

0610-10610-3

MODULAR COURSES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

AN INHERENT task of small-college foreign language departments is servicing both large elementary and intermediate classes and small upper-division courses with a limited number of faculty. The absence of a graduate division in such colleges precludes the use of graduate teaching assistants—a melancholy prospect for those who dislike teaching at the lower level but a fact of life that imposes unusual burdens and yields distinct rewards for the faculty. This report on a two-year NEH-sponsored project at Linfield College addresses perhaps the most perplexing dilemma facing small language departments: the need to offer a great many advanced tutorial or independent-study courses to satisfy major or minor requirements. I believe we are approaching a solution that promises to boost enrollments in our upper division. In describing what we have done at Linfield, I should first say something about the college and its constituency, since these inevitably determine the substance and direction of curricular programs.

We are a private, four-year liberal arts college located about forty miles southwest of Portland on the edge of the Coast Range. Linfield is by no means alone in the area: Lewis and Clark, Willamette, the University of Portland, and Pacific University in Oregon, and Pacific Lutheran, the University of Puget Sound, and Whitman in Washington all compete with Linfield for students from the Pacific Northwest. Our students tend to come from small towns—about fifty percent from Oregon and nearly all the rest from the other Pacific states. Approximately one percent live in the Rocky Mountain region and one percent farther east. Our recent improvements, we hope, will allow us to compete successfully with Reed on the national level.

The humanities curriculum is less well developed at Linfield than at similar schools in the East and Midwest. For a student body of twelve hundred, the Department of Modern Languages has only four full-time faculty members and two adjuncts offering majors in French, German, and Spanish and one year each of Japanese and Latin. I hasten to add that the college has strengthened its faculty and curriculum substantially in the last six or seven years. Roughly half of the eighty faculty members were hired during this time, culled in the current buyer's market from institutions across the land. Of primary importance to my department is our new international program, which has campuses in Japan, Costa Rica, France, and Austria. Each year sixty Linfield students, most of whom have never left the Pacific Northwest, spend a semester of study abroad (generally the first term of their sophomore year) and

Peter N. Richardson

on their return share with fellow students their new perspective on themselves and their country.

Happily, a number of these sixty returnees want to continue their language studies, and many of them choose to pick up a language minor as proof of an ancillary skill. We require our language majors to spend an entire year abroad, which most of them take in the traditional junior year. With but four faculty—all heavily burdened with an annual twenty-five to thirty hours of teaching, largely at the elementary and intermediate level—how do we serve these students? Bear in mind that we are not yet blessed with many upper-level students: Most returnees from abroad have the equivalent of three or four semesters of language study, so we can hardly call them advanced. To accommodate the needs of upper-level majors and minors in the three main languages, we must offer many courses that attract small enrollments, sometimes only four or five students. It is common knowledge that such a program—which is typical of faculty burdens at small schools across the country—does not do wonders for faculty stamina or morale.

With consulting advice from Kim Sparks at Middlebury and with faculty released time sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, we undertook to consolidate our advanced intermediate offerings, following the successful example of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

In 1982, our first year, we focused on two modern drama courses; in 1983, on an introduction to linguistics. In 1982 one faculty member taught a "parent" course in modern drama, dealing with a dozen or so European and Latin American plays. Readings, lectures, and class discussions were all in English. The course met Monday, Wednesday, and Friday (MWF) at 10 A.M. Keyed to this course and meeting Tuesday and Thursday (TTh) at 10 A.M. were three complementary sections, which read and discussed additional modern dramas in the original French, German,

The author chairs the Department of Modern Languages at Linfield College. This article is based on a presentation delivered at ADFL Seminar West, held at the Defense Language Institute and Asilomar Conference Center on California's Monterey Peninsula, 27-30 June 1983.

1-0120

or Spanish. We required students who enrolled in the complementary courses to take the parent as well but allowed those without foreign language experience to sign up for the parent course alone. All four courses were separate entities, with independent syllabi and paper or exam requirements. Discussion in the complementary courses could grow out of the critical method explained and practiced in the parent course; and students in the complementary courses soon felt that they could bring special insight to the English MWF meetings. When we read and discussed García Lorca's *Blood Wedding* in the English section, the students in the Spanish course were irrepressibly eager to comment on the Spanish concepts of family and pride or on the color symbolism of the play—and those who had previously read *Blood Wedding* in the original helped us by pointing out many inadequacies of the English translation. When the parent class read Dürrenmatt's *The Visit*, it was the German students' turn: they brought special insight to the themes of responsibility and humanity, which they had just discussed in the context of Dürrenmatt's *Die Physiker*. By the time the French class had had its day in our English discussions of French existentialist drama, the few students enrolled in only the MWF parent course were feeling a little green and—we hope—thinking that it was about time to discard monolingualism as a bad joke. Toward the end of the term, we further integrated the complementary courses into the main section through either panel discussions or performances of selected scenes.

In the spring of 1983 we repeated the experiment with a parent course entitled Introduction to Language and complementary courses on the history of the French, German, and Spanish languages. The main course, largely historical and descriptive, used English as the laboratory animal. Each complementary section delivered reports on the state of the language in medieval France, Germany, or Spain and on topics dealing with those languages in modern times: Canadian and Missouri French, Pennsylvania German, the language of national socialism, the workings of the Spanish Academy, Chicano Spanish, and so on. Again, the four students not enrolled in the complementary sections could see what they were missing; they carried their weight by giving the class a two-hour report on black English.

These two courses, and others like them that will follow, represent a special kind of team teaching in which the students are exposed to the entire foreign language faculty: to ensure continuity between sections, the instructors of the complementary courses attend the parent course as well. (Preparation loads, however, are just two hours each for the three complementary instructors and three hours for the parent instructor.) Students receive major or minor credit for all five hours, even though three of those hours are in English.

0610-2

Here I should insert a caveat: controlling the flow of discussion in the parent course with all four instructors present requires cooperation. The teachers of the complementary sections must be observers in the parent course and must refrain from entering the class discussion unless their expertise is required and requested. Otherwise the parent course may turn into a department meeting with the students as bemused bystanders. In the linguistics course, where English is the object of study, observations on English by speakers of other languages are especially valuable, and other instructors are consulted regularly as native or near-native informants. Here we can entertain topics that we often want to pursue in the foreign language classroom but have little time for: questions of regional accent, word geography, linguistic chauvinism, and so on.

Where do we go from here? The drama course and the language course have proved themselves, and they will return in three or four years. Courses on realism, expressionism, and other traditional subjects are obvious candidates for this treatment, and it is tantalizing to think of a team-taught course in science fiction. But this format invites affiliation with other departments, most conspicuously English, music, history, or philosophy. It is also a good forum for visiting faculty—for instance, Fulbright scholars who could teach the parent course and one of the complementary sections, thus being available to the entire college. Diluting our foreign language offerings down to a forty-percent solution—two days out of five each week—may sound like heresy, but bear in mind that this program affects only one course out of the departmental curriculum. Besides, we need not limit the language component of such team courses to two weekly meetings: We noted late last spring that the parent linguistics course probably could meet TTh and the complementary sections MWF.

Let me return now to our student constituency and observe that in one important respect it resembles that at virtually any other college in the country. When I mentioned our international program, which sends students abroad for the first term of their sophomore years, I also mentioned that many of the students desire to continue their language work on their return. It is widely acknowledged that, along with the maintenance of language skills, the entire process of reintegration into the campus environment is the crucial aspect of foreign study and the most frustrating one for directors of international programs. When we were contemplating a new international studies program at Linfield, we consulted with a wide variety of institutions about the problems inherent in such programs. From places as different as Stanford, Pomona, Macalester, Lewis and Clark, Middlebury, University of the Pacific, and the University of Minnesota we heard a litany of frustration: What do we do now with these returnees from abroad when we are busy selecting and training the next group? How

do we cushion the inevitable shock of reentry, a psychological problem that plagues almost all students? Just when they think they have begun to sort out their postadolescent lives, they fall prey to an emotionally wrenching confrontation with the indescribable beauty of the stained glass at Chartres or with the idyllic peace and simplicity of an Austrian alpine meadow. Especially for smaller colleges in rural areas, the old question rings true: How you gonna keep 'em down on the farm after they've seen Payree?

At Linfield we have devised a new reentry course, taught by an anthropologist, that seems to address problems of this sort. But we must help out in the language department, too, especially since we are the natural beneficiaries of the foreign programs and probably relate best to the returnees' problems. An obvious role we can play involves the kinds of courses I have described above. Wherever I have taught, students have demanded courses in other departments—notably history—taught in German; I assume this holds true for students of other languages as well. Traditionally these requests have been denied: How many history departments—other than those with a couple of non-Americans—could staff such courses? And—given the staffing—how could they justify teaching such a small number of students? But behold the language department, chock-full of people with graduate training in foreign cultural and intellectual history; behold the language department, eager to let a staff member teach a TTh section in French to complement a traditional MWF course on nineteenth-century French history. And what could be more relevant to a course on twentieth-century Europe than a two-hour ancillary section given in French, German, or Spanish in which the students read and discuss articles from periodicals in the college

library? I do not mean to imply that all language teachers are universal geniuses whose teaching competence spans the entire college curriculum, but we teach "culture" courses anyway—usually to majors—and I think we can learn enough to read and discuss with students articles that relate directly to their work in other fields. We in language departments are not all luminaries, but we still possess more power to illuminate students' lives than we are given credit for. Historically we have plied our trade somewhere near the periphery of the curriculum, a ready-made bushel to hide our lights under. But our profession will suffer a blackout if we stay there.

It seems to me that such a symbiotic alliance with other departments is a proper undertaking for language teachers (at least for a portion of their course load), especially at a college like Linfield, where the burden is clearly on the faculty to justify language study by placing it in the broadest possible humanistic context. A language department whose members can demonstrate this kind of value to a college clearly has broader concerns than producing majors with quantifiable language proficiency. Whereas I am convinced that more of us need to incorporate proficiency testing and performance goals in our lower-level courses, I suggest that language departments are, above all, humanities departments, concerned with developing not only linguistic fluency but fluency of thought and intellectual flexibility. Saying, after all, is more important than talking. By demonstrating the interconnection of humanistic disciplines in the way I have suggested, we establish and strengthen our own position somewhere near the center of the college curriculum, where we should have been all along.

Summer Institute for Teachers of French

For the seventeenth consecutive year, the Department of Modern Languages of the University of Northern Iowa is planning its programs in France for teachers of French.

The regular program, from 16 June to 4 Aug. 1984, will be held in Angers and in Quimper for eight semester hours of graduate credit.

A five-week session, from 16 June to 21 July 1984 (for teachers who are unable to attend our regular session), will be held in Angers for six semester hours of graduate credit.

The institute program is designed for teachers who

need intensive training in understanding and speaking French and who wish not to see France as tourists, but to live in French communities and associate with French people—students, senior citizens, policemen, housewives, social workers, political and union leaders, and so on.

Following the five weeks in Angers, where each student will live with a French family, the group will have a chance to study in depth a specific province, this year La Bretagne, 21 July–4 Aug.

Enrollment is limited. Six to eight semester credit hours are offered.

For further information write André Walther, Director, 1984 French Summer Inst., Dept. of Modern Languages, Univ. of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA 50614.