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Inclusive Teaching Practices in a French for Professional Purposes Course at the U.S. Air Force Academy

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This essay aims to explore inclusive teaching practices to be implemented in an advanced course on French for Professional Purposes at the U.S. Air Force Academy. It will equally illustrate how cadets explore economic, legal, political, and military aspects of the professional world in French-speaking countries, which enhance not only their personal future careers' interests, but also contribute to the success of the Air Force's military strategic interest in Francophone Africa. Cadets become acquainted with specialized vocabulary necessary in professional settings, as well as engage with questions relating to cultural differences and business ethics across different Francophone countries and regions. In this essay, the course content will be presented in conjunction with inclusive policies and resources that help ensure all students are supported in their learning process, develop awareness of multiple identities, address potential tensions or problematic patterns of interaction, and build rapport and community in and outside of the classroom. Among these practices, I will emphasize the value of adding more structure to small-group projects, create opportunities for anonymous participation through online polls, developing a growth mind-set in class, and implement metacognitive questions. It will include practical examples related to course materials, activities, and assessments, as well as specific methodologies tailored to the cadets-learners at the U.S Air Force Academy.

Upon graduation, as stated on the U.S. Air Force Academy website "future Air Force Officers are required to interact successfully with a wide range of individuals, to include those representing cultures and societies different from their own. To foster their success in these interactions, the Academy has created a three-phased approach to help cadets better understand the human condition, cultures, and societies: (a) knowing oneself; (b) knowing others; and (c) constructive engagement. Being able to interact with individuals from different milieus resides at the heart of intercultural or cross-cultural competence and includes both domestic and international environments". This course is designed to place cadets in diverse cultural and social scenarios, professional settings, and situations, as if they were in the field. As such, it helps future officers accomplish these goals, in addition to developing communication skills in Francophone professional environments.

From a curricular perspective, this course is one of a kind in the foreign language program at the U.S. Air Force Academy. As such, it is, on one hand, innovative, and on the other hand a "vulnerable" pioneer with the potential to be improved over the years, to include a mission-relevant experiential component. The professor relies on her research, as well as on the expertise of military colleagues from other departments such as Aeronautics, Economics, Law, Military and Strategic studies, and the invaluable contribution of the French exchange Air Force officer at the U.S. Air Force Academy who serve as guest speakers and advisors. In addition, one first class cadet (senior), engaged in a summer research aviation project in France, contributes as a guest lecturer in the course for the module focused on "Careers in aviation". As part of his Cadet Summer Research Program (CSRP), the cadet travelled to Toulouse, France and shadowed

business and military professionals at Airbus SAS, Airbus Defense and Space, Safran Power Units, and the French Air and Space Force. With the insights he gained, he will help to create a four-lesson unit called “My Future Career in Business, Politics, Science, and the Military” for the French for Professional purposes course. This contribution will inform cadets of the differences in French business practices and bureaucratic methods, providing them with a variety of firsthand information on the economic, legal, political, and military processes found in French commercial and military institutions. The cadet will then co-teach this unit in-class to field questions, share new, specialized vocabulary collected while shadowing professionals, and provide his fellow cadets with tools to allow them to interact professionally in French business, legal, political, and military settings. This CSRP took place in Toulouse, France, the epicenter of the country’s aerospace industry. Toulouse is home to the Airbus international head office and will be the site of a future NATO Center for Excellence in Military Space. There are numerous subsidiary factories and administrative buildings imbedded within the city as well, supporting the aerospace industry there. This first-class cadet’s contribution is very significant for recruitment as he represents a model of how French language and culture proficiency represents a long-term benefit to learners, as they decide whether to pursue a Foreign Area Studies major or a language minor. To combat a perception that French does not have many uses beyond diplomatic assignments, the student-facilitator’s interventions explain his use of French in one’s professional life in the military and in business. The results of this collaboration are valuable for a wide range of audiences, ultimately increasing retention and long-term engagement for our language department. As explained previously, during his summer internship, the cadet collected materials which he will present to his peers enrolled in the course through the lens of inclusive teaching methods. He will contribute to his peers’ growth mindset and reinforce a sense of community. In the same spirit of collaboration, the cadet and his instructor disseminate their research by the means of a scholarly presentation and focus on specific activities that promote inclusive teaching and learning, and active listening.

Our French program offers a minor in the language with course offerings that include culture, civilization, literature, cinema, and current events. Our goal is to join other French programs in their understanding that a French for Professional Purposes course would mirror our learners’ yearning for a learning experience where they can put to good use their language and cultural skills. A course offering analysis conducted by H el ene Bouche and Deborah Reisinger and published in 2021 indicates that “58.7% of US colleges and universities with French undergraduate programs offered at least one FPP course. Among the 446 courses offered at 320 institutions, the vast majority fell under the topic of business (70.4%) followed by general FPP courses (17%)”.

By offering this course focused on the use of French for professional purposes, the faculty members in the French program at the U.S. Air Force Academy demonstrate that they are strong supporters of Pamela Delfosse’s suggested commitment to making our language courses relevant to our learners’ practical and professional aspirations: “Delivering on the promise of language proficiency development includes preparing students for language use within authentic communities and contexts. Ensuring relevance by learning through authentic texts, tasks, and contexts also motivates learners and prepares them with skills that are transferable to life beyond the classroom” (33).

As in many similar courses, the learners in French for Professional Purposes explore practical skills such as preparing a resumé, a cover letter, applying for a job and interviewing. These skills are introduced through the lens of diversity and inclusion, incorporating a wide range of gender, socio-economic, political, of and geographical identities. The professor makes curricular choices that take into consideration demographic diversity at the U.S. Air Force Academy. Based on the most recent statistics available, the cadet population reflects the following race and gender representation: White (67.5%), Hispanic 9.2%, African American 8.9%, Asian 10.7%. Men 70.3% and Women 29.7%. The percentage of women cadets who major in STEM disciplines is 49.9%, an aspect that the professor takes into consideration when determining the focus of the course. It might be notable to specify some racial and gender statistics related to civilian faculty members among which 90.2% are White, 2.6% are African American, 3.6% Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander 5.7%. Civilian faculty men represent 68.7% and women 31.3%. Among the Military Faculty, 87.2% are White, 6.1% are African American, 4.6% are Asian/Pacific Islander and 7.2% are Hispanic with men representing 75%, and women 25%. By military academy across the U.S. standards, this data indicates a fair amount of diversity and some reasonable opportunities for the cadets to encounter professional role models that mirror contemporary global societies. However, in this course, the professor acknowledges that cadets will consistently interact with much more diverse people during their careers and outside of the professional settings than they do during their four years at the Academy. As such, independently from the practical skills that cadets learn as they engage in the creation of a resumé and cover letter, one specific benefit of these activities constitutes the development of cultural humility defined by Foronda et al. as a process of “openness, self-awareness, being egoless, and incorporating self-reflection and critique after willingly interacting with diverse individuals” (213).

In the first part of the course, cadets are assigned a fictitious professional identity that they need to develop as they create their resumé, a cover letter for a specific position and prepare to interview for that position. The pool of identities comprises professional roles from a variety of French-speaking countries, as well as urban and rural settings. Cadets explore professional identities that are far from their own, to include gender, race, and disability and various levels of education. Some examples include a Muslim elementary teacher from France, a Haitian woman politician, a Francophone Canadian superintendent in an Anglophone province, an LGBTQ actor from Senegal, a computer engineer from French Polynesia, and a military officer from Benin. This assignment requires individual research and preparation, while making room for collaboration. In groups of two, cadets play the role of the job interviewer for their partner’s position. As they prepare for this role, their partner will first need to articulate their professional identity and clearly explain the parameters of the job for which they want to apply. The interviewer will then be equipped with the knowledge needed to design culturally and professionally appropriate questions. This collaborative activity embodies our contribution to USAFA’s commitment to create leaders of character. According to this framework, available on the USAFA website, a leader of character lifts others, more specifically “leaders help others become their best possible selves by recognizing, supporting, and lifting their strengths, talents, aspirations, and diverse perspectives. Lifting others is about valuing human dignity and recognizing the inherent worth of everyone”.

As an introduction to the topic and prior to engaging in developing their application materials, cadets are exposed to pedagogical resources available in the newly published textbook *Affaires globales: s'engager dans la vie professionnelle en français, niveau avancé*. In unit 2, cadets become familiar with the vocabulary needed when one is looking for a meaningful internship and applies for a job. The authors of the textbook help the learners to engage in cultural comparisons as they present two résumés of a Moroccan student and that of a Quebecois executive and assist them to prepare their own résumé by providing them with a graphic organizer, which represents a structured, inclusive teaching method.

In addition, as we explore the French employment website *Pôle emploi*, learners become acquainted with specialized vocabulary pertaining to the French Air Force jobs, including “équipier maître chien parachutiste” (lead team dog parachutist), “instructeur de tir combat” (combat shooting instructor), “instructeur armurier avion militaire” (gunsmith instructor military aircraft), “avitailleur dépôt militaire” (military depot refueller), and “militaire technicien défense sol-air armée de l'Air” (military Air Force ground-air defense technician). More insight into the professional world of their French counterparts is gained as cadets read about specific required skills, salary, opportunities for professional development and schedules (which require less hours per week). Exploring job ads in a field relevant to their interests, cadets are also triggered to notice some unexpected similarities and differences pertaining to jobs that are common to both the French and American Air Forces. For instance, in France it is quite common to offer term contracts (contrats à durée déterminée) for two or three years which mirrors the reality of federal jobs in the US Air Force. Many of the French Air Force jobs available on this website do not post the salary offered to the candidate, and do accept candidates with little experience, with training opportunities on site.

In addition to a very well-developed and self-explanatory website, *Pôle emploi* reaches its customers by the means of a Youtube channel abundant in short, pertinent videos and playlists, among which “Découverte des métiers” where cadets may become familiar with specific skills needed to be a successful “mécanicienne aéronautique” (aircraft mechanic), and “chaudronnière aéronautique” (aeronautical boilermaker). Both protagonists of the videos mentioned above are women, and thus defying gender stereotypes associated with such jobs.

Every year USAFA sends exchange cadets to the Royal Canadian Military Academy in Kingston, Ontario, where they spend an entire semester taking courses and engaging with their Canadian counterparts. As such, in this course, cadets find relevant their examining various job ads on the Royal Canadian Air Force website, as well as opportunities to develop a career as an airman. One striking difference with respect to *Pôle emploi* is that names of professions are presented both in the masculine and feminine forms. Cadets will learn about the job requirements and qualifications of “technician/technicienne en génie des armes” (weapons engineering technician) or “opérateurs/opératrice de détecteurs électroniques aéroportés” (airborne electronic sensor operator).

In addition to learning how to employ professional language and navigating cultural norms, in this course cadets are specifically trained to use inclusive writing, as a tool that enables them to become promoters of equality in professional environments. Language is a powerful representation of one's world and demonstrates one's determination to contribute to a more just

society where invisible minorities are honored. Cadets are briefly introduced to the controversial topic of epicene writing which has encountered fierce resistance in France over the past few years, including a usage ban of inclusive, more gender-neutral writing in schools as of 2021. Francophone Canadians, on the other hand, are more favorable to reflecting gender diversity in the workplace. Many official documents, among which “Récommandations pour une rédaction inclusive” published by the government of Ontario, promote a respectful language that addresses not only basic gender equality (men/women) but also the existence of non-binary persons. Some specific examples include the use of collective nouns such as “assemblée, autorité, clientèle, collectivité, communauté, corps enseignant, effectif, électorat, équipe, foule, gens, groupe, lectorat, main-d’œuvre, personnel, peuple, population, public”.

To enhance the diversity and inclusivity component of this course, in addition to promoting respectful use of the language in the workplace, cadets become familiar with societal issues related to race as well. As part of a lesson pertaining to the job market in France, cadets watch a documentary released in 2015 and entitled “Too Black to be French?”, directed by Isabelle Boni-Claverie, a French Ivorian who grew up in the upper class French society. A couple of aspects that we emphasize after having watched this documentary pertain to how socio-economic privilege does not shield one from racial discrimination, as well as accountability to one’s racial insults in the workplace. Through the lens of Boni-Claverie’s documentary, cadets learn about the consequences of Jean-Paul Guerlain’s racist comments on national television in 2010. Anti-racism groups filed legal complaints, coordinated protests in front of the Guerlain store on the Champs-Élysées, and called for a boycott of Guerlain products. The well-known French perfumer was convicted two years later and fined 5,000 euros. This new-found knowledge will help cadets to better prepare the mock job interview with a partner, and later in the semester, articulate the values that they intend to promote as they launch their startup business.

The most elaborate assignment in this course is scaffolded and project-based. Cadets develop a startup business located in a French-speaking country where the United States has a military base. They work on this multi-layered semester-long project in groups of four. Each member of the group fulfills different roles as the project unfolds which will enable them to develop their leadership skills. The United States Air Force Academy’s vision is to be the Air Force’s premier institution for developing leaders of character. In addition to personal leadership, two other capabilities that we plan to expand by the means of this collaborative project are interpersonal leadership (i.e., leading one or more other people); and team leadership (i.e., leading an interdependent group toward accomplishment of a common goal).

During this highly structured project learners will first develop an original business in a Francophone country. Secondly, they will become familiar with business practices specific to their chosen country. Thirdly, they will create an advertising campaign for their product. Two members of the group will then present their startup profile to a group of investors. As they work on this stage of their project, cadets will specifically demonstrate their abilities for clear communication, one of USAFA’s outcomes. This practice is essential for successful officers and leaders of character. Future leaders of character are expected to employ effective oral, visual, written, and aural modes of communication and, more specifically for their project, to confirm proficiency 7: Exploit graceful language – imaginative, notable, and forceful – that artfully

communicates meaning to an audience and Proficiency 8: Incorporate effective delivery techniques (posture, gesture, eye contact, vocal expressiveness, etc.) to make a presentation compelling. The last stage of the project requires students to identify challenges and solutions in their business practices.

This collaborative project allows students to express their strengths and creativity. It involves oral, written, and visual communication which appeals to diverse learners. The use of multiple modalities is expected to enhance student learning. Students engage in think-pair-share activities, role play, individual research, and problem-based learning. Studies in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), such as “Enhancing foreign language motivation through the magic of cooperative learning: Dream or reality?”, published in the *Foreign Language Annals* in 2022, emphasize the impact that integration of cooperative learning techniques has on the learners’ experience. Small-group projects empower learners and help to maximize meaningful discussions and cultivate positive interdependence. It is an inclusive practice as it involves every member of the group at every stage of the project. Moreover, it creates a sense of accountability as the quality of each contribution is crucial to the success of the project. In addition, it is expected that cooperation will alleviate anxiety since this project is built on bringing together the individual members’ strengths, while enhancing string group cohesiveness. Cooperative learning, as described by Dean et al, calls attention to “positive interdependence, face-to-face promotive interaction, individual and group accountability, interpersonal and small-group skills, and group processing” (36).

As the class structure allows, the instructor will strive to organize diverse groups to include a balanced representation of gender, race, and French language abilities. Students benefit from the diverse components of the project as they help to develop reading and listening comprehension, writing, presentational and critical thinking skills. In addition, career-focused language skill development represents a steppingstone to the students’ success in future careers in Francophone countries. They will be equipped not only to communicate at a basic level but also from an intercultural and interpersonal perspective and thus become promoters of inclusivity (instead of simply beneficiaries). In addition to assessing this project for a grade, the professor collects periodic feedback about the students’ motivation and engagement in the form of surveys and questionnaires.

At the end of the semester cadets will equally work on enhancing team leadership proficiency 6, focused on applying foundational principles of team leadership to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of oneself and of teams. They consider the depth of this proficiency as part of a short reflexive paper, written at conclusion of the course. In this assignment, cadets reflect on their journey in this course, and their growth as learners.

The Center for Educational Innovation at USAFA developed multiple initiatives meant to inform and encourage instructors to use inclusive teaching practices. New faculty hires, both military instructors with no teaching experience, and civilian professors with no or some experience in the classrooms, are introduced to inclusive teaching practices as soon as they enter on duty, during the week-long New Faculty Orientation event held in the summer prior to their first semester as faculty members. Some participants also choose to attend workshops offered regularly during the academic year, the year-long Dean’s Certificate Program, and the Education

Innovation Week every April. Moreover, course directors cover a whole module in the Course Director workshop (online, asynchronous but not self-paced) about inclusive teaching practices as informed by inclusive course design.

An inclusive classroom is one in which learners have ample opportunities to give feedback. In this course, cadets will be welcomed into the course by the means of an inclusive practice described by the authors of *What inclusive instructors do: principles and practices for excellence in college teaching*. They suggest that “A welcome statement or video is a preview to the level of interaction and involvement expected for the duration of the course [...]. It can be used to effectively introduce yourself, your personal motivations and passion for teaching the course, the rationale for how and why you designed the course, your teaching style and approach, your commitment to student success, and any other information that would make students feel welcome to the class. (85).

Cadets will also take preassessment affective and behavioral surveys prior to the start of the semester, so that the instructor can measure student interests, attitudes, and motivations. In one of these short surveys conducted electronically in the semester prior to the course being offered, prospective students are asked to rate in terms of relevance all the forms of assessments that the instructor plans to use in the class. At the end of the semester when the course is offered, students take a similar survey where they will rate the effectiveness of the actual assessments they completed. One of the foci of the surveys is measuring how effective course activities are in creating a collaborative environment.

In a different short survey, cadets will be asked to reflect on how specific activities help to develop their leadership skills. Cadets equally engage in shorter feedback opportunities during class, one-on-one with the professor during informal discussions in their office and through a student representative who can orally collect feedback in class on behalf of his classmates. Focused groups are conducted orally in the classroom by the Center of Educational Innovation staff, in the absence of the instructor. Learners will thus know that their instructor is striving to create the best learning environment for them and makes their growth a priority. The surveys will focus on several aspects including the actual content of the course, methods of assessment, classroom activities.

Cadets will write a short analytical paper at the end of the course in which they will reflect on their development as learners in this course. It is expected that they would become aware of their growth in multiple areas such as professional language acquisition, cultural consciousness in the workplace, personal and team leadership, and clear communication abilities.

On a broader scale, such course would demonstrate that our program is a powerful contributor to the development of future leaders of character who conduct themselves with confidence, empathy, and competence in a more just global community.

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