

Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures

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To trace the history and development of foreign language instruction at Oregon State University, one must go back to the beginnings of the institution itself. It is an interesting story; to tell it is to point the way the institution has developed in the past one hundred twenty-five years--from academy to college, to university. Among the personages who played a role in this hundred-year drama are several outstanding language professors who claim our attention immediately; theirs was an important role and their contribution to the development of the institution was considerable.

In the 1850's foreign language instruction--probably Latin or Greek, or both--was presumably included in the course of study at Corvallis Academy, incorporated as Corvallis College in 1858.

In 1865 when the Methodist Episcopal Church South took over control of Corvallis College, it was the first president, The Reverend William A. Finley, who taught Greek and Latin. Ancient languages then constituted a significant portion of the collegiate program.

In 1871-72 two of the five college faculty members taught languages, French having been added to the program of study. In 1872-73 B. L. Arnold, A.M., succeeded President Finley and for one year taught Latin and Greek.

In 1873-74 B. J. Hawthorne, A.M., was named Professor of Languages. Professor Hawthorne, who had been a captain in the Confederate Army and who had served both at Gettysburg and Appomattox, became the institution's first full-time language professor, if we discount Presidents Finley and Arnold. He remained on the staff through 1884-85, teaching Latin, Greek, French, German, and Anglo-Saxon, as well as History. Of particular interest is the following note from the catalogue of 1879-80: "Graduation in German and Anglo-Saxon is required for the degree of A.M. in addition to graduation in the Ancient Languages."

The CLASSICAL PERIOD lasted from 1865 until about 1888. During this period there were but a few members on the staff, and Latin and Greek constituted a significant

part of the college curriculum. By 1888-89 Greek no longer appeared in the annual catalogue. Latin was to remain until 1911-12.

The period from about 1885 to 1911 might be called the PERIOD OF TRANSITION. Numerous appointments were made for all language instruction, and most foreign language instructors also had duties in some other discipline--History, English, Music, Mathematics. Language requirements for the bachelor's degree changed in every new catalogue. Foreign Languages were having a difficult time finding their own place in the college curriculum.

The year 1911-12 marks the end of the old dispensation and the beginning of a NEW ERA. It was in this year that Latin was taught for the last time and Spanish was introduced for the first time. During the period of transition there had been no distinct foreign language department; foreign languages had maintained a precarious existence under the roof of other disciplines and there had been virtually no foreign language appointments as such. From now on foreign language appointments in their own right was to be the order and one could properly speak of a DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES. This new period is marked as an era of long incumbencies, stabilization, devotion to duty and to the institution, and sound and thorough language instruction. One of the memorable members of the department during this period was Professor Melissa Martin Dawes, appointed in 1915, who later served as chair of the department, until 1956.

Late in World War II the staff and student population suddenly increased greatly. The Modern Languages staff increased from three to twenty-five. Courses were offered in Chinese, Russian, German, French, and Spanish--with emphasis on conversation. During this period the service function of Modern Languages at Oregon State College was stressed over all other functions.

The period of expansion and new orientation lasted until 1960-61, the year in which a separate School of Humanities and Social Sciences was established. The Department of Modern Languages together with 15 other departments finally had a home to call their own. By this time the department was in the capable hands of Chairman Walter C. Kraft, Professor of German since 1950.

After 1960-61 both the Department of Modern Languages and the School of Humanities and Social Sciences expanded their offerings and increased their staff at a very fast rate. Staff and students alike--within the entire School--assumed a new orientation. Languages no longer only complemented other disciplines; they were now to exist in their own right with the establishment of departmental majors in French and German in 1966-67, in Spanish in 1968-69, and in Russian in 1969-70.

Course offerings in the languages with major programs included: (1) basic language study on the elementary and intermediate levels; (2) conversation at all levels--elementary, intermediate, and advanced; (3) courses on the intermediate and advanced levels in literary movements and masterpieces of literature, and in the cultures and civilizations of these language areas. The department also offered courses in linguistics in which the phenomena of language itself were examined and studied.

In 1965 Odette Cadart-Ricard was appointed to develop programs in Modern Language Education, as well as to teach French courses at all levels. The department expanded its offerings so that students might satisfy certification requirements in French, German, Spanish, or Russian for the Basic Norm in Secondary Education and the Area of Concentration for Elementary Education. These options were to be popular into the seventies.

In 1966 the Department of Modern Languages installed a completely modern Language Laboratory with thirty-six, student-controlled booths for use in connection with oral-aural work at all levels of language learning. Robert D. Kiekel was hired as part-time Director of the Laboratory, which was soon enlarged to seventy-two booths to better accommodate the large number of foreign language students.

After the rapid expansion of the 60's, the Department was to fall upon harder times in the 70's. The dramatic decrease in foreign language enrollments nationwide was to some extent paralleled at OSU. A regular position in Italian was terminated. The number of Russian staff members decreased from three to one and the Russian major was suspended. As foreign language professors retired or left OSU, replacements were not always authorized.

Yet a core of dedicated, capable professors was working to effect change. Foreign study centers were set up in Stuttgart, Germany; Poitiers, France; Tokyo, Japan; Guadalajara, Mexico. Students in ever greater numbers were to avail themselves of the opportunity to immerse themselves in a foreign culture, gain perspective on their own country, be thoroughly integrated into a foreign university and become fluent in speaking the foreign language of their "living laboratory." At the same time course offerings at OSU were adapted to changing student interests, with increased emphasis on cross-cultural understanding and communication. The department name was broadened to Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures.

Gradually, the fortunes of the department took a turn for the better. Students returned to language study in ^{great} numbers. Current enrollment is 167% of what it was ten years ago. Not only are students filling courses in French, German, and Spanish, but Italian is again being offered, Russian enrollment has begun to climb, and highly successful courses in Chinese and Japanese have been added to the program.

Most recently video monitors have taken their place alongside audio machines so that the visual might reinforce the auditory memory. Under the general direction of Christian P. Stehr, the department acquired critically recognized European television productions in German, French, and Spanish. These programs have been successfully adapted for courses at OSU, putting the Department of Foreign Languages into a position of leadership on the national foreign language scene. OSU and OEPBS together have successfully distributed the following programs to over 140 PBS stations nationwide: Guten Tag, Guten Tag Wie Gehts, Les Gammas! Les Gammas!, and Hablamos Español.

With a new awareness of the importance of foreign languages sweeping the country, the prospects of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures look ever brighter. Now, in addition to the long-heralded advantages of foreign language study, such as enrichment of vocabulary and improved command over our native language, acquisition of a foreign language is viewed as a necessary component of global awareness, one which expands horizons and coincidentally offers improved career opportunities.

Practicality aside, learning a second language, understanding the nature and multiplicity of cultures, is one of the liberalizing experiences of education.

Compiled by Walter C. Kraft and Sara Ellen Malueg

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