

Teaching our French Economic Heritage: A Tool for Advocacy

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Language Study and the Workplace

According to national organizations from the AATF to ACTFL to the MLA, one of the most pressing challenges today in foreign language education is declining enrollments (see the MLA *Enrollment in Languages Other Than English* report under Goldberg et als). The most recent MLA report (2015) shows enrollments steadily declining in many languages, with Spanish showing its first drop since 1958, when the MLA began first tracking language enrollments. French has declined 8% since 2007, following its precipitous decline in 1995 (Goldberg). While the number of French speakers has tripled worldwide since 1945, the number of US students taking French has decreased by 50%.¹ What is going on?

While research continues to churn out evidence about the benefits of language learning on everything from vocabulary development to staving off Alzheimer's disease (ACTFL, *What the Research Shows*), a brief conversation with most US Americans indicates that they do not fully understand the value of speaking a foreign language, nor the importance of learning one. French, in particular, is singled out as being especially impractical. In a recent survey of incoming first-year students at Duke University, for instance, students cited travel as their primary rationale for studying French; those who studied Spanish did so because they thought it would be more useful for their future professional work, citing its worldwide presence.² In reality, according to the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF), French will soon surpass Mandarin as the most spoken language in the world by 2050. These kinds of gaps in understanding are one place where we can begin to advocate for French. In higher education, for instance, departments have taken multiple approaches to attracting more students to their courses. Strategies include decreasing core courses required for the major, changing requirements for the major, creating joint degree programs, and actively seeking out and recruiting students (Durand). The AATF also provides teachers with a number of ideas for promoting French, with an advocacy wiki that offers materials and kits for program advocacy: <<https://www.frenchteachers.org/hq/advocacy.htm>>.

To generate interest in language acquisition and in French specifically, we must demonstrate relevance and utility in both general and concrete terms. Generally speaking, employers report that even more than STEM skills, students need soft skills like critical thinking, writing, and teamwork (Peden). Language study can provide a useful means to

¹ <<https://frenchadvocacy.wikispaces.com/03.+Cultivating+Allies>>

² This survey was conducted by students in a 2015 French for Business course at Duke University. They surveyed members of the incoming 2020 class, via the class Facebook page. 216 students responded.

obtain those skills, and for those wishing to work internationally, French is especially useful. French, we must remind students and their parents, is the language of choice in diplomacy, in healthcare, and in economic development. When bridging conversations about French and work, it is equally important to break out of the stereotypes that circulate in popular culture about French innovation - or lack of it. Americans may be familiar with the luxury sector in France, or a large company such as Bombardier, what about the French Touch or French Tech? Our knowledge of French entrepreneurship is thin, and often erroneous. We need only conjure the words of former president G. W. Bush - who thought there wasn't a word for entrepreneur in French - , to know that we have a long way to go in changing attitudes.

Teaching the French Economic Presence in North America

In order to emphasize the utility of French, we recommend teaching modules - and even entire courses - on French business practices. By grounding this approach historically, through an analysis of the French economic presence in North America, we can bring breadth and depth to our students' coursework. This approach does not come without its challenges, however. Instructors at secondary levels report difficulty identifying and teaching materials related to business sources, particularly those that bridge science and technology themes. For many instructors, knowledge of French is grounded in the study of language and literature, and far less typically in business, science and technology. In other words, while teachers may possess a general knowledge of business and economics, enough to teach hour-long classes, this knowledge does not provide the necessary confidence to develop entire modules or courses on these subjects. Without the breadth and depth that come from formal training, locating materials and developing extensive lesson plans can be a time-consuming, if not formidable process for many.

These same complaints are heard at the post-secondary level from language faculty who are asked to "please take over the French business course" at their institution. The AATF French for Business and Economic Purposes Commission has been approached by numerous professors who do not feel adequately prepared to teach such a course, and who agree to do so only under duress. This reticence reflects the challenges associated with a larger shift in our pedagogies, not only in *how* we are teaching now, but in *what* we are teaching. While this is generally a positive shift, one that helps our field maintain relevance in an era of pre-professionalization, it is one that demands additional time from already stretched teachers.

One need not be a scientific expert or have an MBA to help students succeed in decoding technical texts, however. In fact, a basic familiarity with French professional sectors can have an important impact on student interest - and thus on advocacy. By exploring France's innovative tech sectors or analyzing Quebec's forward-thinking environmental policies with our students, we help them not only to prepare for assessments that will monitor their mastery of French, but enrich their understanding of Francophone culture and its place in the contemporary world. When students grasp the important role that French plays globally, we can help shift attitudes, which can have an important and lasting impact on our own programs' survival and development.

In an effort to situate the Francophone presence both contextually and historically, the following section of this paper offers a brief overview of France's economic presence in North America. Next, we share strategies for identifying resources that help break down stereotypes to engage students in a better understanding of the landscape of French innovation.

Teaching the French Economic History in North America

To open a discussion on the current landscape of French-American economic relations, it is useful to ground students in an historical context. Visual mediums such as paintings, maps, and charts can engage students more than summary readings and dry statistics. Paintings depicting early settlers help students conceptualize the French presence in North America. Simpson's "Jacques Cartier plante une croix à Gaspé" (1929) illustrates France's Cartier landing on the eastern tip of North America in 1534, declaring it territory of the king of France. This depiction of France's first contact with North America is rich and colorful, and students will be amused to learn that Cartier thought he had landed in China. In fact, Cartier's initial scientific discoveries were meager: the "gold" and "diamonds" he discovered were later found to be iron pyrite and quartz. Although his mission was a relative failure, other explorers were intrigued by the possibilities in North America, particularly by the fish and fur trades. Samuel Champlain followed Cartier soon after in 1608, when he founded "La nouvelle France". Over the next 60 years, Champlain tried to expand France's economic grounding on the continent, but by the end of his time abroad, the population did not surpass 3000 inhabitants, and missionary efforts at evangelizing the first nations peoples were abysmal; only the fur trade was a truly successful endeavor. The painting by Charles W. Jefferys, "Champlain trading with the Indians" (1911), shows Champlain trading with first nations people, and offers a rich visual for students to discuss both ethical and historical implications of this early colonialism.

La Nouvelle France did not flourish under Champlain, but under Louis the XIV's imperialism, its geographic expansion surged. For the next 200 years, France expanded its footprint, placing its stamp on North America, the Louisiana Territory and the Mississippi Valley. Maps depicting French settlement across the continent help students visualize migration patterns, and often reinforce their knowledge of US history gained in other courses.³ Despite expansion during this period, however, French American growth was unsteady, with most economic development grounded in the fur trade and in military fortifications. Further up north, France fought off a British invasion, and in 1759, it lost the battle at the Plains of Ibrahim in Quebec City, with Montreal falling soon thereafter. The Treaty of Paris in 1763 left the territory to the British, ending most of France's political power in North America. This relatively short period of 200 years helped settle thousands of French throughout the North American continent. Today, as Stéphane Parent demonstrates in his Radio Canada International article just 1 in 3 Francophones in North America is from Quebec. Through an analysis of migration patterns of these first

³ This map is particularly good for provoking discussion:
 <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portail:Nouvelle-France#/media/File:Nouvelle-France_map-fr.svg>

French settlers, we can map the cities where there remains a strong French presence today, looking at both demographics and in economics (see Parent).

In Canada, the French presence remains strongest. The country itself is home to more than 9 million French speakers, the majority of whom live in the province of Quebec (6 million). Quebec's economy represents 20% of the total Canadian GDP, and were it a country, its economy would be ranked 44th globally. Québec's most productive sectors include aerospace, transportation, information technology (especially video gaming, which intrigues many students), optics, biotech, and hydroelectricity; HydroQuebec alone employs 45,000 people. The hallmark of Quebec's economy, however, is its commitment to environmental sustainability. Quebec's progressive environmental policies lie in contrast to the rest of Canada, and thus provoke student curiosity while meriting study. Why did Quebec sign the Kyoto protocol but not Canada? Why did Quebec's government elect to impose a carbon tax that affects 85% of provincial industries? In what ways is Quebec aggressively pushing for alternatives to coal and ash? These kinds of questions intrigue students, and can lead them to naturally discovering the impact of Francophone industry on our world.

An additional way to engage student interest in the Francophone presence in North America is to ask them to identify Quebec-owned companies. Do they know that Aldo Shoes is based in Quebec? That the popular David's Tea chain was founded in Montreal? This "brand triggering" can activate students' background knowledge and be used to leverage engagement. From there, company case studies become a natural extension of learning.

An equally interesting phenomenon is the growing number of French citizens moving to Quebec. Due in part to Québec aggressive immigration policies that give extra points to French speakers, and also in response to the desire for entrepreneurial ventures that have been harder to take off in France, the numbers of French natives in Quebec have soared. In the past decade, 30,000 French citizens declared permanent residence status in Quebec. According to a Quebec council representative, there are over 110,000 French citizens living in Montreal alone.⁴ As French citizens move to Quebec, their economic presence is unmistakable, from the gentrification of the Plateau area to new businesses and start-ups in Mile End. Students can research demographics, create digital maps, and research French-owned start-up companies in Quebec.

This demographic shift is equally relevant for the United States. The United States is the number one target of French business development, and it remains France's top destination for foreign direct investment, with French exports dominating science and technology sectors (as demonstrated by *The Invest in France Agency*).⁵ French-owned businesses maintain a strong presence in the US, with some 4,600 French companies

⁴ <<http://www.canadianimmigration.net/news/news-articles/increasing-french-immigration-to-quebec>>

⁵ It is worth noting that these exchanges are bilateral. The US has more than 1200 companies in France, employing more than 440,000 people. The US is the largest foreign employer in France, ahead of Germany (AFII - Invest in France Agency, <<http://m.invest-in-france.org/>>).

generating over 500, 000 American jobs (see “French Companies in the U.S.” web article). Asking students to find these statistics on the web, in the form of a digital treasure hunt, engages them in a useful search for information that often leads them to new companies, ventures, and initiatives that point to France’s economic relevance on a domestic level. In San Francisco and Boston, for instance, there are joint US-French start up tech hub incubators (frenchtechhub.com), as well as numerous US-French partnerships that have resulted in joint publications, labs, research, and accords.

As we have seen, the French presence in North America is not just historical and cultural – one of art, culture, fashion, and food – but it is economic. When we consider with our students the impact of France on the North American economy, as well as the growing numbers of French citizens moving to North America, we help students move beyond historical abstraction to begin to concretize how this growing economic presence might impact their own lives. Studying French begins to make sense; French can be useful here on a domestic level. As students better understand the France’s role in North American economic development, they expand their own professional opportunities, and become engaged, motivated learners.

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Work Cited and Important Resources

ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages). What the Research Shows.

<<http://www.actfl.org/advocacy/what-the-research-shows>>

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<<https://www.aacu.org/leap/liberal-education-nation-blog/myth-unemployed-humanities-major>>

Important Resources and Statistics for Students

In Quebec

Invest Quebec: <<http://www.investquebec.com/>>

Export Quebec: <<http://www.export.gouv.qc.ca/fr/objectifs/exporter/accueil-export-quebec/>>

In France

The French Tech Hub: <<http://frenchtechhub.com>>

Say Oui to France:

<http://sayouitofrance-innovation.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/FrenchTech_Brochure_SXSW_V2.pdf>

Fatte+ program: <<http://www.france-science.org/FATTE.html>>

Office for Science and Technology at the Embassy of France in the US:

<<http://www.france-science.org>>

Fiers de la France: <<http://www.gouvernement.fr/search/site/fiers>>

Diplomatie: <<http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/etats-unis/la-france-et-les-etats-unis/>>