7-23-1961

Montana State University Foreign Language Institute update

University of Montana–Missoula. Office of University Relations

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MISSOULA—Stumping high school teachers at Montana State University’s second annual Foreign Language Institute when they return to the classroom next fall to teach French or Spanish will be no easy chore. This summer French and Spanish have been their "native tongue."

The Institute, authorized by the National Defense Education Act, has attracted 52 high school teachers from 41 states. Half are taking a concentrated course in techniques of teaching French while the other 26 are in Spanish.

The purpose of the Institute is to better prepare teachers in public and private secondary schools to instruct foreign languages, a subject regarded by the United States Office of Education as essential to education.

Just as a child acquires a knowledge of English in the United States, living with a foreign language is regarded as the best way to learn it. With this in mind, the Institute has made every effort to re-create the atmosphere the participants would find if they were living in a country where the language they are studying is the native tongue.

According to the Institute’s director, Dr. Robert M. Burgess, chairman of MSU’s foreign language department, this includes not only classroom situations but extra-curricular social activities also.

Classes are taught in French or Spanish and discussions are held using the foreign language. After school hours, the participants join others in their language group for private conversations, meals, and even parties.

The meals are something in themselves.

Dining rooms in the University’s Lodge have been assigned to both the French and Spanish groups. They are served cafeteria-style and when they sit down, find
a menu printed in their foreign language with announcements or an excerpt from the literature of the language. As conversations at the tables are limited to either French or Spanish, depending on the group, the participant had better know how to say "pass the salt" in his language or he is likely to have some flat-tasting meat loaf.

MSU's institute is one of 73 this summer designed to emphasize speaking a foreign language as a means of communicating with other people. Most modern European languages are being studied although the University's institute offers instruction only in French or Spanish.

According to Dr. Burgess, high schools in the area assigned to MSU's institute offer instruction primarily in these two languages. As the institutes are aimed at improving instruction at the high school level, it was only natural French and Spanish were chosen.

The institute has attracted teachers from 41 states. For the most part, the participants are from the Institute's assigned area, Montana, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Northern California and Wyoming.

An extensive program, classes begin at 7:30 a.m. Monday through Friday with instruction in Language analysis. This course is required for all participants, and does not distinguish between French and Spanish students.

The next hour is devoted to a class in conversation and a pattern drill in the target language. A seminar in the teaching of the target language follows and then upper division courses in the teachings of foreign languages at the high school level.

Following lunch a laboratory period is offered participants. Using MSU's foreign language lab, participants use tape recorders in individual sound-proofed booths to improve their speaking ability and understanding of the language. The
use of tape recorders is a priceless aid in improving pronunciation and the use of accents in a foreign language.

Courses in composition and the culture and civilization of the countries in which the target languages are spoken are also offered during the institute.

The long classroom day ends at 4:30 in the afternoon and is followed by dinner, a half hour of required informal conversation in the target languages and films, talks, musical programs, plays and even tape-recorded news casts in French and Spanish.

During all this time English has been a forgotten tongue, everything has been said in French or Spanish. Even the culture courses are taught, discussed and tested in the target language.

This year the institute is performing a rather unusual experiment. Incoming freshmen at Missoula's high schools have been screened and a group of 25 boys and girls have been selected to study French or Spanish for eight weeks. Although they receive no credit from the institute, it is likely because of their participation in the institute they will be placed in advanced classes once the regular high school year begins.

The high school students meet in class regularly and are taught by members of the institute's staff, nationally recognized experts in instructing foreign languages. Regular participants sit in the rear of the room to observe the manner in which the classes are taught.

The high school students are already following the speech of the instructor with an understanding they would have thought impossible when the institute began. Many parents have commented on their youngster's enjoyment of the language, his use of it outside of the classroom or with companions outside of study hours.
In keeping with the effort to make the participants feel as though they were in France or Spain, the institute has acquired a rather extensive library of French and Spanish books, magazines and films. Some of the literature is elementary in nature while some can be found in the book stalls and magazine stands of Paris or Madrid. Teaching aids are also included in the collections.

The purpose of the foreign language reading rooms is two-fold. The participants may not only read in their target language, they may also discover sources from where they may purchase or borrow materials for their high school students. An obvious source, are the French and Spanish Counsels who have proven most cooperative to the institute and schools. There are other sources also, many eager to assist in closing the gap in language instruction between schools in the United States and Europe.

There is some typical American equipment in the reading rooms also, the familiar cups and coffee percolator and a compartment for frozen joices for periods of relaxation.

Over 300 teachers from public and private high schools applied for admission to this year's institute. Of the 52 selected, 48 were from public schools and four from private schools. Those from public schools receive a stipend of $75 a week and $15 for each dependent. Although participants from private schools receive no stipend, no charge is made for their instruction.

Nationwide, nearly 3,200 teachers have been enrolled at institutes to study French, Spanish, German, Russian, Italian and Modern Hebrew. The program will cost an estimated $6 million.

Assisting Dr. Burgess in the administration of MSU's program is Dr. Douglas C. Shepard of MSU's foreign language department. Dr. Shepard is the Institute's assistant director.