

MEETING THE PROFESSIONAL NEEDS OF TEACHERS: A GRADUATE-LEVEL INSTITUTE IN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

THE Department of Romance Languages at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has established MA and MEd programs in French and Spanish. Such degree programs, however, do not place primary emphasis on further training in the language nor are they designed to meld the few advanced courses in language that we do offer with advanced work in literature and culture. Moreover, in more formal programs such as these, practical pedagogical issues, often of pressing concern to in-service teachers, are rarely addressed in the context of the language itself. With all this in mind, we in the department projected a series of intensive summer institutes to meet the needs of elementary- and secondary-school language teachers. To preserve the single-language ambience that must distinguish such institutes from regular offerings, and in recognition of the somewhat different pedagogical problems encountered in teaching each language, we elected to offer our French and Spanish institutes in alternate summers.

Our goal in these institutes was to upgrade the capabilities of foreign language teachers and their grasp of foreign cultures. Specific objectives were to:

1. revitalize the participants' language capabilities,
2. increase the participants' knowledge of literature and culture with emphasis, when appropriate, on third world areas,
3. enrich the participants' teaching through exposure to the broader scope of less traditional Hispanic and Francophone worlds, and
4. encourage stronger ties between schools and the university toward a common goal of better global understanding on all levels.

The first institute, the Graduate Language Institute in French, was held during the summer of 1982. Eighteen participants, all foreign language teachers, completed this three-week pilot program, for which they received six hours of graduate credit. In response to faculty and student evaluation of this initial experience, the department decided to lengthen the duration of the institute to provide more exposure to the exclusive use of the language and more time for required readings. While a portion of the funding for the first institute was provided by Romance language alumni and a small grant from the Quebec government, about eighty percent of the 1982 costs were budgeted through the university's summer school as part of its one-time commitment to special projects. This meant that participants were required to pay for the usual student expenses, including books, tuition, fees, room, and board, and that they received no stipends. As a result, the summer school

Roch C. Smith

recovered its portion of the costs, and the pilot institute turned out to be largely self-supporting.

Encouraged by the relative success of our first effort, we then sought three years of outside funding to establish the program and make it known. Moreover, the modifications of the pilot program, particularly the change from three weeks to four weeks, meant significantly increased costs, which, without outside support, the students would have to bear and which would have reduced accessibility to the program. In fact, even with our three-week institute, several applicants, citing cost as the factor, decided not to attend. Finally, outside funding would enable us to upgrade the quality of our program, especially in the areas of support personnel and cultural activities. Therefore, in the fall of 1983, we applied for a grant from the Division of Education of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

We formally proposed a series of intensive four-week summer language institutes for elementary and secondary school teachers who hold the bachelor's degree with at least a minor in the appropriate language. The successor to our pilot program in French, the "Graduate Language Institute in French/Spanish," was planned as a three-year alternating language program, offering Spanish in 1983, French in 1984, and Spanish in 1985. Our total request from the endowment was for \$136,000, with the university providing an additional \$39,000 in cost-sharing contributions. The total cost of the project was therefore about \$175,000. Late in December 1982, the NEH responded to us and asked if we would consider modifying our proposal from a three- to a two-year project. This we did and resubmitted a budget requesting \$87,000 from the NEH, to which was added \$26,000 in institutional cost sharing. The total cost for the two-year project was about \$113,000.

On 16 March 1983, to our great delight, we were informed that our two-year project had been funded as requested. Because our pilot program had essentially paid for itself, we had taken the relatively small risk of planning to offer an institute in Spanish in 1983, irrespec-

The author is Professor and Head of Romance Languages at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. This article is based on a presentation delivered at the MLA Convention in New York, 27-30 December 1983.

tive of the outcome of our grant proposal. But now we could offer a much fuller program, with invited speakers and improved materials, and, most important, we could do so at far less expense to participants. Each participant would now receive a stipend of \$400 (\$440 for the 1984 institute in French), would pay no tuition, and would have the cost of his or her room covered by the grant. Only meals and books would remain the student's responsibility.

Before receiving the grant award, we had advertised the institute at our own expense, mentioning the possibility of a grant though not the potential source. We thus had several applications already on hand and received a few more for a total of twenty-four. In addition to providing the usual application for admission to the graduate school, a transcript, and three letters of recommendation, each prospective student submitted an Application for Institute Participation, which included the applicant's pledge to speak only Spanish during the institute, a signed commitment by the applicant's principal to released time for a follow-up workshop, and a cassette tape recording of the applicant speaking in Spanish. Each applicant was rated on grade point average and, in the absence of an average of B or better (two instances), on the applicant's apparent success as a teacher. Each candidate was also rated on linguistic ability and apparent motivation. Finally a judgment was made as to how well each applicant's needs could be met by the institute. As a result of this evaluation, one applicant was denied admission because of insufficient preparation in Spanish. Subsequently, two applicants who had been admitted withdrew, one to accept an assistantship at another university in North Carolina and the other, from Seattle, for personal reasons. That left us with twenty-one participants in the 1983 institute—one from Tennessee and the rest from all major geographical areas of North Carolina. For 1984, the institute in French had twenty-three participants from eleven states (including Alaska and California); we had received 104 inquiries from twenty-five states.

The 1983 program included two graduate courses: Argentine Literature taught by one of our associate professors of Spanish, who also served as faculty coordinator, and Special Problems in Spanish Language and Literature, taught by a full professor of Spanish. For 1984, a person who holds a joint appointment as associate professor of French and education is serving as faculty coordinator. She will be joined by an associate professor of French in teaching two courses: *La Phonétique avancée* and *Le Drame à travers les siècles*, with special emphasis when possible on short works that come from the entire francophone world and that are particularly adaptable to secondary and elementary classroom use. These courses are offered in the context of a full immersion program in which students are required to live on campus, take two of their meals together, meet daily with one of four native-speaking

"monitors," attend and participate in special evening cultural programs, and speak only the target language throughout the four weeks.

A word about the monitors, who, in addition to being native speakers, hold at least the bachelor's degree: Their purpose is to help facilitate conversation and help improve the linguistic skills of the participants. Each holds two daily small-group conversations with groups of two or three participants and takes at least one meal daily with the participants. Teaching experience is essential for the lead monitor and considered highly desirable for the other three. One of the four, who need not be the lead monitor, resides with the participants in the dormitory. To preserve the foreign language ambience in the dormitory, the receptionists who staff the switchboard and intercom system are fluent speakers of the language—usually drawn from the ranks of our own majors or those of neighboring institutions.

The daily format of the institute is designed to make possible the rigorous study of the language, its literature, and its culture in a full immersion program. After a thorough orientation on the first day, the daily schedule begins with three hours of class time in the morning, followed by lunch taken as a group, which includes monitors and occasionally faculty and the project director. The afternoon is devoted to study and a one-hour meeting with a monitor. Over the four weeks each participant spends five hours with each of the four monitors. Dinner, like lunch, is also a group affair, while the evening is reserved either for study or a cultural program. There are ten evening sessions during the period of the institute. They vary from lectures by invited speakers, to dramatic presentations by the participants themselves, to films and musical programs. Special events on or off campus are scheduled on weekends, although participation in these is optional. Throughout, of course, the target language is used.

At the conclusion of the summer program, the institute faculty is asked to convey its observations and suggestions for improvements to me as project director. Participants are also asked to evaluate their experience by filling out a questionnaire on the last day and, once again, during the course of the subsequent academic year so that we can determine how useful they think the institute has been in improving their teaching now that they are back in the field. A one-day workshop for the participants is scheduled during the following academic year. Here, participants and faculty discuss the participants' postinstitute experience. All the evaluations of the 1983 institute in Spanish indicate that, to a substantial degree, its four goals have been met. Both faculty and students came away from their experience with common understandings and a deep feeling of community. The participants displayed a high degree of enthusiasm, which seems to have been based on a renewed sense of confidence in themselves as knowledgeable and highly skilled language teachers. The problems in meeting the

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goals were all minor and generally subject to solution. The follow-up responses indicate that most participants found their improvement in speaking skills to be especially useful when they returned to the classroom. And while most actually use their increased knowledge of literature and culture about every two or three weeks in the classroom, almost all find such knowledge highly valuable to their teaching and have continued to do additional readings. Most participants seem to cherish their new friendships with the professors and express a greater sense of participation in the language teaching profession.

Participants typically expressed enthusiastic appreciation for the institute experience. A few representative comments might speak for all:

It [the institute] helped me grow intellectually. I think this is very important, even if the teacher doesn't have the chance to use all the literary knowledge in the lower level classes.

More than anything, they [the courses] have inspired me to continue developing my fluency in Spanish.

My attendance at the summer institute and related communication between the university and my school has made my principal more aware and responsive to the needs of the F. L. Dept.

And perhaps the most significant, certainly the most concise, comment of all:

I would do it again!

But, would *we*? The answer, at midpoint, when the work remaining to be done prevents us from blithely engaging in nostalgic reflections that minimize past difficulties, is still yes. There are a lot of sound reasons for offering the institute. In the first place, it is already abundantly clear that this sort of program is needed. Formal evaluations by participants and unsolicited responses confirm this view. Second, we as university faculty have learned much about problems and issues facing high school teachers and have developed a true appreciation of the constituencies making up the language teaching profession. Third, not only are the

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goals being achieved but the participants' renewed spirit and their own sense of belonging to a multifaceted language teaching profession can only contribute to an enlightened discussion at all levels about what the values and priorities of a coherent profession are or should be.¹ And finally, from a practical point of view, our graduate program has benefited from increased visibility and enrollments as a direct result of the institute. In 1983, for instance, one third of the participants elected to continue work on their degrees with us. Such gains should not be discounted at a time when graduate programs in foreign language departments are frequently the object of administrative (and budgetary) indifference if not open hostility. An institute cannot, by itself, ensure continued vitality, but it can contribute to the overall vigor of a graduate program.

None of this means that we would stand by the old adage, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," and make no changes in the institute. For it would be foolish indeed and a disservice to our prospective students not to profit from experience. For example we and the various offices of the university that work with us have learned enough about the logistics of offering such a program that we could consider doing simultaneous institutes in different languages without jeopardizing our goals. And there are numerous ways the project might be made even more responsive to the needs of in-service teachers (on-site visits to the schools, opportunities for former participants to teach college language classes, use of particularly successful former participants in subsequent institutes, etc.). The possibilities for modifications are many and will often be suggested by emerging circumstances. But our basic model does work very well and, I believe, can be successfully adopted elsewhere.

NOTES

¹Richard I. Brod argues forcefully for the need to achieve a consensus of the various constituencies in the language profession in "The State of the Profession—1983" (*Modern Language Journal* 67 [1983]: 319-29). In a small way, institutes that recognize common professional concerns of both school and university faculty can contribute to this worthwhile end.