interestingly, this same student described being drawn to the challenge of motivating students and trying to find ways to reach them. She questioned what she

could do to help her struggling and unmotivated students. She described asking herself, “What can I do to change that?” and “So, the same thing is happening [as happened in her English classes in the Congo] but now it is not English, it is French. So, here that was the first motivation for me: can I change?”

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“If You Want to Waste Your Money...”

Student comments during the interviews reveal that the majority, four out of six, had not received encouragement to pursue teaching as a career from their French professors and advisors in the foreign language department. Students also had mixed responses with respect to the advising they received from foreign language faculty about the online course. Their comments revealed a lack of communication or connection between the education and foreign language programs. Although the students could take the course as an elective while pursuing a major in French, this was not made clear to them by foreign language faculty and advisors. Students reported feelings of frustration and confusion about how to get adequate information to fulfill their requirements and to find courses that suit their interests and needs.

While the majority of students stated that the possibility of teaching had never been presented to them in their French classes, two native-speaking French students reported that they had been encouraged to consider teaching French. These students speculated they received encouragement because they were native speakers. Participant 3, a female student from the Congo who had taken ten courses in the language department, stated that her advisor told her that she would make a good teacher “because you are native-speaking.” However, Participant 1, another native speaker of French from the Congo described being actively discouraged from considering teaching as a profession. That student stated her advisor told her teaching French “is too much work and it is too demanding.” Participant 4, a male native-speaker from Haiti, speculated that teaching as a career had not been mentioned to him because his French professors probably assumed he would pursue teaching as he was a native speaker: “No, they did not really mention that. I do not recall them mentioning to be a teacher. Maybe because they are thinking automatically that because we are taking French class and because I am a native speaker, I will teach it.”

For the specific course under consideration in this study, two students reported being actively discouraged from enrolling by one French professor who served as their advisor. The 41 year-old female from the Congo (Participant 1), who was discouraged from enrolling in the course, said her advisor told her to drop the course because “it is not going to give you anything” and “if you want to waste your money [by enrolling in the course], go do it.” The other female from the Congo (Participant 3) said the same advisor discouraged her from enrolling in the course, while a second French professor encouraged her to take it and told her “it was a good class to take.”

Additional student remarks indicate that students often spoke with two advisors or faculty members about enrolling in the course, one advisor in the language department

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and one in the education department. Student comments suggest that the advisors may not have been in full communication. They describe being sent from one advisor to another when one advisor was unfamiliar with a course. The female student from Togo (Participant 5) commented: “My advisor mentioned the course to me. I talked to my advisor, he said he did not know anything about the class, so I had to go to my other advisor and she told me it was very interesting.” Participant 3, a female student from the Congo, described how one faculty member in the French department never followed through on getting more information about the course for her: “Then, in a class, I asked Madame X if she knows the class. She says she would check [...] but she never did.” The same student stated that a second French faculty member did in fact encourage her to enroll in the course.

Discussion: “A Total Disconnect”

Data analysis clearly demonstrated that the course engaged students to seriously consider teaching French as a potential profession. Even the 41 year-old female from the Congo (Participant 1), who expressed the most reservation about entering the teaching profession was still stimulated by the challenge of motivating students, but ultimately said teacher salaries were too low for her to choose teaching as a profession. Ironically, 18 months later this same student was actively looking for a job as a French teacher and nearing completion of all required education coursework to gain licensure to teach the language. It appears as though the course may have had some impact upon even the most resistant of students.

Separate Camps

In support of Long (2000), in addition to suggesting improved attitudes toward teaching French, the students’ comments also suggested that foreign language departments do little to encourage students to pursue a career in teaching. It is noteworthy that in the weeks leading up to the beginning of the semester, more than two dozen students had registered for the interdisciplinary course only later to withdraw prior to the first day of class. Student comments during the interviews revealed that some students were discouraged from taking the course. Just after the Drop/Add period during which enrollment in the course fluctuated from a high of 24 students to a low of two, one of the researchers contacted 11 students who had initially registered but later dropped the course to better understand why so many students were dropping the class from their schedules. Two students mentioned they thought the course would be too challenging once they saw the modules and the remaining nine learned from their advisor that the course was not required and subsequently dropped. An additional person contacted her advisor in the College of Education and mentioned that her advisor in the foreign language department knew nothing about the course.

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advice from faculty members suggests there may be some lack in communication between colleges and even among faculty within the same department. Reminiscent of the previously mentioned comments by Ortega (1999) relating to the existence of two separate language camps, Participant 4, a French education major from Haiti, stated explicitly that he felt there was a “disconnect” between the two programs. He described having to figure out on his own how to navigate between the two to place himself in the appropriate program:

There is a disconnect, not a little bit. It is a total disconnect because when I first come, in fact I know people [i.e., fellow students] who were not in the right program because they not really understanding the connection. I was one of them. I had done some research. There is a disconnect (Participant 4).

It should be noted that any “disconnect” in the present study could not be due to physical distance as the College of Education and the foreign language department occupy the same building and are only one floor apart.

Interdisciplinary Courses

Although it was not a stated goal of the study to explore the benefits of interdisciplinary foreign language courses, the data gathered provide greater strength to the call for the further development of such courses. Even though a large number of students who registered to take the interdisciplinary course withdrew prior to the beginning of the semester, the fact that so many students initially expressed interest in the course speaks to the potential draw of courses outside of the realm of foreign language literature. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the group of students who decided to pursue the course consisted of heritage language learners, adult students, and students from other disciplines, such as history and communications. One of the students who was discouraged from taking the course was neither majoring nor minoring in French, but rather had just returned to the United States after backpacking throughout France and wanted to further hone his French skills. It is this very type of non-traditional student that the MLA (2007) reported foreign language departments need to attract and cultivate to maintain and even expand student enrollment. Greater development of interdisciplinary courses such as the one described in this study could serve to tap into the pool of non-traditional foreign language students and hence to ensure the sustainability of foreign language courses and programs.

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In addition to the enrollment benefits of interdisciplinary courses, the goals of these courses align with current thinking in second language acquisition theory. Interdisciplinary courses provide opportunities for language learning in a meaningful

context and for a real-world purpose. According to Krashen (1981), language learning is most effective when it is meaningful, attached to prior knowledge, and for a real-world purpose. In the case of this study, the 6 students who completed the interdisciplinary course were further developing their French skills in a meaningful context in which they all had prior experience as language teachers, tutors, or learners. They were also being exposed to a real and practical career in teaching French in a K-12 setting.

The creation of interdisciplinary courses also aligns with national foreign language standards. According to the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (1999), one of the 5 main goals for second language learning is for students to make connections between the foreign language and other disciplines. That is to say, students learning foreign languages in the United States are expected to reinforce and further their knowledge of other subject areas through foreign language instruction.

Implications and Applications

To clarify, we do not suggest that traditional literature-based foreign language courses be replaced by collaborative and interdisciplinary courses. Some students are interested in literature and should have the option of taking literature courses at various stages of their degree. However, as was suggested in the report by the MLA (2007) and in this study, not all students wishing to take a foreign language course are interested in studying foreign language literature. The needs and interests of these students should also be addressed. In the required course sequence of French majors and minors options should be made available to students. In the case of this research project, if the interdisciplinary French course could have been taken by students as an alternative to one of the required French literature and culture courses needed to graduate, the practical reasons for taking it would have been inarguable and perhaps more students would have registered for and completed the course.

In support of the recommendations by Rosenbusch et al. (2000) and Long (2000), this study has demonstrated that collaborative efforts between teacher education and foreign language faculty have, at their best, the potential to improve attitudes toward a career in teaching a foreign language. At minimum, such a course exposes students to the possibility of a potential career choice that they subsequently might or might not choose to pursue. In this research project, as the students learned more about the teaching of French, their attitudes toward the profession seemed to change. That is, all students involved in the study noted their increased interest in learning more about a career teaching French. After completion of the course, three of the six students have in fact enrolled in the College of Education at the participating university to become a French teacher. To address critical teacher shortages in other areas such as mathematics and science, similar courses could be developed in other departments across universities.

Analysis of the data also indicated a need for more interdisciplinary alliances involving more faculty members, not just those directly involved in, for example,

...this study has demonstrated that collaborative efforts between teacher education and foreign language faculty have, at their best, the potential to improve attitudes toward a career in teaching a foreign language.

this collaborative project. Students are very influenced by teacher encouragement with respect to subject choice (Kissau, 2007; McGannon & Medeiros, 1995). In our context, foreign language faculty did very little to encourage students to consider a career in teaching.

As a caveat, we note that simply improving student attitudes does not necessarily equate with increased teacher recruitment. Furthermore, the time limitations of the study only allowed the researchers to learn that three of the six students enrolled in the interdisciplinary course had subsequently enrolled in the College of Education in order to ultimately become a French teacher. A longitudinal study to look at the number of students whose attitudes toward teaching change and later go on to become teachers would be much more informative.

We also note that interviews with students who completed the course and follow-up communication with students who dropped the course revealed that some students were encouraged, sometimes strongly, by academic advisors in the foreign language department to drop it due to its optional nature. Ironically, the small numbers of students who actually enrolled in and completed the course were indicative of what we consider to be one of the study's most important findings. The fact that students were persuaded not to pursue the course by faculty members in the foreign language department clearly supports the previously mentioned claim by Ortega (1999) that separate language "camps" exist in teacher education programs and foreign language departments.

The large presence of non-traditional and heritage language learners who ultimately completed the course and participated in the study is, of course, not representative of the traditional, postsecondary foreign language classroom. However, it is again very interesting to note that in the recent report by the MLA (2007) the possibility of attracting non-traditional students was stated as one of the main reasons for developing interdisciplinary foreign language courses. The large percentage of students who participated in the course and who represent non-traditional foreign language students underscores this untapped resource pool of potential foreign language students and draws further attention to the need to integrate similar interdisciplinary courses into the mainstream foreign language curriculum.

Foreign language departments need to broaden their curricula or course offerings beyond the confines of foreign language literature in order to meet the needs of non-traditional foreign language students and thus to help ensure their sustainability.

Unmet Potential

Foreign language departments need to broaden their curricula or course offerings beyond the confines of foreign language literature in order to meet the needs of non-traditional foreign language students and thus to help ensure their sustainability. With a clear shortage of foreign language teachers in the United States that is only expected to worsen as foreign language enrollment in K-12 schools continues to grow, the interdisciplinary research study described in this article has provided a possible model to achieve both of these goals.

Despite the positive nature of these findings, the results of the study have also demonstrated that the success of the model is clearly influenced by the strength of the alliance between the participating departments. Had potential students not been discouraged from enrolling in the interdisciplinary French course by individual faculty in the foreign language department, more students may have experienced similar positive perceptions. For Long (2000) and also in our institution, there is indeed a disconnect between foreign language faculty members in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and their foreign language colleagues in the College of Education—and caught in the middle are students who might otherwise become teachers of French or other foreign languages. While we feel that the interdisciplinary course had great potential to both change student attitudes about teaching French and to attract new, non-traditional students to the foreign language department, ultimately its full potential was not met. Finally, we note that due to a lack of communication between the participating colleges, an unwillingness on the part of the foreign language department to allow the course to be taken as an alternative to a required literature course, and low enrollment in the pilot the interdisciplinary course, FREN 3050/4050, has not been offered since its inception in 2008. Should we choose to offer a non-literature based, interdisciplinary course in the future, we would need to work harder to promote the course inter-departmentally. Looking back, we believe that had our colleagues been more aware of the strengths of the course, they may have been more encouraging of students to enroll in FREN 3050/4050. We also realize that it will be necessary to continue to reach out to our colleagues in the foreign language department in order to strengthen our relationship and meet our shared goal of serving the needs of our students.

Notes

1. The term heritage language learner refers to someone who has had significant exposure to a language other than English outside the education system. It most often refers to someone with a home background in the language, but may refer to anyone who has had in-depth exposure to another language (Webb & Miller, 2000).
2. The same group of students participated in a separate research study investigating their willingness to communicate in an online environment (see Kissau, McCullough & Pyke, 2010).

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Appendix A Evaluation Rubric

Elements	1	2	3
Comprehension of content	Student demonstrated weak understanding of the content of the module.	Student demonstrated some understanding of the content of the module.	Student demonstrated strong understanding of the content of the module.
Provision of details and examples	No details or examples were provided to support ideas.	One or two details or examples were provided to support ideas.	Several details or examples were provided to support ideas.
Completion of work	Student failed to submit the assignment by the deadline and/or did not respond to all of the task requirements.	Student submitted the assignment by the deadline but neglected to respond to one or two of the task requirements.	Student submitted the assignment by the deadline and responded to all of the task requirements.
Contribution to discussion	Student failed to mention or address comments made by classmates and therefore did not contribute to the discussion.	Student occasionally mentioned or addressed comments made by classmates and therefore made some contribution to the discussion.	Student regularly mentioned or addressed comments made by classmates and therefore significantly contributed to the discussion.
Quality of French	Numerous and significant errors in vocabulary and grammar often impeded comprehension of the student's message.	Errors in vocabulary and grammar rarely impeded comprehension of the student's message.	Occasional, minor errors did not impede comprehension of the student's message.