

**Department of French Studies
Departmental Retreat
December 18, 2007
Campus Center, 103-104**

Report on Retreat

Present: Martine Gantrel (chair), Anouk Alquier, Mary Ellen Birkett, Dawn Fulton, Jonathan Gosnell, Ann Leone, Christiane Métral, Nicolas Russell, Janie Vanpée

The department of French Studies had the following agenda for the its retreat:

- A. Look at the major requirements and see how they could be more in line with the main recommendations of the New Design for Learning.
- B. Examine our curriculum in view of the curricular capacities as recently defined by CAP and see which capacities are addressed in each of our courses.

At the retreat, the following changes were considered and adopted (pending formal vote at dept meeting on February 13th):

A. Course Titles changes

- We agreed to rename FRN 230 *Colloquia in French Studies*
- Renumbering our 300-level courses: we agreed to get rid of headings such as “Topics in 19th/20th century Literature” and to turn topics into separate courses (“*the Russell system*”). Thus, two different topics of FRN 320 would become FRN 320 and FRN 321; two different topics of FRN 360 would become FRN 360 and FRN 361, etc.
- We also agreed to indicate in the Catalogue whenever possible courses taught in the next two years so that our students can better plan their course of study especially when they go abroad.

B. Requirements for the major

Current requirements: FRN 253 (Medieval and Renaissance period) or FRN 254 (17th and 18th-century France)

We agreed to make FRN 230 the basis of the major; to rename the course “*Colloquia in French Studies*”; and to cap each section at 18 students.

Rationale for change

- FRN 230 being a mandatory course for whoever wants to continue the study of FRN beyond FRN 220, it seems natural that it should be the basis of the major.

- It is a very important course; it helps the students to learn essential academic skills in French; it prepares them to read longer and longer works; its topic structure makes it a very convenient place to introduce new topics, new disciplines, etc. Making FRN 230 the basis of the major would officially recognize its strategic and curricular importance.
- To allow FRN students to think of themselves as eligible to become a FRN major earlier.
- To broaden the path to our major and making all lit and culture courses at the 200-level courses more equal by opening the choice of courses to students.
- To ease the enrollment crunch on FRN 253 and 254 .
- To root the basis of the major in contemporary time.

Additional thoughts:

- The department used part of the afternoon session to go over the description of methods and goals for FRN 230 that was drawn by Dawn Fulton last year. Some minor revisions were made to focus the course goals more exclusively on developing students' writing and analytical skills (document attached). All sections of FRN 230 should be listed as Writing Intensive (a minimum of 4 papers with some rewrite).
- We agreed that there should be a head of course for FRN 230 to make sure all the instructors understand the goals of the course and that reading and writing assignments in all sections are more or less equivalent.
- We discussed the feasibility of having one grammar book for all levels starting in FRN 220. We also discussed the idea of referring students to various Internet sites for grammar.

C. Period requirements for the major

Current Catalogue description: "Majors must take at least two courses in periods before the 19th century and one course covering the 19th or 20th century."

Three options were considered and discussed. Option a) seemed to be the preferred one.

a) "Majors must take at least one course in the Medieval or Renaissance period, and one course in 17th, 18th, or 19th century."

b) "Majors must take at least two courses in periods before the 20th century."

c) No period requirements altogether

Rationale for change: the 19th century has become just as foreign to students as pre-1800's periods. Our period requirements for the major should reflect that change by dissociating the 19th and the 20th centuries.

N.B. When changes are adopted, we will post our new advising guidelines on our FRN dept Moodle site and distribute hard copies to all major advisers.

D. Curricular expectations

We used the afternoon session of our retreat to identify the places in our curriculum and major where we integrate the intellectual capacities we agree should be part of every Smith student's career at the College. Our primary mission falls under the rubric of learning a foreign language and engaging with its cultures; foreign language learning consists of mastery of the four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing. This is the framework for the following report (attached) on the particular courses that emphasize "capacities" as defined by CAP. Overall, the report shows that our offerings cover all those capacities, except for # 2 ("Knowing and Using Quantitative skills" and "Applying Scientific Reasoning").

The FRN curriculum in view of the curricular requirements and expectations at Smith
I. The ability to think critically and analytically and to convey knowledge and understanding

 ➤ **Writing clearly**

We begin our concentration on this skill in the following first- and second-year courses:

- * 230, Colloquia in French Studies
- 244, French and Francophone cinema
- 253, Medieval and Renaissance France
- 254, France before the Revolution
- 260, Literary visions

* We append our instructor guidelines for FRN 230, which we reviewed and updated during this retreat.

The following courses require more complex and sustained use of written French (literary and cultural analysis, business vocabulary, translation)

For advanced students, on campus or in Paris or Geneva:

- 300, Advanced grammar and composition
- 385, Global French or Translation
- ** Comparable courses abroad

** All JYA courses are considered to be at the 300 level.

 ➤ **Speaking articulately**

Preparation for JYA includes courses designed specifically to build confidence and competence in speaking, at beginning and intermediate levels:

- 121 and 221, conversation sections based on topics in 120 and 220.
- 255j, “Speaking like the French” (intensive oral immersion course)
- 250, “Speaking with the French: cross cultural connections” (real time webcam communication with students in France)
- 300 level courses

Students return from JYA in Paris and Geneva with significant fluency in speaking French and in engaging with the intellectual and everyday culture.

 ➤ **Reading closely**

We begin this work in all FRN 230 colloquia, and develop it throughout our curricular sequence.

 ➤ **Evaluating and presenting evidence**

We emphasize this skill in the following: JYA, 300-level courses on campus, and especially in our seminars and in FRN 385, “Global French”.

 ➤ **Research methods course**

CLT 300, “Foundations of contemporary literary theory”, for students in their senior year.

[When Janie Vanpée teaches this course, she offers an additional weekly discussion in French.]

CLT 340, “Problems in literary theory”, also taught by Janie Vanpée

FRN 380 “Topics in French cultural Studies” (the methodology of cultural studies)

- **Engaging artistic creation and expressions**
240j, “Ça parle drôlement,” French theater workshop
370, “Representation of self and society, 1750-1850”, taught in 2006 by Mary Ellen Birkett in conjunction with the French neoclassical portraits exhibit at the Smith College Museum
- **Working independently**
JYA
300-level courses
seminars
Honors theses and special studies

II. Develop a historical and comparative perspective

- **Learning a foreign language:**
Our language sequence: 101-102, 120, 220, 300, 385
- **Studying the historical development of societies, cultures, and philosophies**
253, Medieval and Renaissance France
254, France before the Revolution
256, From Revolution to Revolution, 1789 to 1968
Our 300-level courses approach French and Francophone culture and history from Medieval to contemporary times through literary texts, cultural documents, art, music, and history of science.
- **Understanding multi- and interdisciplinary approaches**
244 (cinema course, all topics cross-listed with Film Studies)
230 (“Dream spaces and nightmare places”; cross-listed with Landscape Studies)
360 (“The Year 1830”, political and cultural upheaval in a signal year of French history; “Images of the Other”, cross-listed with SWG)
CLT 271, “Writing in translation: Bilingualism in the post-colonial novel”
CLT 253, “Literary Ecology”
CLT 278, “Gender and Madness in African and Caribbean prose”
FYS 141, “Reading, Writing and Placemaking: Landscape Studies” (cross-listed with FRN)
History of Science 285, “Mnemosyne: Goddess or demon”

III. Become an informed global citizen

- **Engaging with communities beyond Smith**
250, Cross-cultural communications
251, The French press online
365, Literature of the Caribbean
392, Locating *la Francophonie*: Shifting alliances created by immigration and globalization
JYA Paris and Geneva
CLT 271, Writing in translation: Bilingualism in the post-colonial novel

- **Learning tolerance and understanding diversity**
 - 230, “Francophone women writers”; “Voices from the outskirts”
 - 244, French cinema. Topic: “Cities of light: Urban spaces in Francophone film”
 - 254, “Orienting French identity”
 - 360, “Images of the other: Female domestic servants in French fiction”
 - 380, “La France des cinq continents: Colonial or post-colonial France »
 - 392, “Locating *la Francophonie*: Shifting alliances created by immigration and globalization”

- **Applying moral reasoning to ethical problems**
 - 392, “French intellectuals: Observing and contesting social order”

- **Understanding environmental challenges**
 - 230, “Dream places”
 - CLT 274, “Literary Ecology”

FRN 230 OBJECTIVES

[Dawn Fulton, April 2007; revised during departmental retreat, Dec 07]

I. CONTENT

French 230 sections should focus on contemporary literary and cultural texts, primarily 20th- and 21st-century. These "texts" might include novels, plays, short stories, essays, films, photographs, paintings, internet clips, blogs, etc. The goal is to push students to think critically about the texts they read, to think about what is at stake esthetically, culturally, historically, and politically in each text. The study of the corpus should also allow them to build a good vocabulary of critical analysis, including but not limited to the terminology of rhetorical devices (See Appendix B for examples). Students will also need to recognize that different kinds of texts require different reading strategies, and that the time they spend looking up words in the dictionary will vary accordingly. The number of pages and level of difficulty of the readings should increase steadily throughout the semester so that by the end of the term students are able to read a relatively challenging novel or prose text (~200 pages) in three weeks. In other words, they need to be ready for the expectations of courses above the 230-level.

II. WRITING

French 230 is built on a "writing intensive" model; one of its most challenging aims is to guide students through the transition from the more creative writing assignments associated with language courses to the kinds of essays they will be expected to produce at the FRN 244 level and up. To this end, it can be useful to generate a variety of writing exercises, while bringing students' attention to the kinds of approaches and techniques that are being practiced. It is useful to incorporate *ateliers d'écriture* or suggestions for writing strategies into class meetings, explaining how to gather ideas, formulate an argument, produce an outline, write an introduction, etc. These steps might be broken down into separate assignments building towards a complete essay, especially at the beginning of the semester. We have found the *dissertation* or argumentative essay to be the most useful focus for this course, but it may also be useful to present the *explication de texte* or *commentaire de texte* model, perhaps as a framework for an oral presentation.

Students should be expected to produce approximately four formal writing assignments during the semester; the completion of multiple drafts (corrected for grammar, content, or both) is encouraged, especially early in the semester. The goal for these formal assignments should be for the students to be able to produce a clearly written and well-organized argumentative essay of three to four pages on a topic of literary or cultural analysis by the semester's end.

III. SPEAKING

Class meetings should be discussion-oriented, encouraging students to develop their critical expression in spoken as well as written French by moving from single-sentence responses to

paragraph-length reflections, from expressing taste or preference to taking a critical position and supporting it with examples. Students may be asked to deliver a short presentation at some point during the semester, either individually or in a small group of 2-3 students (or both). They might also be encouraged to prepare questions for the class in order to spark a discussion following their presentation, as preparation for advanced courses where they will be responsible for leading a discussion.

IV. GRAMMAR

While the focus of French 230 is on literary and cultural analysis, it is helpful to incorporate some formal grammar review into the class meetings. The amount of time spent on grammar will vary depending on the particular class, but a 20-minute review once every two weeks works as a good basis. Grammatical points to cover will also vary and may often respond to student needs, requests, or mistakes on papers, but it is useful to confer with FRN 220 instructors from the previous semester to produce a list of grammar points to cover in FRN 230 (See Appendix A for recent suggestions).

Instructors might generate their own handouts and exercises for grammar review and/or use relevant sections of a grammar book. Either way, a particular grammar textbook should be recommended (or required) for all FRN 230 students in a given semester and should be placed on reserve for FRN 230 at the library.

Appendix A

POSSIBLE GRAMMAR POINTS FOR FRN 230

les pronoms relatifs	le démonstratif
verbe + préposition + infinitif (essayer de, commencer à, etc.)	les articles
la voix passive	les pronoms objets
le comparatif et le superlatif	les structures impersonnelles

Appendix B

SAMPLE VOCABULARY FOR FRN 230

le récit	le discours [direct, indirect, le style indirect libre]
l'intrigue	la structure narrative
le narrateur, la narratrice	l'ellipse
la perspective narrative [la focalisation interne, externe]	l'allitération, l'assonance
	la métaphore, la comparaison
	le symbole, la métonymie