Annual Twentieth-Century Conference Comes to the University of Illinois French Department

On March 27, 28, and 29, almost 200 scholars from around the country and from Canada, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and England gathered in the Illini Union for the annual Twentieth-Century French Studies Conference, hosted this year by the department. Nothing gives a better idea of the current state of research and scholarship in French studies than such conferences, where the attendees collectively take the pulse of the profession. At the rate of about fifteen presentations per session, followed by ample time for good intellectual exchange of ideas, this conference, like the Nineteenth-Century French Studies Conference hosted by UI in 2001, provided an ideal forum for the airing of current inquiries into things French.

Entitled “Cultural Capital: Canons, Cultures, and Contexts,” the colloquium ranged widely among the forms of culture in French—in print, on film, on canvas, and more. There were papers about contemporary French novelists like Christian Oster, Jean Echenoz, Marie Darrieussecq, and Michel Houellebecq; classics of the canon like André Gide, Marcel Proust, Simone de Beauvoir, and Jean Cocteau; writers from Quebec (Gabrielle Roy), Algeria (Assia Djebar), the Caribbean (Patrick Chamoiseau, Édouard Glissant); and critical theorists like Pierre Bourdieu, Denis de Rougemont, and Gilles Deleuze. Also featured were papers on films by Rohmer, Visconti, Marker, and Bunuel; “cinéphilia,” rock music, baroque music, and Stravinsky’s “The Rite of Spring”; and several sessions on poetry and theater. Other papers addressed pedagogical questions and the status of the profession, small publishing houses, the position of minor authors, anti-Semitism in film, the photographic self-portraits of Claude Cahun, the African mystery novel, the African diaspora in France, mediology, media studies, cultural studies, and images of America in the French press.

Two major figures in modern French studies, François Noudelmann from the Collège International de Philosophie and Jeffrey Mehlman of Boston University, gave plenary talks. A good buffet dinner on the second evening saw participants continuing the lively discussions that had gone on during the day. The Saturday evening closing banquet at the Levis Center gave everyone a wonderful memory to take away: braised leek and sautéed oyster mushroom soup; salad of spring greens with poached asparagus, heirloom tomatoes, basil, stilton, shaved red onion, and champagne vinaigrette; roasted Atlantic salmon with tamarind glaze and Moroccan basted mahimahi skewers, with basmati rice and Moroccan glazed carrots and haricots verts; and warm chocolate cake with a fudge center garnished with fresh berries. Miam!

As if all that spiritual and corporeal enrichment were not enough, the group was treated to an excellent concert of twentieth-century French music played by students and faculty of the University of Illinois School of Music just before the banquet. Two harpists, undergraduate students Elizabeth Jaxon and Claire Happel, performed impressionistic works by Marcel Tournier (1879-1961) and Germaine Taillefierre (1892-1983). Graduate students Tracey Ford, soprano, and Teresa Crane, piano, presented five French mélodies by Francis Poulenc. The concert concluded with an inspired rendition of Maurice Ravel’s evocative piece “Gaspard de la Nuit,” based on three prose poems by Aloysius Bertrand, played by faculty pianist Dr. Timothy Ehlen. Professor Larry Schehr, organizer of the conference, warmly thanked the musicians for these spectacular performances.
NEW BEGINNINGS: RETIREMENTS AND GRADUATIONS

After a long and distinguished career at Illinois, Professor Emile Talbot will retire at the end of this academic year. But, he hastens to add, he will be here, and he will also continue to teach courses in his specialties from time to time.

Professor Evelyne Aced plans to retire at the end of December 2003 and devote her efforts full time to her career as a novelist and writer of nonfiction books. No doubt she will stay in Paris, where she has made frequent trips while in the French Department.

Samira El Atia is an assistant professor at Al Akhawayn University in Morocco after defending her doctoral dissertation in January. Her topic was an analysis of the bacalaureat over the years, focusing on the content of the French and English language portions of the exam.

Jane Kuntz, who defended her dissertation on Assia Djebar in fall 2002, will be a new assistant professor in our Department.

Lenuta Giuikin has accepted a position for next year at State University of New York at Oswego.

A WORD FROM THE HEAD

We Continue to Build

Jean-Philippe Malvy

As described on the first page, the annual Twentieth-Century French Studies colloquium was a great success, with an unusually high quality of papers. Organized by Professor Lawrence Schehr, it was the fourth major French studies conference our department has hosted in three years. The two plenary speakers, Professors Jeffrey Mehman and François Noudelmann, gave outstanding lectures on current philosophical and intellectual debates in France.

Several French and Francophone scholars visited our campus as guests of our Centre pluridisciplinaire, funded by a generous grant from the Cultural Services of the French Embassy. In addition to François Noudelmann, sociologist David Lepotre, from the University of Amiens, gave two well-received lectures on his research on adolescents from immigrant communities in Parisian suburbs. Cameroonian novelist Therese Kwoh-Moukouy, the first published African woman novelist writing in French, gave two lectures, one in French on her experience as a writer and political activist in Cameroon and one for African Studies students in English on Francophone women's writing.

We continue to build strong relationships with other units on campus; I have recently been invited to sit on the board of the European Union Center. The French Department will be more closely associated with the center's activities, which range from graduate seminars and invited lectures by international scholars to the development of educational programs focusing on Europe for Illinois high-school students. The EU Center has been mostly concerned so far with economic and public policy studies, and our participation will help broaden its academic agenda to include cultural and linguistic issues raised by the inclusion of several new countries in the European community.

A new program of collaboration between the University of Illinois and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in the area of modern and contemporary France is being put in place this year. Scholars in a variety of fields, from French and History to Anthropology and Art History, will explore issues ranging from cultural modernization to France's relations to the rest of the world. Faculty from Illinois will participate in CNRS activities while French colleagues will conduct research in Urbana. This new exchange complements a successful collaborative project in medieval and Renaissance studies.

Our faculty continues to be recognized for the quality of their contributions to scholarship. This semester Professor Zsuzsanna Fagyal has been studying language use among immigrant youth in France during her fellowship in the Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities, and next year Professor Andrea Goulet will benefit from one of these very competitive faculty fellowships. The fellowships release faculty from teaching and service for one semester to devote themselves entirely to research. These awards attest to the quality and vitality of our junior faculty.

I always look forward to what has become a new end-of-the-year tradition in our department, the annual award ceremony for our best undergraduates. Four of our majors received a Charlotte Kambarian McMillan Scholarship of $1,000 for their outstanding performance in French Studies this year. Another eleven juniors and seniors were distinguished by a departmental Undergraduate Excellence award. The event was also an opportunity for Professor Peter Golato to initiate students into the French Honor Society, Pi Delta Phi. Parents, faculty, our Director of Undergraduate Studies, Professor Alain Fresco, as well as representatives from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences were in attendance to congratulate our students.

These are only a few of the notable events that marked the past academic year. This issue of The French Connection highlights many more achievements by faculty, students, and friends of the department, as French and Francophone Studies continue to thrive at Illinois.
Double or Nothing: Double Majors Place Their Bets on French

This year the French Department boasts nineteen double majors. They come from many departments, the most popular being international studies, psychology, and political science. Students are also double majoring in fields as diverse as history, linguistics, chemistry, engineering, finance, economics, and biology. Many consider their French major to be equal or secondary to their other major, but some consider it to be their primary area of study.

Of the ten students who responded to a questionnaire about their double majors, all have traveled or studied in France, except for one who indicates plans to go next year. They all express an interest in keeping French in their lives on both personal and professional levels. They are considering careers such as international law with an emphasis on human rights, humanitarian efforts or missions in Francophone countries, secondary school teaching, working abroad for the government or a company, being a liaison between the U.S. and the E.U., doing graduate studies in France, and working for a multinational consortium. On a more personal level, students mention that they plan to use their French for reading and watching television, maintaining friendships with French speakers, traveling, and even dating—after all, French is the language of love! Many simply enjoy learning French even if it ends up serving no practical purpose for them.

Meg Kibbee, a senior from Urbana, is studying commercial French and political science. Kibbee has had many opportunities to discover firsthand what French life is like, having studied in Nantes as an eighth-grader, then having studied and taught in Marseille, Paris, Grenoble, and Montpellier as an undergraduate. Sciences Po in Paris was perhaps her biggest academic challenge, which she met with success. People may not realize how difficult the school is; Kibbee is quite serious when she says she is happy to have passed all her classes—not everyone does. She says she was “ready to get on the next plane home” when she learned she was going to have to give ten- to fifteen-minute presentations in front of native speakers. Instead of taking the RER to Charles de Gaulle, she decided to stay and confront her fears.

What brought Kibbee to the French language in the first place? It may not come as a surprise that her father, Doug Kibbee, professor and recent head of the French Department, played a major role. His persistent nudges kept her enrolled in French classes. Once she started going abroad, she knew that French was something she wanted to pursue further.

Kibbee is keeping her future options open by applying to Sciences Po for its masters program, taking the foreign service exam, and considering careers in business and government. Her French skills will no doubt help her in whatever profession she chooses.

Cliff Redeker, a junior from Champaign, not only majors in French but also two other fields: history and psychology. He started out with a major in French, then added the other two along the way. The French Department recognized his accomplishments in French by awarding him the Charlotte Macmillan Scholarship in 2002.

In 2001 Redeker went to Paris with a group of Illinois students for a month-long history course. He describes the course as “living history” because they were able to see historical places that they had been studying in books. Euro Disney was among the sites he visited. Redeker has a keen interest in the history of theme parks and world fairs, so he enjoyed seeing how the Europeans approached and modified the American-style theme park. Who knows, one day Redeker may be in charge of transatlantic relations for Disney. This is just one possible way he says he could use French and work in an international setting, both of which interest him.
UNDERGRADUATE PROFILE

Aimee Showers, French Major and Professional Harpist

Not many undergraduates pay their way through school by playing the harp. While most trudge off to their jobs as waiters, clerks, library help, or what have you, Aimee Showers fetches her harp and plays at weddings, dinners, parties, receptions, and even funerals. On occasion she has to go home to Alton, Illinois (near St. Louis, for you Chicago-ans), and bring her harp to Champaign-Urbana. "You need," she says, "a big car." And she lays down a futon mattress to cut down on the jiggling, which could break a string.

How Aimee Showers learned the harp is akin to how she learned French: she was attracted to the one and the other by the influence of her mother, who had been a French major herself and encouraged her to study music. Showers was only eleven when she thought it would be kind of cool to learn an instrument not many others in her school played, so after a few years of piano, she began to study harp. An eleven-year-old is not big enough to hold a real harp, so Aimee's first year was on the troubadour, a smaller harp without pedals—and for that reason actually harder to play than the regular harp. She has been able to continue harp lessons throughout high school and college until this year, when courses and practice teaching have taken top priority.

As for French, nothing proves the value of immersion in a foreign language as much as Showers' experience does. Between ninth and tenth grade, she participated in a month-long program at the Concordia Language Villages. The immersion in French, even though short, was enough to propel her from French 1, in freshman year, to French 3 in her sophomore year. Concordia College in Minnesota also runs language programs in France, and Showers did that too, during the summer after tenth grade. Before she came to the University of Illinois, she had advanced placement French, and now she has another trip or two under her belt. She turned twenty-one while studying at the Institute for European Studies in Paris, and friends took her to celebrate at that consummate Parisian restaurant, TGI Fridays!

Language is a skill like playing a musical instrument, and vice versa: what Aimee Showers learned in her harp lessons helped her in learning French. Both language learning and harp come easily to her. Somehow she has managed to study with the best harp instructors at the university while practicing sometimes less than an hour a day, and she has branched out into German, Italian, and Spanish after mastering French. She began her French major at the university with 200-level courses, and she has taken several 300-level courses. Because of her language experience, she was a Cohn Scholar as a freshman; with Professor Emile Talbot, she studied four novels each semester, writing a paper on each. Showers has been inducted into Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi, Pi Delta Phi, and Kappa Delta Pi. She has been a James Scholar since fall 2000. As a senior, in recognition of her outstanding work in her studies, Showers was one of two students awarded the Charlotte Macmillan Scholarship.

And yet, Aimee Showers does not plan to become a French teacher. She has a double major in French and Elementary Education, and her first desire is to teach elementary school. She has already attended job fairs and sent our her resume to schools in the St. Louis area, and she plans to seek accreditation in both Illinois and Missouri. What attracts her to elementary teaching is the chance to cover many different topics, but she says she will try to teach French as well as the usual subjects.
Michele Diekelman, Reaching Out to the World

After spending a month away from home with a cultural exchange program in Lyon at the age of sixteen, Michele Diekelman decided she would like to teach French. The oldest of six children, she was the first in her family to leave the United States, inspiring two of her siblings to spend a year abroad during their high school years. What is more, for the last fifteen years, her family has welcomed foreign exchange students from Sweden, France, Ecuador, Thailand, and Switzerland to their home in Owasso, Oklahoma. Diekelman learned that exploring the world deepens our understanding of ourselves.

As an undergraduate at the University of Tulsa, Diekelman strengthened her commitment to international understanding by majoring in French and in International Studies. Having spent her junior year abroad in Grenoble, she returned to France after graduation as a Fulbright-sponsored teaching assistant in Bordeaux. Teaching high school students at the Lycée Michel Montaigne was such a good experience that Diekelman was all the more sure of becoming a language teacher. She then spent two summers teaching English to French high school students with the Nacel Cultural Exchange Program in Tulsa.

After beginning her MA Program in French Language Learning at Illinois, she had the opportunity to work in an immersion setting with students from ages eight to eighteen at Concordia Language Villages in northern Minnesota. The energy, curiosity, and potential of young people who would spend two to four weeks at a camp in the woods speaking nothing but the native language of their choice convinced her that she should seek certification as a high school teacher while pursuing her graduate studies.

In May 2002, Diekelman received her teacher certification. One of the highlights of the teacher education program was her student teaching experience in grades nine through twelve at Central High School in Champaign. After student teaching, she worked with the Teacher Education Program as a student teacher supervisor for two years.

Diekelman entered the PhD program in French SLATE (Second Language Acquisition/Teacher Education) after earning her MA in 1998. Combining her experience in secondary school teaching with her doctorate, she plans to become a teacher educator. In her thesis, using technology to enhance her work in cultural exploration and international understanding, she asks whether on-line prereading activities can help third-semester students better understand a francophone folktale. By providing students with background information on cultural and story-telling traditions in Senegal, information on the country itself, and essential elements of the story to be read, she hopes to help students gain a greater appreciation of African short stories. She is finding out whether mastering the prereading material facilitates reading the story itself. She defended her thesis in April 2003.

Michele Diekelman has taught several 100-level courses, coordinated French 103 and 105, supervised teaching assistants, and served for two years as the department's webmaster. She has also served on various campus committees and has worked in family and graduate housing as both a graduate assistant and resident director. In these tasks she found many opportunities to interact with international students and to increase her understanding of the rich diversity of cultures and viewpoints, which challenged her to continually refine her own values and beliefs.

All of this experience came to wonderful fruition in the fall of 2002, when Diekelman joined the staff of Semester at Sea and sailed around the world in 100 days. The University of Pittsburgh hosts this unique program in which about 650 undergraduates take classes taught by a faculty of fifteen while at sea. The ship docks at ten ports around the world, from East Asia to South America, with stops in India and South Africa. Diekelman was one of the coordinators of the field trips at each port. The trip around the world demonstrated for her the power and impact that this kind of encounter has on college students to help them define their role in a global society.

Home again, Michele Diekelman has found a high school teaching position in the Chicago area. She hopes to continue her travels in the future, engaging her students in their own exploration of the world.
Although not all French Department graduate students have taken his courses, most have participated in at least one of Assistant Professor Peter Golato's psycholinguistics experiments. Using personal computers running specially written software, Golato has designed psychology experiments to investigate how people process their languages. Participants in his experiments typically listen to French or English words or sentences and push a response key when they hear or see certain words or sounds. It sounds simple, but Golato is able to control the experiments so precisely that he can reliably measure his participants' reaction times to the millisecond. This fine-grained time measurement is crucial, since significant differences in reaction time between groups may be less than thirty milliseconds.

Before joining the University of Illinois French Department, Golato was a faculty member in the Modern Languages Department of the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa. He obtained a PhD in French at the University of Texas at Austin in 1998. While in graduate school, Golato had a brief stage at the Laboratoire de Sciences Cognitives et Psycholinguistique, a CNRS research laboratory in Paris. In fact, the behavioral studies he conducted for his doctoral research on word-level speech segmentation were ones he designed and ran while at the LSCP.

Although still keenly interested in word-level processing, Golato's research has expanded to include constituent-level phenomena such as the processing of the differing syntactic structures of French and English noun phrases (NPs). For instance, Golato's experiments examining the auditory processing of NPs suggest that both native French listeners and advanced second-language listeners of French are able to use their knowledge of French syntax when monitoring for target sounds (for example, /k/) within NPs of varying word order (for example, *une quantité énorme or *une énorme quantité). These studies, which were funded by the University of Illinois Research Board, are part of a larger project examining how native and second-language listeners process French at syntactic, morphological, and segmental levels of analysis.

For instance, recent work suggests that native listeners of a language may rely upon different memory systems than second-language listeners when processing derivational and inflectional morphology. To investigate this question, Golato is using masked priming, a technique that involves briefly presenting words on a computer screen that are otherwise masked by meaningless symbols. The hidden words are presented for such brief periods of time (less than fifty milliseconds) that participants are not consciously aware of having seen anything at all, yet the words influence their responses.

A recurrent feature of Golato's work is an almost exclusive reliance on experiments in which participants have to react quickly and without thinking in order to complete a task. As he notes, "I ask people to react quickly in my experiments since it's thought that these responses better reflect the sort of lowest common denominators for language processing that I'm interested in measuring."

As co-director of basic language instruction, Golato has teamed up with French Department graduate students to develop and maintain a French 104 website featuring a number of authentic language audio- and video-based online activities (see www.french.uiuc.edu/FR104). With funding he secured from the Provost's Office, Golato has purchased computers and provided research assistantships for further French 104 materials development.

A native of New England, Golato was first exposed to French in an immersion context at the age of twenty. He learned German at age twenty-seven. "I speak predominantly English at home with my wife, Andrea, who is an assistant professor in the UI's Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures. However, since Andrea's parents don't speak much English at all, I decided I would try to learn German. Thanks to my close contacts with the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures, I'm able to keep both my German and my French well exercised."
French Honors to Our Faculty

Two faculty members, Lawrence Schehr and Douglas Kibbee, were named Chevalier dans l’Ordre des Palmes Académiques this year in a ceremony led by representatives of the French consulate in Chicago. The presence of Véronique Renault, Attachée Culturelle adjointe of the Consulat général de France at Chicago, and Yannick Mercoryol, the then newly appointed Attaché Culturel, brought a little of France to this eminently French award of distinction.

Napoleon Bonaparte created the Order of the Palmes Académiques in 1808 to recognize exceptional service to French education. The order comprises three ranks and is awarded by decree upon recommendation by the French minister of education. Foreigners who “contribute actively to the expansion of French culture in the world” can be named to the order. Recipients are given a certificate and a medal with a purple moiré ribbon; they can show that they carry the distinction by wearing a small purple ribbon in their boutonniere.

Napoleon Bonaparte created the Order of the Palmes Académiques in 1808 to recognize exceptional service to French education.

This is not the first time the UI French Department has been honored to have its members singled out for this distinction. Others who have received it in the past are Professors Emile Talbot, Herbert Deley, and Edwin Jahiel, who was named Chevalier in the 1960s and Officier in the 1990s.

During the ceremony on October 10, speeches were made detailing the accomplishments of Schehr and Kibbee. Each of the recipients then rose to receive the award, accompanied by the accolade or ceremonial kiss, and each then formed words of thanks. Douglas Kibbee spoke eloquently in the French style, and concluded, “All that I have ever done to promote French culture, and all that I might do in the future, will never repay the debt I owe my French friends.” Schehr warmly thanked colleagues and the university as well as the République française for bestowing this honor.

Barbara Schehr, Professor Schehr’s mother, came from Columbus, Ohio, for the ceremony. Nothing, she told us, would keep her from seeing her son knighted! A rare occasion indeed.

Les nouvelles: Recent Events in the French Department

Goulet Wins IPRH

Professor Andrea Goulet has won a fellowship in the Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities for next year. The fellowship will allow her to devote a full semester to her research project studying the narrative suppressions and returns of traumatic violence in modern European detective fiction and film, especially in France, England, and Italy. She will be collaborating with Robert Rushing, Assistant Professor of comparative literature. The French Department continues to shine in the ability of its members to obtain research fellowships in the IPRH and the Center for Advanced Study.

Our Miss Books

Professor Laurence Mall has taken the responsibility of forwarding the faculty’s recommendations for purchasing French books to the University Library. With the general tightening of the library’s budget, it has become very important to advise the Modern Languages Library about books that are essential to the library’s collections in French. Professor Mall circulates the monthly catalogue of books just published in France and sends the recommended list to Tom Kilton, the Modern Languages librarian.

Updating the MA and the PhD

A lot of serious thinking and planning took place in several committees to revise and update the masters and doctoral studies programs. This spring, after the final piece of the puzzle was put in place (the master’s reading list), the revisions were approved. Because disciplines change by virtue of the knowledge produced by their practitioners, the department recognized a need to unify French studies under a more general rubric.
Epigraph for a Condemned Book

It is not often that piano performances incorporate veils of writing scrolling over the pianist. But Sarah Rothenberg’s most recent production, *Epigraph for a Condemned Book*, does just that—and more. She blends the work of three nineteenth-century French artists in a multimedia event that she performed at Krannert Center for the Performing Arts on December 7, 2002.

In her program notes Rothenberg writes: “The condemned book in question is Charles Baudelaire’s poetic masterpiece, *Les Fleurs du mal*... Baudelaire is the first poet of city life. His inspiration came less from the beauty of nature than from the pulsating urban world in which he lived... The Paris of *Epigraph for a Condemned Book* has several wanderers. The painter Eugène Delacroix, whose bold colors and visceral intensity embodied the raw emotion that Baudelaire called ‘modern.’ The photographers Charles Marville and Charles Nègre, who captured with new technology a Paris in a state of change; and also Nadar and Vallou de Villeneuve, who set up studios to create portraits of their contemporaries—artists, writers, and actresses, as well as the anonymous women models often met in nearby cafes. On the same streets of Paris, one finds the elegant and fragile Polish émigré composer, Frédéric Chopin.”

Rothenberg performed selected works by Chopin while images of nineteenth-century French photographs and paintings by Delacroix were screened behind her. In addition, words from the poems of *Les Fleurs du mal* were projected in both French and English. At times the cursive words—representing Baudelaire’s hand—appeared on Rothenberg’s body and her piano. Simultaneously, recorded male and female voices read the poetry aloud, creating a multilayered, stimulating performance. The audience was enthralled.

In conjunction with the Rothenberg performance, the UI Rare Book and Special Collections Library mounted an exhibit of Baudelaire’s banned poetry and featured other authors’ banned books as well. Information on censorship accompanied the display. The Krannert Art Museum also got into the act with the exhibit “Charles Baudelaire: A Poet and His Painters,” which ran for approximately three months.