

ALUMNI SURVEY

If you were asked by an in-coming first-year student what the value of an Amherst College French Major might be, what would you say?

(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.)

The professors are truly invested in their students. Classes provide ample opportunities to improve grammar and fluency. Because the more advanced classes (literature, history) can tie in to other disciplines, it makes attempting to double major more feasible. The opportunity to study abroad is once in a lifetime. And, you never know when your French skills will come in handy down the road.

While at Amherst, French majors enjoy a small department and small classes with brilliant professors – which, if you're coming to a small liberal arts college, are probably your dream situation. After Amherst, I think French majors are well-prepared to do more reading, writing, and thinking, and that can happen in more than one country. (I never thought I'd use French in Anglophone Canada, for example.)

If you love French and Francophone culture, it is an excellent way to discover interesting literature and ideas, work with knowledgeable professors, and acquire the skills you need to work and travel in French-speaking country.

An opportunity to take some great classes with great professors, the chance to study abroad (and have those classes count towards the major).

Although I didn't realize it would while I was at Amherst, my French major has had a major effect on my career path by enabling me to live abroad. I highly recommend both a foreign language major and study abroad.

Amherst College's French program places emphasis on critical thinking and global awareness rather than simply on skill-based learning of the language, and therefore allows you to use French in a variety of other areas, while at the same time improving language and rhetorical skills. The major was, in my mind, like an English major, only more challenging in that it entailed literature and texts in another language.

The French major satisfies one's hunger for that interdisciplinarity which forms the essence of a liberal arts education; with enough effort, one will learn to read, write, think and speak critically and confidently, one will find oneself well-prepared to lead a "life of consequence" with cross-cultural sensitivity and global reach.

I think my French major prepared me for law school just as much as my LJST major did.

The Amherst French Department is full of kind, enthusiastic, and extremely knowledgeable professors who understand the value of foreign language training in the liberal arts context. The major itself is not overloaded with tedious requirements and covers an interesting range of materials, styles, and time periods. In my experience, French was a deeply enriching complement to my primary major that led to interests and perspectives that would have otherwise gone unexplored during my time at Amherst.

In learning to think in another language, you can learn to better express yourself in English (or in any other language). Furthermore, some of my French professors have been the most understanding and helpful at Amherst.

It is very important to have a foreign language skill, and I think that French remains a key foreign language in both international business and in international relations work.

Proficiency in a second language is generally helpful and I always found that my study of the French language helped me with my English writing ability.

You are guaranteed to become proficient in a second language, which is invaluable. If you are unfamiliar with “staple” academic philosophies such as those of Diderot and Proust, taking courses in the French department will definitely benefit you. The department is fantastic. The faculty and staff are friendly, enthusiastic, and patient.

Learning another language and studying other literatures and cultures hones your critical thinking skills like nothing else. Functioning and living in a second language is an experience like no other. It shapes who you are and has lifelong benefits.

1) French is one of the most commonly spoken languages in the world, and its cultural cachet makes it even more important than the number of speakers suggests. 2) In another 25-40 years the number of Francophones is projected to double, primarily in Africa, which is also a booming market. French’s future is very bright – it is a key factor in globalization. 3) In any number of fields – anthropology, art history, cinema, design, diplomacy, fashion, gastronomy, government, history, law, literature, museology, music, philosophy, theater, and tourism – French is a major plus. 4) Studying abroad and studying a foreign language prepares you for life in a globalized world as both an informed citizen and as a global professional. 5) An Amherst degree opens doors. Combining French with another major will make you an exceptionally competitive applicant for just about anything you want to do.

While I was an English major and while I loved my experience as an English major, I had much more personal attention in the French department and was able to develop much more thoroughly as a scholar and thinker. The advising advice and recommendations I received from French faculty were irreplaceable and largely responsible for enabling me to be accepted at every grad program I applied to. The department was also incredibly warm, creative in its thinking, and generous with its time. I am still in frequent contact with many of the professors and am deeply thankful to have had the chance to study with the department. I had no intention of becoming a professor of French and Comparative Literature. But like most Amherst students who have a free curriculum, I let great professors shape my future.

This major will provide you with a variety of useful and transferable skills, most obviously communication and critical thinking tools. More importantly, the French major will allow you to connect with others around the world who would otherwise be inaccessible to you, thereby giving you the opportunity for endless social and professional connections in the future regardless of the career path you choose.

Having professors who are as intelligent and interesting as they are caring and kind. Having the closest and best exposure to another culture and another time second to actually living it.

It is a very widely-used language in academia and culture, which helps when conducting research and in understanding and engaging with myriad cultural references. Learning French opens the door to other romance languages and is an excellent way to develop the capacity to study foreign languages in general because of its relative difficulty (both in terms of pronunciation and grammar). Studying French at Amherst College also opens a world of study abroad opportunities because it is so widely-spoken.

Even someone not particularly interested in French literature can gain a lot from a French major. Studying another language and the culture that goes along with it broadens your way of thinking. A French major prepares you at minimum for study abroad and/or travel in francophone countries.

As a double major, it complements other subjects very well.

Experience in a non-American centric world vision – Knowledge of foundational ideas and figures of western civilization – High level of literary analysis

Even though majoring in a foreign language doesn't seem like it will lead to a certain career path, there are lots of benefits. Being fluent (or at least highly proficient) in a language and having experience living and studying abroad can be major assets when looking for a job.

Speaking a foreign language is an immediately employable skill that I was able to use for my first job! It is a major that leaves you with a job skill.

I enjoyed that I was able to read some of the major works of European Literature in the original. Also, France is obviously still one of the major languages in the European Union. For anyone interested in European Politics or European History, speaking and reading French really is a requirement.

For any in-coming freshman who might consider an international career I would say that a French major is indispensable. Even if you never set foot outside of the states, studying a foreign language and culture opens your mind to different perspectives, different ways of solving problems and helps to develop your analytical skills through comparison. I would strongly suggest coupling a French major with a second major.

If pursuing a career involving French is of interest to you, then an Amherst French major will serve you well; my friends who have sought jobs or continuing education in France or involving French have all found them. If not, the major is still invaluable. Studying a foreign language and literature trains your mind to work in new ways: to find alternate ways to express ideas, to choose words carefully, to find patterns in unexpected places.....

If one plans to pursue any kind of academic career, reading French is pretty helpful because so much contemporary critical theory is in French. Also, study abroad is a great experience.

Foreign language proficiency is a very marketable skill in the business world. Beyond your ability to do work that others might not be able to do, a French major shows a certain high level of written and spoken communication skills.

Working closely with a team of learned, interesting, kind, and available professors. Exploring research topics that are of interest to you (and having support throughout). The fact that coursework covers a broad range of subject matter, but is also in-depth.

French is more and more becoming a minority language. If you are interested in working in Africa, it is definitely an asset. If you love French literature, but don't want to pursue an academic career, this is your opportunity to enjoy it.