Teaching Statement

Background
I was born in France, educated in three different countries (France, Ireland and the United States) and my experience with the teaching of French spans over 18 years. After having completed a dissertation in French literature at Yale University, I taught as a Lecturer in the Modern Languages Department at Carnegie Mellon University. I joined the Department of French and Romance Philology at Columbia University as a full-time lecturer in the fall of 2007. So far, I have taught French at the intermediate and advanced levels of the undergraduate curriculum.

Goals
In each of my classes, I have tried my best to carry out the following goals:

Provide language proficiency to our students by using a communicative approach and placing the student at the center of the classroom. Whatever level I teach, my classes have as the primary goal accuracy in oral, aural, reading and writing skills. My in-class settings are highly interactive, with emphasis on speaking and listening, and engagement in student-centered activities, often involving work in pairs or small groups.

To give an example from my Intermediate French I class, instead of “teaching” the vocabulary for travels to my students, I ask them to bring and describe pictures of their own vacations. The personalization of the exercise results in a lively discussion in class where I am practically removed from the conversation except for occasional interventions to provide feedback on the use of the grammatical point of the day or to rephrase a student’s sentence if it was not understandable to other students.

For that exercise (as for many others), I rely on modeling. The night before the exercise, I send an example of my own vacation (a picture with a short description using the new vocabulary and grammar) so students can apply it in their own paragraphs. The reproduction of models gives students self-confidence in their learning: they rely on their own intelligence, not my explanations.

Excel pedagogically through close personal contact and interaction with students. My students know that I am always available whether via e-mail or in person in my office. In class, I try to assess the students’ four language skills as quickly as possible not only to see if they are in the right class level but also in order to focus on the skills they need to develop. In order for my students to track their progress, I post their grades on Courseworks by mid-semester, and I send them their average grade along with comments on what to improve for the rest of the semester. Although I am not practicing differentiation per se in my classrooms, I do demand more from stronger students in their compositions for instance, or modify an assignment for a weaker student. Close personal interaction means also circulating between groups during pair group activities (instead of staying at my desk) in order to give feedback and assess level.

Emphasize critical issues related to language and cultural analysis. At all levels, classes should provide students with an in-depth study of the French-speaking world through the study of cultural phenomena and through language itself. For instance in my intermediate I class, while reading an excerpt of Georges Pérec’s Deux cent quarante-trois cartes postales en

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couleurs véritables, my students rightly noticed how the cards were all signed off with “Baisers” when their English counterpart would show “Love”. This simple remark sparked a conversation on how the French describe the act of love whereas the Americans state the feeling itself. This was a small yet noticeable moment of cultural awareness.

Incorporate appropriate technologies in our teaching. In their evaluations, students often mention their appreciation for the variety of media and cultural documents. Although a good class doesn’t always depend on technology, the use of films, songs, newspapers, TV programs and pertinent internet sites not only diversifies the rhythm of the course but, mostly, it offers a broader and more authentic image of a given culture.

Expose students to diverse cultures and develop mutual understanding among the world’s peoples. I try to serve as a link between students, their community and the Francophone world. As often as I can, I entice my students to attend French cultural events at our outside Columbia. A recent example: Each spring, a preparatory class from France comes to New York City. The professor who organizes the journey, M. Albert, asks Lecturers from the Department of French to welcome his students in their classes. This year I decided to organize mini-groups and asked my students to prepare questions for the French visitors related to the topic of the day. The experience went better than anticipated. That same night, my students went out with the visitors and came back the following Monday with plans to study in Paris. I am aware that my classes will never be able to reproduce an authentic French or Francophone experience, but if I can just expose my students to something different and encourage them to study abroad, then I have done my job as a teacher; for they will come back enriched with a truly humanistic education.

Curriculum Development

Elementary Level: French Online

Before coming to Columbia in the fall 2007, I was a lecturer at Carnegie Mellon University where I taught, developed and co-authored the French Online project (http://www.cmu.edu/oli/courses/french/index.shtml) which received the 2007 Access to Language Education Award for best publicly available on-line instructional materials for language. French Online is a two-semester course at the elementary level. It is web-based and can be adapted for a blended learning and teaching system (in class and/or on-line). Hallmarks of the course include a highly interactive presentation of French language and culture, and a media-rich course environment including new video shot in France with professional actors. French Online is now being used institutionally at many institutions such as the University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon, and University of Michigan.

Intermediate level: French for SIPA (W1201)

In fall 2008, I taught and developed an intermediate French I class targeted to students of the School of International Public Affairs (see the syllabus in sample materials). This class sets the same linguistic goals as its traditional counterpart. However, more than just adding a SIPA “flavor” to it, I organized the topics and the vocabulary around what the students needed after I asked them in class what their concentration and interests were. Unfortunately a French manual for SIPA students does not exist. What I did instead was to adapt Sur le vif, the manual we use in our regular Intermediate French I class, to SIPA themes and offer supplementary vocabulary. For instance, I taught chapter 9 first (on international affairs) in conjunction with

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chapter 1 (Studies) to give my students the necessary vocabulary to talk about their area of studies and future work plans. For chapter 5 on travels, we focused on Africa, which was the students’ main area of interest; I eliminated chapter 7 on fairy tales. Instead, we spent more time on chapter 6 (media) and chapter 8 (family). Students did presentations on problems within the media for chapter 6 and we read extensively on gender roles and human rights in chapter 8. I also modified tests and compositions’ subjects to accommodate SIPA students who are generally more professionalized (see example of exam in sample materials).

**Plans for the coming three-year term**

*Introducing and teaching French Online to Columbia*

I am very much looking forward to teaching more classes at all levels in order to have a good grasp of the articulation of the French undergraduate program in my department and to extend my field of knowledge and competences. I would also like to introduce and teach French Online to the Columbia community. Years of experience teaching French Online at Carnegie Mellon have shown me that the most successful students for this web-environment are graduate students and independent learners who have a strong motivation to learn French and who are comfortable with technology. That is why I think French Online might appeal to the mature public of the School of Journalism, the Law School, the Business School or the School of General Studies and/or Continuing Education.