

CIEE Action Plan

Contemporary French Studies program, CIEE Study Center in Paris, Paris, France Spring 2012

ACB Evaluation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Founded in 1999, the Contemporary French Studies (CFS) program in Paris is in excellent shape, although poised for growth and some redefinition. Building on a very solid base of excellent staff, dedicated teachers and very strong student services, the CIEE evaluation team believes the CFS should strengthen its core identity to better communicate its considerable strengths to sending schools and prospective students.

As described in the bulletin: “The Contemporary French Studies study abroad program in Paris, France is geared to students who have completed a minimum of two semesters of French study (or the equivalent) and wish to continue improving their language skills while also taking courses on French culture and contemporary France taught in English and/or French.” At the end of the program, all students should have improved their French level in all four competence areas and should have achieved a clear understanding of the political, social and cultural complexity that characterizes contemporary France.

The principal question posed to the review team concerned the core identity of the program and its tracks (Francophone, Language and Culture Learners), and how well this structure was being communicated to sending schools. While member institutions and former students seem quite satisfied with the program, there was some confusion about what kind of student would be best served by this program and how to assess the fit of the CFS for particular students versus the CIEE program in Rennes or the Critical Studies program. The structure of the current program is rather complex as seen from the outside, with a number of moving pieces, alternative combinations, and overlapping options. While the flexibility of this approach is useful, our recommendations are to clarify and systematize the structure to make it more legible to prospective students, study abroad advisors, and sending institutions.

Our general recommendation would be to align the Francophone track of the CFS program more closely with the CIEE Critical Studies (CS) program, preferably by identifying dedicated space for this “French only” option near Paris Diderot, and to keep the Learner’s and Language and Culture tracks, in which some English language can be tolerated, together (we were disappointed, overall, to hear mostly English being spoken by students on their breaks). Students should be admitted directly into these three tracks (CS/CFS, Language and Culture, Learners) to give the students and their home schools more predictability about the courses and credits they can anticipate. Each track will then be defined not only by prerequisites in language, but by the courses allowed (only in French for Francophone, for example, either at the Center or the university) and will continue the process of separation of orientation, field trips, etc. While there are many important decisions to be made in order to implement this general recommendation, we have great confidence in the experienced staff of the Center to navigate their way. We do not mean this recommendation to be in any way binding or prescriptive (new

space is not easy to find, for example), but more in the form of general guidance and suggestion.

Overview

The Action Plan outlines the key recommendations from the Evaluation and the specific steps CIEE plans to follow to address the recommendation. While the Action Plan is authored by CIEE, staff solicited input from the ACB team leader from the evaluation (Dr. Priscilla Stone, Washington University, St. Louis). The Action Plan should be read in light of the ACB Evaluation and with reference to the detailed description of the program available from CIEE.

CIEE staff are pleased to provide this Action Plan in response to the Academic Consortium Board (ACB) report on the Contemporary French Studies program. The report of the site visit was received by members of the ACB at the Spring 2012 meeting. After review, the ACB accepted the report, and presented it to the Academic Consortium.

The “ACB Plan for Program Evaluation”, the Evaluation report, the Action Plan, and program details are available at www.ciee.org.

ACB Recommendations - Academic Framework

- 1) Distinguish the three tracks from the outset, admit students into these tracks (with some flexibility on site to reflect language placement) and hold the students to more strictly defined requirements.

ACTION: We have created a clear administrative distinction between the tracks, with Learner's track open to those with 2 semesters of French, and Language and Culture Track open to those with 3-4 semesters of French. All English-taught content courses are listed as “Learner's track courses” and students in Language and Culture Track can take one maximum with special permission and a valid academically motivated reason.

To create closer links between the Francophone track and Critical Studies students, we have reconfigured both Paris Study Center programs to create the “Critical and Francophone studies program with a minimum French requirement of 5 semesters all approved by the Academic Consortium Board last May. The Critical Studies and Francophone students are now in two tracks within the new program. This also responds to the recommendation that the Francophone students be required to study entirely in French and to study at the French university, since the new program includes these as requirements for participation.

- 2) Increase the number of French content courses and
- 3) Adopt a broader “contemporary area studies” approach to course offerings that includes more social sciences.

ACTION: we have created seven new French-taught content classes. Four of them are French versions of classes already offered in English (19th Century French Painting, French Avant-

Garde Artists, The 20th Century French Novel, and Contemporary French Cinema). Two of them are entirely new and are designed to respond to the recommendation to adopt a broader contemporary area studies approach – Contemporary French Society, and France and the European Union. One is a new Practicum class on Service Learning, designed to provide a reflective framework for those students involved in community service work as volunteers.

Furthermore, by creating French versions of classes once offered only in English, we are designing the two tracks as reflections of two broad programs allowing many disciplinary approaches to French society.

- 4) Offer more content courses that meet multiple times per week (two 1 hour meeting

ACTION: We are actively seeking out ways to meet this recommendation, but it is extremely difficult for most of our professors to set up their schedules to make this possible, since obviously none of our professors are full-time with us. We will probably be able to make this change for at maximum one or two more classes. Post-War France and Phonetics and all French classes are already meeting twice a week.

- 5) Rationalize the advising structure and better organize and publicize the information on French university courses.

ACTION: In the new structure, students taking courses for credit at the French university will all be in the new “Critical and Francophone studies” program. Their advising will be handled by that program’s Resident Director. All advising for the two CFS tracks (Learner’s track and Language and Culture) will continue to be done by the CFS Resident Director, as was the normal procedure for the CFS program.

- 6) Integrate the blog into the website

ACTION: The blog has been moved to the CIEE website as recommended.

ACB Recommendations - Teaching and Learning

- 7) Implement a regular evaluation of the courses taught at the Center to better assess the overall academic structure of the program and to better communicate this to sending schools.

ACTION: The CIEE Paris Resident Directors will launch a systemic evaluation of courses whereby they each regularly sit in on all the courses that are taught at the Center (once a year for a course that is taught each semester).

- 8) Improve the collection of data on student majors

ACTION: CIEE’s new data management system requests that students identify their academic major at the time of application to the program. Applicants are given the opportunity to provide a first and second major as well as minor as soon as they start their application. CIEE staff are

able to access this information as soon as students provide it. Overseas staff access this information via their online portal in to CIEE's participant database. Historical data on student majors is also available via the online portal.

- 9) Regularize the language pledges

ACTION: A staff member who is also a language instructor, has prepared standardized language pledges for each track of CFS. We will experiment with the results of making known the pledge prior to arrival (e.g. during our on-line Orientation). The staff member has been assigned the role of "language coach" and his work station has been moved to the student area.

ACB Recommendation - Quality and Appropriateness of Students

- 10) Align the ILP of the Francophone track with that of CS

ACTION: Now that the Francophone track is part of the new Critical and Francophone studies program, the ILP for both tracks is two weeks.

ACB Recommendation - Student Preparation for the Learning Environment

- 11) Rethink the integration of the Living and Learning seminar into the overall curriculum perhaps by linking it to another language-based class.

ACTION: We are still in the process of rethinking the integration of the Seminar on Living and Learning into the overall curriculum. In fall semester 2012, the teacher of the Seminar participated in teaching of Intercultural Communication, a class which overlaps in themes and approaches with the Seminar, but which also has academic elements and has 3 credits. We will continue to experiment with other modes of integration.

- 12) Clarify the academic tracks to alleviate the problem of pre-approval of credits and courses.

ACTION: The new set-up distinguishes the tracks and students are required to indicate on their course choice form, filled out on line in advance of arrival, which track they intend to be in. Therefore, there should be much less fluidity and changes of courses and tracks on arrival, and this will help the problem of pre-approval.

ACB Recommendation - Quality and Appropriateness of Services

- 13) Regularize the assignments of track heads and make them for more than one semester at a time.

ACTION: The CFS program now has only two tracks. We have rethought the notion of "track head" and find that it is more appropriate to have clearly defined roles for staff that apply to all students, not to one "track head". In fact, the academic advising by track was one of the practices divided by "track head", and as the ACB rightly pointed out, it was not the best use of staff skills. Now, we have eliminated the role of track head and clarified the roles. Hannah Taieb

is Director and does all academic advising and decision-making, Lucie Laureillard is Housing and Well-Being coordinator for all students in all tracks, and Jean-Philippe Primout is Coordinator and Language Coach for all students in all tracks.

ACB Recommendation - Quality of Facilities

14) Continue the effort to find alternate space, either for the entire program or for the advanced CF/CFS Francophone students. Ideally the space will be adjacent to, or within, the Paris-Diderot, to facilitate an “all French” environment and encourage the fuller integration of students. This new facility should be more accessible.

ACTION: Brent Keever, Center Director, is actively engaged in setting up office and classroom space with one of our French University partners. It appears that this activity has borne fruit or will bear fruit in the very near future, allowing the Critical and Francophone studies students to function in a Francophone environment.