Francophone Courses in United States Colleges and Universities

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ABSTRACT

In undergraduate programs in the U.S, Francophone literature and culture courses are generating more and more interest among students courses are offered in more institutions than in the past but when these courses are offered, they are often optional and rarely mandatory. In order to examine how many Francophone literature and culture courses are offered and required for students, we reviewed 63 French department course catalogs from 63 different sized universities—both public and private—from a variety of geographic regions. The discussion of the results is preceded by a brief synopsis of Francophone history, from the birth of the concept to the present. In the analysis of the results, the importanc of Francophone literature and culture courses for both students and universities is stressed.

The Evolution of "Francophone" Culture and Literature

First used in 1880 by Onésisme Reclus (1837-1916), a nationalistic and patriotic geographer, the term *Francophone* referred to group of people and countries outside of France that used the French language at one or more levels. Currently, Francophone countries include Belgium, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Canada, Lebanon, Haiti, former French colonies, Départements d'Outres-Mer (DOM), and Territoires d'Outres- Mer (TOM). In 1880, the concept of *Francophonie* was part of a larger process of maintaining and extending French power and wealth in the context of increased competition within Europe. France had recently suffered defeat by the Prussian army (in 1871) and was looking for new territories outside of Europe (Farandjis, 2004). French politicians of that era, convinced by the economic benefits of colonialism, passed legislation that financed the military colonization of territory from Vietnam to North and Sub-Saharan Africa, a process completed within the first quarter of the 20th century (Nouschi, 2005).

It was the expansion of the Francophone world through the instrument of colonialism that mainly shaped its contemporary character. For this reason, and for reasons of space, the present description focuses on this expansion and not on the Francophone countries with unique legacies like Haiti, Canada and Belgium. Within the colonial Francophone world the example of French colonies in North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa will serve to indicate the evolution, institutions and cultural and literary importance of the contemporary Francophone world.

The conquest and colonization of territory in North and Sub-Saharan Africa was not specifically motivated by a desire to spread the French language, culture, or literature, but rather by the political, economic, military, and religious objectives of the wider French Empire. The citizens of former colonies, with some exceptions, were educated in French only after independence in the mid-1950s and not during colonization (Farandjis, 2004). André Nouschi (2005), for example, emphasizes that at the end of the North African "Maghreb colonization," less than 15% of the general population had access to education, and only 5% of the "indigenous" children had access to schools. Illiteracy was widespread, producing what he calls "the lost generation": a generation without any formal education. Ironically and incidentally, it was some of the members of that "lost" generation who fought with the French army during the first and the second world wars, contributed to rebuilding Europe, and produced the first immigrant generation in France (with its "beur" literature).

During the colonial era, however, some literary voices from the new French colonies began to appear despite the extremely limited opportunity to go to school and learn French. For example, in 1934, Aimé Césaire, Leopord Sedar Senghor and Léon Contran Damas founded "L'étudiant noir," a black students review where the term "négritude" appeared for the first time. The birth of "Présence Africaine" in 1947, a panafrican review, might be considered an early example of African literature of French expression. In 1960, notable figures such as Hamani Diori of Niger, Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia, and Léopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal proposed regrouping the newly independent countries willing to continue a relationship with France founded on cultural and linguistic affinities (Nouschi, 2005).

This presence became the basis for a more formal and institutional relationship among countries in the Francophone world and between them and France itself. For example, in Niamey, Niger in 1970 under the initiative of the heads of the states mentioned above and joined by Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia, the representatives of 21 countries and governments signed the convention for the creation of the *Agency for Cultural and Technical Cooperation*. But it was French President François Mitterrand (1981-1995) who gave an official aspect to the agency when, in 1986, he invited all heads and representatives of Francophone states to Versailles. It was again Mitterand who, in 1991, created "Le Conseil Permanent de la Francophonie" (Nouschi, 2005). Today, this summit brings together 56 heads of states and representatives of governments including five new members from Eastern Europe. Jean-Marc Moura (2005) uses the term "colinguisme" to include countries such as Romania, Bulgaria and Viet-Nam where French is neither the second official language nor the national one. It is, however, the target language of some students from higher social classes, and it is a part of the curriculum at some universities.

The mission of the *Agency for Cultural and Technical Cooperation* is to improve the cultural and the economical cooperation between member nations and to achieve a unified voice and position among the members regarding world matters when submitted to vote at the United Nations. This also provides France, with its right to "veto" Security Council resolutions, considerable weight. It also affords the French language an important role in today's globalization.

These brief examples indicate the presence of an important and growing element in the global context of the French language, literature and culture. They also indicate what Claire Riffard (2006) argues are essentially the two meanings behind or implications of the term "francophonie." Riffard notes the importance of making a distinction between the term "Francophonie" used as a political "tool" and "francophonie" for referring to literature and cultures of French expression.

The existence of a global francophonie literary and cultural presence does not, however, mean that it is homogeneous nor of the same status everywhere. Moura's term "colinguisme" reflects this diversity in the European context. More importantly, there are also considerable difference among former colonies regarding the status of the French language and the impact of the educational system. Access to education varies from country to country although it is generally true that despite the fact that former colonies have experienced half a century of independence, the general population still is not fully educated. The status of French varies not only between Francophone countries but also within those countries. In general, people who live in urban areas are more likely to have a higher educational status, and therefore are more likely to have been exposed to French, than those living in rural areas. Some multidialectal societies such as Ivory Coast, Senegal, and Mali adopted French as their official language. Other countries, such as Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, consider French the second official language following Arabic. In Lebanon, a French education was long held as a mark of cultural and social distinction. In the former French colonies (with some exceptions), French is present in secondary schools and—importantly—in universities where it is the vehicular language of scientific knowledge. French is also the primary language for many other media: radio, television, newspapers. French is used in businesses, finance, administration, government (at high levels), music,

cinema, and in literary production. In terms of use of French in literary production several authors have described national or regional francophone literature from various perspectives: Moroccan literature in French as a vehicular language (Kacem Basfao), Algerian literature of Arab expression in French language (Ahmed Lanasri), and the literature of the French language (Jean Sénac) (Déjeux & Mitsch, 1992).

It is also the case that the output of literary work in the Maghreb in French is impressive. During the 40-year time-span from 1945 to 1989, writers in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia produced a total of 1146 novels, poetry volumes, and plays, all written in French (Déjeux & Mitsch, 1992). It is important to recognize that in the Maghreb, Francophone literature coexists with Arabic-language literature and that there is a vibrant cultural and literary expression in Arabic particularly in music. However, francophone literature of the Maghreb is now very familiar to the Western world, particularly after the awarding of prestigious literary prizes to Francophone Mahgrebi authors such as le Goncourt to Tahar Ben Jelloun for *The Sacred Night*.

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Even this brief description of the evolution of the francophone world leads to the following broad generalizations: (a) there is a rich body of Francophone cultural and literary production in Francophone Europe, Quebec, and former French colonies; (b) this cultural and literary production has a history where there is a common core but also where there is much local diversity; (c) there has been considerable growth in academic research related to Francophone literature. We could conclude that a comprehensive understanding of the French language, culture and literature should by now include the study of this continuing evolution in the francophone world outside of France itself.

Translated into the curriculum of higher education, the growth and diversity of Francophone literature and continued academic research interest in this body of work should lead to an increase in the inclusion of Francophone courses within the French curricula of universities and colleges in one of two ways. Francophone courses may be offered as optional one, on the one hand, or required, that is included as part of the "canon" for mastering the French language, its culture and literature, on the other hand. Evidence from a 1977 survey of Francophone literature in the French curricula of U.S. education showed that 44.3% of college-level French instructors reported that their organization offered at least one course, mostly optional, related to Francophone literature and that 85% of students (based on teacher perception) at these same institutions were generally "enthusiastic" about studying Francophone literature (Hancock, 1977).

By 1977, therefore, the curriculum of undergraduate programs began to recognize the Francophone world although as an optional experience. However, in nearly two-thirds of U.S. colleges and universities, students obtained a bachelor's degree in French without ever being exposed, even as an option, to French outside of France—without ever hearing the diverse voices from Francophone countries.

This conclusion raises the key question organizing the research for this article and that is whether there has been a change over time in the pattern of inclusion of Francophone courses better reflective of the Francophone world? This project was designed to determine if American colleges and universities offering an undergraduate major in French currently provide Francophone courses and whether such courses are required for degree completion.

METHOD

To answer this question, we conducted a review of course offerings for students majoring or minoring in French to determine the extent to which Francophone courses are both available and required. To evaluate whether Francophone courses were offered, we reviewed the course catalogues of French

Departments or Language Departments that were published by public and private educational institutions across a range of geographic locations and from educational organizations of varying size (i.e., undergraduate student enrollment).

Participant Schools

Sixty-three schools and universities offering an undergraduate degree in French were selected from the continental-U.S., segmented into the following seven geographic regions: Northeast/ New England (11 schools), Midwest (9 schools), Mid-Atlantic (7 schools), Mountain (6 schools), Southeast (10 schools), Pacific (10 schools), and South-Central (10 schools). In order to account for potential variability in course offerings and requirements that might occur due to funding status or school enrollment (i.e., size), colleges and/or universities from each region included (a) both public and private schools and (b) three tiers of varying student enrollment. The survey sample included 30 public schools and 33 private schools. Size stratifications were defined as small (up to 4,000 students, n = 17), medium (4,001 to 14,000 students n = 25), and large (more than 14,000 students, n = 21).

Procedure

For each school, information regarding course offerings was collected from the publicly available course catalog offerings of the French or languages department as available on the school's Internet website. A course was considered to relate to Francophone literature if it included information in the title and/or description that indicated a country, region, or culture outside of France. A course was considered "required" for completion of an undergraduate degree in French based on the requirements provided on the school's website description. If a school did not have an available website or did not provide information regarding course offerings, it was not included in the review.

RESULTS

Information regarding Francophone literature course *offerings* for undergraduates majoring in French is provided in Table 1. Of the 30 public universities and/or colleges surveyed, 70% (n = 21) reported offering at least one course in Francophone literature. Ninety-one percent (n = 30) of the 33 private universities and/or colleges surveyed reported offering at least one course in Francophone literature.

Table 1
Universities and Colleges Offering Francophone Literature to French Majors

School type	Schools offering courses No. (%)	Total courses offered No.
Public [a]	21 (70%)	79
Private [b]	30 (91%)	93

[a] n = 30. [b] n = 33.

Table 2
Universities and Colleges Requiring Francophone Literature for French Majors

School type	Schools requiring courses No. (%)	Total courses required No.
Public [a]	2 (7%)	3
Private [b]	6 (18%)	7

[a] $n = 30$. [b] $n = 33$.

Table 2 presents information about the same universities and/or colleges, but focuses on the number of these Francophone courses that are *required* for students completing an undergraduate degree in French. Whereas 70% of the public schools surveyed indicated offering Francophone courses, only 7%

($n = 2$) of these 30 schools require any Francophone courses as a degree requirement. Although 91% of private schools offer Francophone courses to their French majors, only 18% ($n = 6$) of the 33 private schools surveyed require any such courses to graduate.

Table 3 presents the number and percentages of Francophone courses offered and required according to the size of the university/college. Due to the relatively small cell sizes when stratified by enrollment, public and private schools were collapsed across school size. For schools with small, medium, and large enrollments, comparable percentages of Francophone courses are offered (i.e., 76%, 88%, 76%, respectively). Although the percentage of small schools requiring Francophone courses for degree completion (24%) appears greater than the percentage of medium (12%) and large schools (5%), the total number of schools requiring Francophone courses is too small across enrollment categories (i.e., 4, 3, 1) to conclude much in terms of differences in course requirements associated with university/college size.

Table 3
Universities and Colleges Offering and Requiring Francophone Courses for Undergraduate French Majors, Stratified by Student Enrollment

School size	Courses offered	Courses required
Small[a]	13 (76%)	4 (24%)
Medium[b]	22 (88%)	3 (12%)
Large[c]	16 (76%)	1 (5%)

[a] up to 4,000; $n = 17$. [b] 4,001-14,000; $n = 25$. [c] more than 14,000; $n = 21$.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Francophone courses in literature and culture focus on the literary works of writers from diverse geographic areas: Belgium and Switzerland in Europe; Quebec Acadia in North America; Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia in North Africa; the Middle East; West and Central black Africa; the Caribbean and the West Indies. It is important to remember that the writers from these different locations do not have the same relationship with French. For some, French is the mother tongue; for others, writing in French is perceived as an act of liberation from the limitation they might feel by writing in their mother tongue (e.g., Arabic). Regardless, all of these writers chose the French language as their medium to communicate with the world. Many Moroccan literary critics suggest that by writing in French, an author is allowed to do anything with the language that might be forbidden in Arabic, the author's mother tongue (Kacem, 1988). For these writers French brings freedom of expression without suppressing anything. Some francophone writers are perceived by Muslim fundamentalists to be contaminated by the western culture dangerous, and are therefore targeted for elimination by assassination; such was the case of the Algerian novelist and poet Tahar Djaout, assassinated in May 1993.

For Francophone writers, French becomes the means to communicate with and access the world in a multicultural dimension. Integrating required courses on Francophone literature and culture into the French curriculum for majors/minors not only expands the identity of the department but also reflects the complex realities of French in the world today. It exposes students to a body of literature expressed in French but firmly anchored outside France.

The cultural attitude of French departments toward Francophone literature is changing. In the 1977 survey conducted by Hancock, 44.3% of college professors reported their organization offered at least one course related to Francophone literature. In the present review of 63 French department curricula offerings, 70% of public and 91% of private institutions offered courses related to Francophone literature and culture. In addition, 7% of public and 17% of private schools reported

requiring Francophone courses as degree requirements for their majors. It is this kind of change that is needed for French majors and for the curricula to be more in tune with the changing needs of students geared toward the literature and culture of the French speaking world.

Clearly there is now recognition on the part of the vast majority of institutions that Francophone courses should be available to students. However, it continues to be the case that only a very small minority of colleges and universities consider those courses to be essential. From the data private colleges and universities appear to be leaders in the inclusion of the Francophone world in the study of French. Why private rather than public institutions tend to offer and require such courses is an avenue of further research beyond the scope and data of the present article.

Although there may be value in having students "exposed" to these diverse Francophone elements, it is not our argument that such inclusion be intended as a replacement or substitute for *French* culture and literature. Instead, we believe that courses in Francophone literature and culture must signal new orientations within those departments, allowing students majoring in French to realize that the target language (French), is "the medium by which many nationalities and ethnic groups, some multilingual and all of them multidialectal, express themselves and their cultures" (Auger & Valdman, 1999, p. 410). To the extent that this realization encourages an increase in exposure to Francophone literature and culture, it might bring new perspectives to French departments, especially given that interest in Francophone inquiry is on the rise for both faculty and students (Petrey, 2003).

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