OSTAN means breakthrough in the African language of Wolof, spoken by 70 percent of Senegalese. It is an appropriate name for the active non-traditional education program which UI alumna Molly Melching developed in Senegal along with African and American scholars, a program which she spoke about during a brief visit to the University of Illinois in August 1998. When it comes to breaking through, Molly Melching is a wizard. A red-headed Danville native, she has spent the last 25 years in Senegal. She was the first participant in the University of Illinois’ graduate exchange program in Dakar, Senegal, in 1975, and she simply never returned to the States, except of course for brief visits to her family. In addition to creating TOSTAN, an amazing program of positive social transformation in Senegal, Melching also has worked for the Peace Corps as a teacher and writer and for USAID devising literacy programs. Her work in Senegalese villages has been the impetus for legislation there to end female genital cutting (FGC).

When Melching was 15 years old, she worked as a waitress with the express purpose of saving money for her eventual trip to France to study the summer after her junior year in high school. Her high school French teacher, Mrs. Reed, told her that one semester she deserved a “B,” but she would give her an “A” because she knew she would never get another. Melching avidly pursued her study of French from the minute she arrived at the University of Illinois. She begged Professor Bruce Mainous to be allowed to go on the first University of Illinois Junior Year Abroad program even though she was only a sophomore. Mainous recalls that Melching was so helpful, bright and energetic that she helped other students become accustomed to their new surroundings in Rouen, even though the conditions were equally as unfamiliar to her.

When Melching first arrived in Senegal, she was interested in studying Francophone African literature, an almost unheard of field in western universities at the time. She eventually wrote her masters thesis on “The Role of Wolof in National Development in Senegal,” having had the good fortune to study under Chiekh Anta Diop, a leader in the struggle to develop national languages from indigenous cultures. Her master’s thesis was later published as a book on Senegalese culture, Little by Little, and has been used as a book for newcomers to the country by the Peace Corps since 1980. While French is the official language of Senegal—a former French colony of 7.9 million people—Wolof was suppressed in schools and in official circles until 1971.

In 1976, when Melching arrived, she started a cultural center for children in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture. It was called Demb ak Tey (Wolof for Yesterday and Today) and promoted literacy through theatre, puppetry, art activities and games. She realized nearly immediately that the children had few books, and the books they had depicted French children in Western situations. This led her to write her own book, Anniko, a parable of tolerance. It tells the story of strange people with long necks.

Melching went on from Dakar to a village called Saam Njaay where she began a Wolof literacy program. During her stay in Saam Njaay, she lived as a villager and suffered through a drought with them. She says of that experience, “I lived in a village where there was a famine for a whole year. There was nothing to eat. And yet everyone smiled every day!"
Dear Alumni,

As I write this, the contents of my office are stacked to the ceiling while painters are transforming the walls of the administrative section of the Foreign Languages Building. This is one of many changes underway in the building and in the department. During the past year the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences urged the language departments to find ways to combine functions of the secretarial staff, so that fewer positions would be needed to support the work of our departments. The savings effected in this way are to be returned to the departments, with the French Department a significant beneficiary. As part of the same process, the space in the Foreign Languages Building has been reorganized, with the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures now joining French on the second floor. This has required some changes in the configuration of the administrative areas, and one of the happy consequences of this work has been a fresh coat of paint on walls that were starting to look a bit dingy.

In addition to the changes in our physical space, the departmental faculty worked hard through the spring reorganizing the three undergraduate majors (French Studies, Commercial French and Teaching of French) and the courses offered at the undergraduate level. Pending approval of the college authorities, in the fall of 2000 we will offer a new set of major requirements. The most significant changes are in the major and minor for the Teaching of French. The requirements for those programs will correspond more closely to those of the French Studies major and minor, providing future teachers with the strong foundation they need - so that they can send us new generations of well-prepared undergraduates.

In addition to the program changes, we have also revamped the courses themselves. We are adding a course on writing at the 200 level, which will help prepare students for the rigors of the more advanced courses in literature, linguistics and civilization. The literature courses will be organized by genre (poetry, drama, narrative) and by themes (literary movements, literature and the other arts, studies of individual authors) rather than by century. We feel that this will provide new opportunities for creative courses.

Through these changes we hope to continue providing our students the very best preparation possible to attain their personal and professional goals.
Learn French on the Web

Language for business purposes is as old as the clay you write on. Clay? Yes, clay. The cuneiform tablet was written in Business Sumerian, so to speak, and had word lists known only to accountants and scribes. Medieval European scribes kept guild records on parchment. And in keeping with the sweep of history, the French Department will be offering Language for Special Purposes using the latest web-based technology beginning in the fall of 1999.

As you may recall, last spring the French Department sent a survey to all her alumni when the web-based program was first proposed, in order to determine interest. Your response was overwhelmingly positive! Over four-fifths of respondents said they would be interested in such a series of courses. Buoyed by your exuberance and the success of our Annual French Business day, as well as the popularity of the Commercial French program on campus, the decision was made to go ahead with a set of professional development courses in French to be offered primarily via the World Wide Web.

The six courses offered will include two semesters of Commercial French, two semesters of Techniques in Translation, Lexicology and Terminology, and Scientific and Technical French, with a probable seventh course, Theory of Translation, to be offered later. The courses will be part of a major initiative by the University of Illinois–UI On-line, to provide distance learning opportunities for a variety of purposes. While full MA programs are currently being offered by the Graduate School of Library and Information Science and the College of Education, the French Department opted to offer professional development courses designed to provide adult learners with the opportunity to hone skills and specialize in commercial or technical areas.

The first two courses scheduled for on-line delivery in the fall of 1999 will be electronic equivalents of our Commercial French 385 and Techniques in Translation I. Banking, company structure, accounting, transportation, telecommunications, insurance, import-export, customs, advertising, the stock-market, income-tax, worker's unions and the economy are among the many topics covered, with an emphasis on translating in both directions. Mini-lectures on-line by the instructor, Professor Elizabeth Martin, and guest speakers on specific themes will be delivered via on-line video and audio. On-line assignment chats, bulletin boards, and email will assist students in completing work. Group projects and peer review will encourage class interaction. A major objective of the course will be to prepare students for the French Chamber of Commerce Exam in order to receive the Certificat pratique de français commercial.

Soon to follow will be a class on Lexicology and Terminology. Using on-line dictionaries for the study of productive prefixes and suffixes and employing TERMIUM, an on-line resource for technical vocabulary, the class will make full use of the kinds of research which can only be done in a web-based environment.

On the verge of a new century, indeed a new millennium, we are excited to embark on a journey of such magnitude into distance education. If you are interested in joining us by enrolling in the French Commercial Studies class, contact the department directly, 217-333-2020. In a few months more information on the URL for these classes and more information about enrolling will be posted on the French Department website: http://france.lang.uiuc.edu/frenchdept/default.html.
Poppies and Tea

Just like the meadows of Monet's paintings, brilliant red poppies dot the background of Valerie Ona Funk's website. Undergraduate web pages are becoming a bit more common, and Funk's is remarkably comprehensive and reveals her broad range of interests. For example, Funk photographed the eye-catching flowers last year while visiting the Roman ruins of Glanum near St.-Remy-en-Provence on her most recent trip to France. She also has links to her interest in Lithuanian culture--part of her heritage--and to East Asian languages and cultures, specifically China and Japan.

Funk says she planned a trip to France for herself and her parents because she had learned so much about French history and culture in her French classes, and she was eager to see everything. Focusing on historical events, Funk began at Bayeux where she and her parents saw the famed 11th century tapestry. They made a pilgrimage to Mont-St.-Michel to tour the Benedictine monastery perched atop an outcropping of granite off the coast of Normandy. They toured Strasbourg, rich in Reformation history, and after a pleasant stay in Paris, ended their tour in the quiet walled town of Aigues-Mortes, the site of Louis IX's embarkation for the 7th and 8th Crusades in the 13th century. Funk's penchant for history has led her to an intense interest in the literature of the 17th and 18th centuries, particularly Les lettres d'une Péruvienne. As a senior, she has added Francophone literature to her other interests: she's writing her senior thesis on Mongo Beti from Cameroon.

Funk became interested in languages in junior high, where she enrolled in French classes to distinguish herself from friends who were more interested in Spanish. By graduation Funk had studied French for five years and had begun the study of German. Far from the end of her language study, Funk came to the University of Illinois, completing a major in French in record time, and launched into a fourth language, Japanese.

Studying Japanese led her to a year in Japan as an exchange student at Konan University, Kobe. In addition to her academic work in Japan, she has worked as a 4-H/Japan summer exchange counselor, has acted as a tour guide and receptionist at the Japan House, and is now an undergraduate teaching assistant for Japanese Tea Ceremony and Zen Aesthetics, an art and design course.

Funk's Lithuanian heritage has made her particularly sensitive to the interests and needs of ethnic minorities. By virtue of her first-hand knowledge of the Russian oppression of Lithuanian language and culture, she has become interested in the plight of Jews in the Soviet Union, Palestinians in Israel, and ethnic minorities in the People's Republic of China.

Funk eventually wants to be a diplomat, blending her personal sensitivity to the needs of ethnic minorities with her language facility and broad academic perspective. She plans to pursue this goal next year at the University of Chicago, where she will attend graduate school in international relations. She is the winner of this year's Charlotte Kambarian McMillan Scholarship. Funk plans to apply the scholarship to further her language studies. Valerie Funk's website may be found at http://www.students.uiuc.edu/~v-funk.

Klaus Wins Chateaubriand

During the stormy years of the Reformation in France, Marie Dentière argued for women's right to engage in theological discourse, Jeanne de Jussie staunchly defended the monastic life, and Marguerite de Navarre wrote the Heptaméron, complete with mixed mystical and sexual messages. All of these women were named diaboliques or diableresses by their adversaries. Women writers of the French Reformation and Counter-Reformation, regardless of their position, were frequently vilified for their role in the debate. Doctoral candidate Carrie Klaus is spending a year in France hoping to discover the intersections of spiritual and sexual, religious and personal in the writings of both Catholic and Protestant women during the time of the Reformation. To further her research in the field, she was awarded the prestigious Bourse Chateaubriand.

Only a couple of times before has a University of Illinois French Department student been awarded a Chateaubriand, an extremely selective award offered by the French government to students in the final stages of their dissertation research, or having just completed their doctorate. Last year, there were only 24 recipients of arts and humanities awards in the United States. The Bourse Chateaubriand includes airfare, insurance while in France, and a monthly stipend. It also provides for some travel within France and is supported by the CIES, an agency that takes care of paperwork and arrangements tours for Bourse recipients. In addition to a big party at the Grande Arche de la Défense for the December holidays, Klaus went cross-country skiing in the Jura and attended the Carnival celebration at Dunkerque thanks to the CIES.

In contact by electronic mail, Klaus says her research is going well, and that she likes the new Bibliothèque Nationale with its increased work space, more books in open access, and even its “café des chercheurs.” The new library, which opened in September, has had numerous
problems with its information system, however, and beginning in October it closed for a five-week strike. Still, Klaus had plenty to do. As the works of several women writers of the Reformation are in Strasbourg and Geneva, she spent a few weeks out of her Paris home base. While in Geneva, she worked with what was believed to be the only remaining copy of Marie Dentière’s Epistre Ouverte from 1539. Since then, she has also been able to work with a recently-discovered second copy of the Epistre, located at the Bibliothèque Mazarine in Paris, where the librarian looked suspiciously at her and told her they had counted the pages.

Klaus is finding that these Reformation-era women varied in their presentation of materials, from propaganda (in the form of hymns, theater, open letters and pamphlets), to private materials (personal correspondence and diaries), to ghost and pseudonymous writing. However, all fell under the same strictures, persecuted by the world and repressed by the institutions they were defending. Still, they managed to express their own spiritual vision, which is only now being uncovered and understood. Klaus says she hopes her dissertation will contribute to our greater understanding of the many women who have dared to write and even to publish, as they saw the world around them take startlingly new shapes.

In April 1998, Professor Emile Talbot was awarded the rank of Chevalier in the Ordre des Palmes Académiques by the French Ministry of Education, a very high honor for American professors. As the author of three major works on Stendhal and over thirty articles on Québécois literature, Stendhal, and aesthetic and critical theory, as well as innumerable reviews and papers, Talbot is an internationally known scholar in nineteenth century and Québécois studies. He serves his profession as an active member of the American Council for Québec Studies and the Conseil International d’Etudes Francophones, and he is a current or past member of the editorial boards of Nineteenth-Century French Studies, The French Review, Québec Studies, and Etudes Francophones. He was also head of the department for eight years, and director of graduate studies on many occasions.

The most tangible and perhaps the most meaningful honors for Talbot come, however, not from official circles but from his students, like current MA student Jodie J enz. J enz says that she may enter his office to talk about a paper or research concern, but often leaves certain of the direction of her career, and with the notion that the French Department has some understanding of her personal needs and ambitions. Talbot is not only a great advisor, but also a concerned and wonderful teacher, as Alumna Alison Ounanian has said: “I remember Emile Talbot… with great fondness! Good teacher and lovely person!”

Talbot is the current president of the American Council for Québec Studies, an interdisciplinary professional association of about 300 members, mostly academics, who work on various aspects of Québec culture. As the chief administrative officer of the association, he is responsible for planning the association’s biennial conferences. The most recent conference in Charleston, South Carolina, in the fall of 1998 drew over 200 participants.

Talbot’s fondest memory as department head was working with an extraordinarily cooperative faculty and staff. They, in turn, often remarked at how fair, judicious and considerate he was during his tenure as head. He also has a wonderfully positive attitude toward teaching—it is no wonder his students enjoy his classes so much. Talbot says, “With few exceptions, I’ve taught literature almost exclusively. It’s been a constant source of joy because it has permitted me to reflect on great writing and to share that reflection with students.” Talbot is frequently on the list of excellent teachers, not only for his undergraduate classes but also for his seminars on Realism and Naturalism, 19th Century Literature, and Québécois Literature.

Talbot was reared in a French-speaking community in Maine, and French is his native language. He learned English at school. He has made his home in Urbana-Champaign for the last 32 years with his wife Elizabeth, where they raised their two sons.
Wow, My God! when you live through that!... I knew then I had so much to learn from them." Melching readily perceived, by living in Saam Njaay, that Western methods of education had failed. It was here that she began to use an educational program more adapted to the villagers' way of life, a program which eventually became TOSTAN.

An eighteen month program, TOSTAN is structured in six modules and teaches problem solving, hygiene, oral rehydration and vaccination, financial and material management, management of human resources, and how to do feasibility studies with income-generating projects. TOSTAN's programs have increased literacy rates and provided innumerable health and economic benefits to Senegalese women and children. Through TOSTAN, trainers teach the program to the person in the village best able to convey knowledge. This facilitator in turn hands the knowledge on to sixty villagers over a two year period. Each module is presented via different participatory methods: games, flip charts, poems or skits. All manner of things from literacy and numeracy, to the building of latrines and wood stoves, to prenatal care and child spacing, are taught and discussed. Perhaps the most striking result of TOSTAN's self education system is the proclamation in February 1998 by thirteen villages, representing about 8,000 people, that they would put an end to Female Genital Cutting.

Female Genital Cutting, also known as female circumcision, involves the cutting or removal of a girl's external genitalia. It affects about 136 million women in 28 countries across Africa. It is a practice which has taken place for many centuries in certain regions of Africa; originally it may have been a method to insure the virginity of a bride. Sociologist Gerry Mackie has studied the phenomenon and likens it to footbinding in China. "FGC is a matter of proper marriage and family honor," she says. "An individual in an intramarrying group that practices FGC can't give it up unless enough other people do." While FGC has been practiced in Senegal for generations, it appears now that enough villages have begun to abandon the practice that it may be disappearing in the same way as footbinding did. Melching is quick to point out that this was not on TOSTAN's agenda when they began to teach. She says, "We never spoke about sexuality, we only spoke about health and rights." Villagers say that months of discussing infections, childbirth and sexual pain inevitably led them to question circumcision (FGC). Of TOSTAN's result with regard to FGC Melching says, "I think the work TOSTAN has accomplished... is probably the most important work I have ever undertaken given the delicacy of the subject and the fact that there was such little success in that field before. I am amazed by all that has happened these past two years and feel so lucky to have been part of this important movement toward social transformation which may be, as Gerry Mackie says, the beginning of the end. Millions of girls and women suffer such horrible health problems related to this practice--so many die uselessly. No experience could possibly compare to that day... when thirteen villages... stood up before the Senegalese nation and solemnly swore an end to Female Genital Cutting for their daughters!"

Melching credits the UI French Department, in small part, for her success with TOSTAN. She says that a course with Professor Wilga Rivers was most influential on her perspectives about other cultures. "I especially remember writing a course paper for Wilga Rivers on teaching French culture which Professor Mainous then allowed me to actually teach as a graduate assistant in the French Department! The idea was not for students to learn French but for them to learn why one might want to learn French. Our class went to French films, cooked French meals, traveled to the Art Institute and ate at a French restaurant in Chicago, recited French poetry, wore berets, and in general had a great time as we learned about French society. We discussed tolerance and racism and opening one's mind to different ways of thinking and viewing the world. This successful pedagogical experience had a lasting effect on me and is relevant to the philosophy of our present TOSTAN basic education program for Senegalese villagers: people anywhere in the world want to know why they should learn something before actually learning it!"
1980s

PEGGY ROBERTS ROCHA (BA '77, MA '80) has taught French at San Joaquin Delta Community College in Stockton, California, for the last nine years. She has also taught at Modesto Junior College, University of Southern California, the Carden Malibu School and the Carden School of Salt Lake City. She has two daughters, ages 11 and 16.

LINDA BEANE KATNER (MA '89, PhD '93) is an assistant professor of French at St. Norbert College in De Pere, Wisconsin. She was awarded tenure in February 1996 and is serving as coordinator/chair of the Modern Foreign Languages Department. Her publications include articles on Emile Zola and North African women writers.

1990s

KAREN LARSON (BAT '95) is spending the year in Dakar, Senegal, on a U.S. Information Agency and J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board grant. She has been teaching at Taft High School in Chicago.

KIMBERLY LAKIN JOHNSON (BAT '96) has been teaching high school French and U.S. History at Morton High School in Morton, Illinois, since she graduated in 1996. She will be beginning her master's studies in foreign languages next semester at Illinois State University, with an emphasis on instruction. She is also planning to co-lead her second summer tour of France with Morton H.S. French students. She says, "It's fun to see students excited about using their French!"

JOSEPH C. PEDDICORD (BA '97) is teaching English at the Institute for Nuclear Power Engineering (INPE) in Obninsk, Kaluga Region, Russia. Obninsk is located approximately 100 kilometers southwest of Moscow. INPE is a technical university with an enrollment of 2,600 students. In addition to his duties at INPE, Peddicord is teaching at the Obninsk English School. Because of the number of visitors to the various thirteen research laboratories in Obninsk, from time to time he has the opportunity to use his French language skills as well.

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At the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, the piece was performed in English, to the chagrin of some of us who had hoped to hear the French original, but the opera's director Kurt Klippstatter defended this option. First, as he pointed out, the work was, after all, premiered in Italian at La Scala, and only later in French. But most importantly, the Dialogues, as the title would imply, are very much text-driven, and Poulenc himself preferred that the libretto be closely attended to and understood. Klippstatter's choice of a stark, minimalist stage set was also intended for maximum focus on the music, the psychology of the characters and the text itself. (In an aside, he hastened to add that next year's spring opera, Debussy's Pelléas et Mélisande, will be performed in the French original!)

Elizabeth Pacheco, one of the two interpreters of the role of Blanche, admitted that it seemed odd at first to be singing the work in English. It was difficult to make the words adhere to the music, but text and music quickly merged for her. The greatest challenge, on the other hand, was in representing this fragile and frightened young woman, so different from her own personality. By performance time, however, the role had completely inhabited her, she said, in the same obsessive way Blanche had taken over Poulenc's life during the composing process. Elizabeth Campbell, who played the severe Mother Marie, said she found little need to delve into the history of the French Revolution in order to prepare for her part. In any case, as she noted, the nuns were so cut off from the world that they probably had little idea of what was happening outside the cloister walls. Campbell described the intensity of some of the rehearsals, in particular the final scene when, on several occasions, the entire cast simply broke down and the scene came to a stop, until the women could regain their composure. Anyone who saw their performance could feel how well they made use of these moments of high emotion.

1990s

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Back to the Future: Remembrance of Things Past in the Year 2000

Nothing seems to represent the future in quite the way that the year 2000 does, and in that millennial year, on April 13 to 16, the French Department, Krannert Art Museum, the Office of Continuing Education and the Kolb-Proust Archive of the University Library will sponsor a symposium on Marcel Proust. In an ironic twist on the title of Proust’s great novel, Remembrance of Things Past (À la recherche du temps perdu), the Proust 2000 conference will showcase one direction of the future of research: the Kolb-Proust Archive, a web-based, hypertext database of material related to Proust and the interesting period of his life, 1871-1922. The Archive makes available, both on site and on-line, the research tools gathered over fifty years by the late Professor Philip Kolb for his edition of the correspondence of Marcel Proust. To publicize the Archive, the symposium will bring together scholars from all over the world whose work represents the current state of Proustian research, which has taken a variety of approaches including gender studies, narrative theory, and text and manuscript studies. As part of the Proust 2000 symposium, Krannert Art Museum will mount a special exhibit of French and American works of art from the period, and the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts will present Debussy’s opera Pelléas et Mélisande, in French. In addition, original Proust manuscripts will be on display in the Museum. A keynote address will be delivered by Roger Shattuck, author of Proust’s Binoculars (1963) and Marcel Proust (1974). Seventeen other Proust scholars will speak, and there will be special demonstrations of the future of “things past,” the web-based Kolb-Proust Archive (http://www.library.uiuc.edu/kolbp).