Dr. Michael Horswell, Chair

Department of Languages, Linguistics, and Comparative Literature

Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters

Dear Dr. Horswell,

This is a letter of peer evaluation for teaching on behalf of my colleague Dr. Géraldine Blattner. On Wednesday, November 23, 2011 I had the great pleasure of observing a class period of Dr. Blattner’s course FRE 4850 “Structure du Français Moderne.” The course met from 9:30 to 10:50 AM in GS 117. The following evaluation is based on this period of observation.

Before addressing the specifics of the session I saw, I would like to place this course in the larger context of our French curriculum. FRE 4850 is an upper-division linguistics course designed to be taken by native/heritage and nonnative speakers alike. Although all of the students taking the course are (theoretically, at least) proficient speakers of French, the course is nevertheless challenging to teach because it combines two very distinct student populations: those who have received extensive formal schooling in French and therefore have notable command of French grammar and syntax, and those who have not had the benefit of receiving this formal schooling. All class activities and assignments must therefore strike a balance between the needs of these two populations, and Dr. Blattner did a very good job at this.

I would also like to take a moment to explain what Dr. Blattner has done to reshape and refocus the content of this course to better meet the needs of our undergraduate French curriculum. Before Dr. Blattner’s arrival, this course focused primarily on phonetics and phonology—the study of sounds and their patterns in standard French. One of the first things that Dr. Blattner did upon her arrival at FAU was to develop a new 3000-level French linguistics course focusing specifically on phonetics and phonology, which then allowed her to reshape this course under consideration (FRE 4850—Structure of Modern French) so that it covers morphology, syntax, and semantics, with new emphasis on such sociolinguistic considerations as dialectical variations of the French-speaking world. By creating two distinct undergraduate French linguistics courses, Dr. Blattner has strengthened our undergraduate curriculum in very tangible ways.

The class session I saw began promptly at 9:30 AM. Of the 25 undergraduate students enrolled in the course, 17 were already seated (5 minutes before class began, in fact). Five more students arrived after the class had already begun. I appreciated Dr. Blattner’s open verbal acknowledgment of each student’s arrival; it was a very effective way of reinforcing the clear message that class activities had already begun—and I know from my own experience with this same student population that lateness is a pervasive pattern for them, regardless of professor or class.

The class session on this day centered on a detailed explanation of Chapter 17 of the course textbook (Léon’s *Structure du français moderne*, 3rd edition): “La derivation et la composition” – the last chapter on morphology. Dr. Blattner led the class very deftly through a review of lexemes and morphemes, and particular categories of morphemes (prefixes and suffixes, notably). By the end of the session, students were quite conversant with a wide range of detailed morphemic concepts such as *racine* (root), *terme de base* (base term), *affixation*, *préfixation*, and *suffixation*, as well as with various subcategories of each. Most of the examples she used were derived from active student input, which made them much more meaningful (and comprehensible) to students, particularly the non-native speakers.

She also reviewed composite words with them (words such as *arc-en-ciel* [rainbow] or *croque-monsieur* [a popular type of grilled ham-and-cheese sandwich] – and once again, these examples were generated by student input. I mention this in particular because, from a semiotic perspective, I was particularly intrigued by the way in which Dr. Blattner took care to point out to students how one can distinguish between composite words in which words keep their original meaning (as is the case with *chef de gare* [station master]), and composite words where the basic meaning of the component words is altered or manipulated to some extent (as with *croque-monsieur*, which would translate extremely loosely to something like “crunchy mister”). I was also very intrigued by Dr. Blattner’s incorporation of the famous “test de la commutation” (commutation test) into discussions of morphology. Dr. Blattner took two examples to demonstrate this: *psycholinguistique* [psycholinguistics] on the one hand, and *Madagascar* on the other. She pointed out that the word *psycholinguistique* passes the commutation test, because if one takes away the prefix *psycho* and replaces it with another prefix, such as *socio*, the resulting word is “valid”: *sociolinguistique*. Madagascar, on the other hand, fails this same commutive test, because not only cannot we replace the phoneme “mad” with a new element and have the resulting “word” make legitimate sense, but in fact the “mad” of Madagascar does not have any connection to the English term spelled the same way; the similarity is purely concidental. It certainly seems to me as though such free-flowing discussions, which go beyond limited consideration of simple prefixation or suffixation to evoke semantic and semiotic concerns, are extremely useful for our students, and will enable their deeper appreciation not just of language itself, but also of the societal practices in which language is embedded (not least of which is the production and reception of literature).

I was also particularly struck by Dr. Blattner’s incorporation of sociolinguistic information in the context of her detailed presentation on categories of morphology. When discussing prefixes, for instance, and their application in the context of nouns and adjectives, she invoked a very interesting discussion on the sociolinguistic differences between the following “intensifying” prefixes: *ultra-, hyper-, super-, mega-, and archi-* (as in, *megacool, archicool, hypercool*). During the discussion Dr. Blattner pointed out how age and social appurtenance affect linguistic choice and linguistic register. The students appreciated this discussion very much and, once again, I am convinced that such exposure to the nuances of register will enable students to be much more sensitive to all types of linguistic nuance wherever it is found (literature, song lyric, or elsewhere).

In summary, Dr. Blattner was very well prepared for class, and has clear expertise in the subject area (French linguistics, particularly sociolinguistics). Her students are extremely fortunate to be able to benefit from her knowledge of linguistics. There is no question that Dr. Blattner does indeed represent the best teaching traditions of the professorate, and I therefore do not hesitate to give her the overall qualitative judgment rating of EXCELLENT as outlined in our departmental criteria for annual evaluation. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide further detail based on the class session observed.

Sincerely yours,

Marcella Munson, PhD

Associate Professor of French and Comparative Literature