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Stakeholder Summary

Pilot course at the University of Ottawa prepares first-year students for university-level French

In 2012-13, the University of Ottawa piloted a French course designed to help first-year students transition into university-level French. After completing the course, students felt more confident with their writing, literacy and oral communication skills, which in turn helped them better integrate into the University of Ottawa community. Students who participated in the pilot course also performed better in their other courses offered in French than did students who did not participate in the pilot.

Project description

Developing University Literacy and Promoting Academic Success across Disciplines: A Case Study of French-Language University Literacy documents the creation and implementation of a French course piloted at the University of Ottawa in 2012-13 to help French-speaking students from minoritized communities (where French speakers make up less than 5% of the population) succeed in their courses delivered in French. The course was offered weekly over two semesters and focused on syntax, editing, grammar and clarity.

The project used a mix of data, interviews, focus groups and surveys to document the process, experience and outcomes of the course, including the impact of the course on students' first-year experiences and their academic performance. Students were also compared to a group of similar Ontario francophone students who did not register for the course. The course was offered as an option to those whose entrance French tests suggested they could benefit from taking the course.

The course was developed following a recommendation made in *[Linguistic Heterogeneity and Non-Traditional Pathways to Postsecondary Education in Ontario](),* a HEQCO report that explored initiatives created by the University of Ottawa to better understand the challenges faced by francophone students at the institution, as well as the role of language courses on student success.

Findings

Given the small sample size (69 students completed the course but only 58 were analyzed due to data limitations), the authors caution about the generalizability of the findings. Scheduling conflicts prevented many students from registering for the course.

More than 70% of students felt that the course helped them improve their writing and literacy skills and become more confident writing in French for academic purposes. Students appreciated learning about the appropriate use of language but they wished that the course would go further in addressing more complex grammatical issues.

Students who participated in the pilot course performed significantly better in their other courses taught in French than did students who did not participate in the pilot. This finding did not extend to students' other foundational French language courses, however.

All students suggested that the course be mandatory, as they felt that it better prepared them for writing at the university level than the two existing foundational French courses.

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The university is pursuing the pilot study for a second year to enable collection and analysis of student data from a larger sample.

Developing University Literacy and Promoting Academic Success across Disciplines: A Case Study of French-Language University Literacy was written by Sylvie A. Lamoureux, Jean-Luc Daoust, Johanne Bourdages, Marie-Josée Vignola, Alain Malette of the University of Ottawa.

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