

# ALUMNI SURVEY

## **Please describe some of the benefits you have derived from having completed a French Major at Amherst College**

(In June of 2012, the French Department conducted a survey of its alumni. In the context of the department's 10-year external review, there was interest in obtaining feedback from our graduates regarding their perceptions of the value of our program. The following consists of comments submitted in response to the prompt above. All of the respondents cited gave permission to have these comments posted in a public forum.)

Not only do I feel that I have a solid command of French, but I use the same research and writing skills I learned in my French classes at Amherst every day at my job. Because I'm one of the only French speakers at a company that produces French versions of magazines, my degree in French has given me a professional advantage. And personally, I'm convinced that learning a second language has made me more open-minded.

I gained confidence that has opened up new career possibilities in the Francophone world and allowed me to form meaningful connections in my travels abroad. The small size of the department provided the opportunity to work closely with passionate professors who were genuinely interested in supporting students beyond the scope of Amherst classes. Additionally, the major provided ample training in the study of primary source documents in French, a skill that helped me tremendously during the course of writing my thesis.

At AC my French went from absolute beginner to Advanced Mid (on the ACTFL scale) in 7 semesters. The intellectual and personal benefits of my experiences studying abroad and in the program are immense; no less so are the professional benefits. It was having an AC diploma that got me into a top French Ph.D. program (NYU). As a French professor, I draw on my many experiences at AC and on the excellent pedagogical models I encountered to enhance my own teaching and program design.

I am a much more concise writer, and I have been exposed to some of the best known works of literature in the world as a result of my taking French Classes.

It was clearly a strong influence, along with my whole experience at Amherst College more generally, in inspiring me to pursue a Ph.D. and go into academia as a profession.

The ability to study and live abroad, to communicate in another language and understand another culture, the ability to study and practice law in a foreign legal system

The same as the characteristics of my best courses at Amherst – ability to think critically, exposure to broader perspectives in modern discourse, as well as improved fluency.

I was lucky enough to have written a thesis through the French department, meaning that I had the opportunity to explore a topic with a wonderfully patient adviser. The French experience I had at Amherst not only served as a means of intellectual enrichment but also gave me the encouragement and confidence to pursue my academic interests and to take the risks necessary to travel abroad.

The French major at Amherst provided me with the opportunity to explore French literature in depth, something that many undergraduate programs do not offer. I learned to delve into profound and complex questions without fear. My critical thinking skills were honed in the French major.

I began taking French classes at Amherst in my freshman year. I had taken French in High school and could speak a little bit, but was not a very confident speaker. I was amazed that in just four short years, I became so proficient. In the end I was able to write long papers all in French and felt very comfortable speaking. I am convinced that one is only able to fully understand another culture – empathize with that culture's values, etc. – if one is able to speak,

read and write in the native tongue. In addition, beyond my ability to live in France and feel completely comfortable there, the thorough language instruction at the French Department also enabled me to learn other languages fairly quickly. Since, I've learned Spanish, Italian, and Polish.

Learning about another culture, improving grammar (in English & French). Improving public speaking & self-confidence

I am now able to speak French with co-workers who also speak French.

Broad and deep exposure to French language and literature, culture and civilization, art and art history, film and media, history, philosophy, and social and political issues.

Ability to speak French, experience reading and interpreting great literature and writing about, critical thinking, worldliness and cultural awareness

Learning a foreign language has enabled me to connect with people I never would have otherwise met. I've traveled in France and Morocco and been able to interact with the locals. I've used my French in other exotic locations, such as Thailand and Nashville.

Excellent grammar skills Great knowledge of French culture and history

Learning a foreign language is very consistent with the general approach of liberal arts. It forces you to think in a new way, which is broadly useful in life, no matter the professional or personal endeavor.

I don't know where to begin. Although I spoke French when I arrived because my mother is Swiss French, the process of learning advanced grammar and how to read and write (which I didn't really know how to do) in another language challenged me to open a new side of my mind. It's always a delightful surprise when I'm in conversation in English and realize that there's a more apt word for what I'm describing in French. Also, the process of reading and analyzing literature in another language has given me much more facility when I do close readings of texts, particularly classical ones (whether English or French), which is something that I do constantly in my career as a professional actor.

I came to Amherst thinking I was going to be pre-med or English major. I spoke Spanish much better than French at the time. But from the first course I sat in on with Professor X while visiting to my subsequent courses with X, X, and senior tutorial with X, I became fully passionate about French and the eighteenth century in particular. I do what I do now largely because of X and X. They along with X and X (who unfortunately never had a class with but had my orals with) introduced me to new methodologies, sharpened my analytical writing, and certainly introduced me into the pleasures of research, critical analysis, creative thinking, and close readings. They were deeply passionate about what they did and were top leaders in their fields. It was pleasure not only to be taught by them but to read their books. Success in Circuit Lies was the first full academic research monograph that I purchased and read cover to end. It ended up being instrumental in my own first book.

Completing a degree in French gave me the ability to converse with and understand French-speakers, and thereby opened up the possibility of talking to a huge population I can learn from. I became more confident in my public speaking – in both English and French. I'm a closer reader, a better writer, and a more critical thinker as a result of my experience completing the French major.

I can speak, read and write in French at a professional level (though I do make mistakes here and there). I am more fully aware of proper grammatical structures, have an expanded vocabulary, and often can read newspapers in other romance languages with relative ease. I developed strong relationships with some members of the faculty, who later wrote letters of recommendation for my graduate school applications. I also have an appreciation for French literature, art, film, history and generally all things French.

Quite literally, it gave me a career path...and opened up my mind to so much literature and to ways of thinking about literature and the world.

As a French Major, I had the chance to explore and be part of a different culture. My writing and analytical skills improved a lot thanks to the wide variety of courses offered, and I found a very supportive community among the professors and the other majors that gave me the courage I needed to pick a career track that reflects what I really wanted to do.

I was able to make a lot of inter-departmental connections with Art, history, law, etc.

When I travel in countries where I don't speak the language, French is a great alternative—it helped me in China, actually! Being able to meet people half-way or communicating with them in their native language is humbling and rewarding all at once. I have access to many more great books in their original form.

Access to a trove of first-hand cultural and historical knowledge – Professional edge over other candidates

Brilliant faculty who have broad knowledge and ability to guide students.

1. I was accepted to a PhD program in French literature at a prestigious university. 2. I earned a MA and continued to work toward the PhD, completing all but my dissertation (ABD). 3. I worked in foreign rights for a publishing company, helping to buy and sell rights to books with French publishers. 4. I now work in a study abroad office, a position I got in part because I speak near fluent French.

It was a wonderful experience to be a part of a smaller department where professors had a keen interest in my French language development but also my activities outside the classroom. I found the department to be supportive and flexible to student needs.

I could not have obtained my current position with the United Nations without a background in French language. In addition, completing a French major at Amherst has shaped my life in several other significant ways. Upon graduating in 1999, I was fortunate enough to be awarded the École Normale Supérieure Fellowship for 1999-2000. That was a wonderful opportunity and experience, and I enjoyed the year at the ENS very much. More importantly, however, I met my future wife (a fellow pensionnaire étranger) during my year at the ENS. Alors, merci beaucoup, Amherst College French Department!

I was able to move to a French-speaking city (Geneva) after graduation and I have remained here – first studying, now working – ever since.

Learning how to think critically, write eloquently, and understand different perspectives by putting myself in other cultures' views. My profession requires cultural competence, and having studied francophone culture intensely, I have an appreciation for subtle differences that my peers did not.

The French Major at Amherst has allowed me to pursue my passion for French culture and especially the language. The quality of the department is such that my level of French and my understanding of the culture and literature made it easy to integrate two prestigious French institutions and pursue a career in France.

As with any major, it developed my critical thinking skills. Because it required the mental process of moving between languages and cultures, it also sharpened my ability to view problems from multiple perspectives.

I really enjoyed taking French at Amherst because I got to know my professors well (small class size) and by the end of my 4 years I knew the entire department. I HIGHLY recommend going abroad, on a program which requires full

immersion. I went into my junior year abroad timid and unsure of my French skills and came back extremely confident with my language skills and allover self/ability.

Cross-cultural exchange, reading texts in the original from a philosophical tradition quite different from Anglo-American thought.

I write better English because of French.

My mind was opened to the world and my life was literally changed by it. So many of my post-college experiences and decisions have revolved from my experience with the Amherst French department.

I assume that my Amherst French major deserves a fair part of the credit for getting me into all the grad programs I applied to (Stanford, NYU, Columbia, Yale, Duke).

The small class sizes allowed me the opportunity to use the language on a daily basis, so that when I went abroad I felt instantly capable and comfortable communicating.

The French Department does an excellent job of not only providing you with the practical skills you need to be able to communicate effectively and efficiently in French, but they also ensure that you are able to have the critical thinking and analytic skills that will help in any professional career.

In addition to my junior year abroad, I was able to complete a second year abroad with a fellowship after graduation. Then, I was admitted to an Ivy League graduate program in Comp. Lit. based largely on my French major at Amherst.

Awareness and understanding of culture and language other than my own; development of important linguistic, analytical and critical thinking skills; support and instruction by wonderful faculty; ability to communicate across linguistic and cultural divides.

My grammar and speaking skills improved dramatically. Without the knowledge I acquired at Amherst, I probably would not have been able to succeed at taking oral exams in French.