



UNIVERSITY ASSEMBLY AND FACULTY SENATE  
UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS AT LITTLE ROCK  
2801 S. University Ave, Little Rock, AR 72204

**DATE:** March 17, 2023

**TO:** Faculty Senators and University Assembly Members

**FR:** Senate *Ad Hoc* Retrenchment Committee  
(Ed Anson, May Atkins, Belinda Blevins-Knabe, Angela Hunter, Amar Kanekar, Carol Macheak, Kristin Mann, Joanne Liebman Matson, John Nichols, Lisa Sherwin, Joshua Silverstein)

**SUBJ:** Senate Response to Chancellor's Proposal to Retrench French

## Introduction

The Senate ad hoc Retrenchment Committee appreciates the opportunity to review the recent decision to retrench French. However, we strongly oppose the decision at this time.

In the Chancellor's 2020 retrenchment report, she wrote that she limited the scope of her recommended cuts because

a) we need time to adjust our curriculum to the changes we make now, deeper cuts would be too destabilizing and would compromise our mission, and b) we may be able to reach our goal through a combination of retrenchment and increasing enrollment and a more gradual approach would give us the flexibility to see if that is possible. (p. 3).

We believe these same principles still apply to retrenchment in 2023 and should guide the approach to review of the French program. The pandemic lasted longer than originally anticipated and UA Little Rock's enrollment has begun to turn around. Significantly, the French program's Student to Faculty ratio and SSCH /Faculty ratio grew in 2020 and 2021 at a time when the institution's overall enrollment continued to decline.<sup>1</sup> It is only in Fall 2022 that the ratios declined. The French program has provided a detailed explanation of changes that they have made and are in the process of making, including revised courses scheduled for Fall 2023 and certificates. They are thus adjusting their curriculum based on the 2020 retrenchment report and on additional insights gained over the last three years. They deserve time to see if these changes will work.

Below we elaborate on these and other reasons to retain French.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on OIR data provided

## Concerns about Process

The retrenchment process in 2019-2020 was carefully planned and executed, involving multiple stakeholders who were provided multiple sources of information and who deliberated over multiple months. The programs affected knew what was being considered long before the Chancellor delivered the first version of her plan at the end of March. Then there was additional review by all stakeholder units before she announced her final plan at the beginning of May. In contrast, there was no advance warning after 3 years that retrenchment was being reactivated and that French was to be closed; plus, this time the entire campus review process is supposed to happen in a matter of weeks rather than months. The only criterion given for the decision are the faculty/student ratios that were used as a starting point for the reviews in 2020, and minimal data was provided..

The process for the 2019-2020 retrenchment was structured and relatively clear. But at the end of that undertaking, there was no process outlined for programs like French who were at risk but earned a reprieve. We believe that principles of due process and fairness to faculty and students call for a clearly articulated process that allows programs to plan for any subsequent review. The process should tell programs when they will be reviewed and the metrics that will be used. The process should allow the program to review and verify the data being used and should allow the respective committees to respond in a timely manner. In other words, there should be a process that is open and transparent, with clear and appropriate benchmarks and timelines.

## French Actions to Promote Enrollment

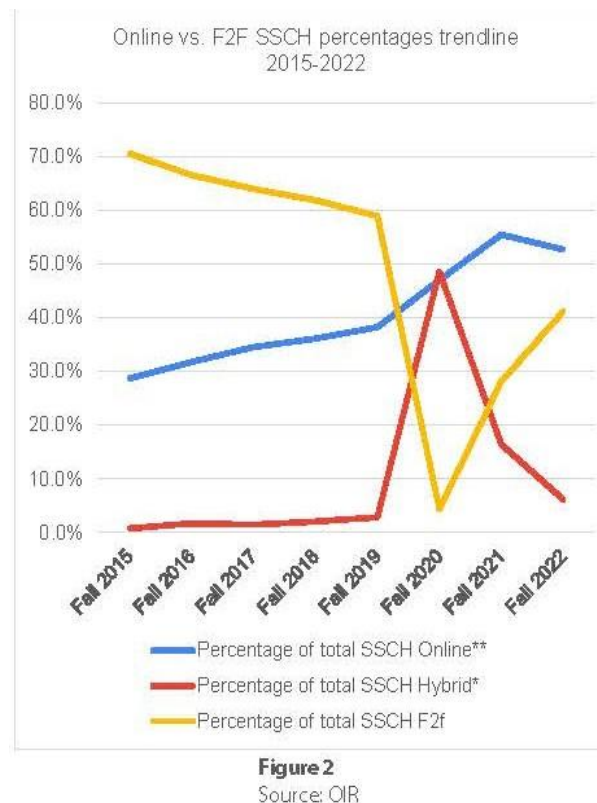
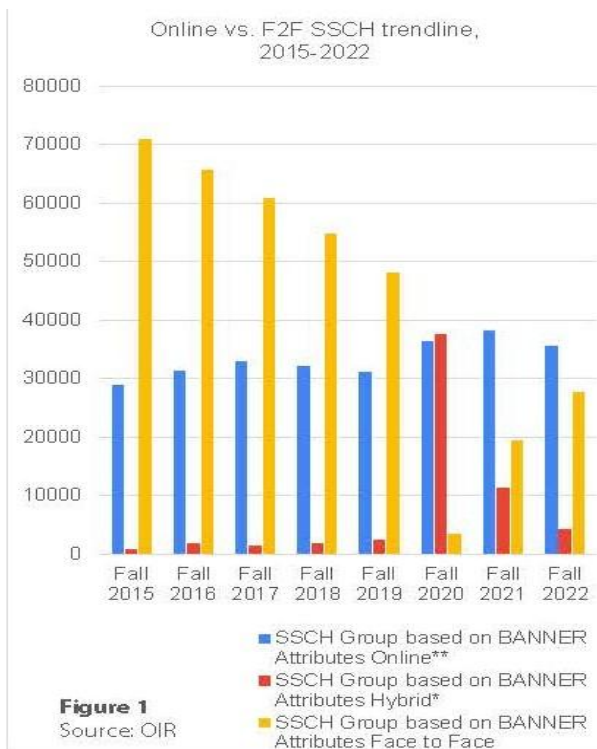
As noted above, the French faculty took a variety of steps to improve enrollment as a result of the 2020 review. They revised their introductory sequence and they have developed proposals for two stackable certificate programs, which they are ready to put through the curriculum process. These proposals can be seen in detail in the French program's materials supporting their argument against retrenchment.

During the pandemic, they did suffer from enrollment issues associated with COVID, partly because they did not have a robust online presence and partly because college energy was engaged in basic issues as a result of reorganization in and within the college. Nevertheless, the French drop in enrollment from 2019 to 2022 (12%) was *less* than the overall undergraduate drop in enrollment (19%)<sup>2</sup>.

Post-pandemic, the French faculty have recognized the need to increase their online offerings, since enrollment patterns show a shift university-wide toward online courses. See Figures 1 and 2.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on OIR data on dashboards and in the spreadsheet provided by the provost.



They also plan to offer English versions of popular upper-level courses that can introduce students to French culture without their needing to know the language. This could supplement the curriculum in other programs in which students study related subjects or read sources in translation. Courses such as French Cuisine or the Francophone World would increase demand. .

Their new upper-level courses, whether in English or French, show promise in attracting students and might reasonably be added to the *Acadeum* listing of offerings to draw from a larger pool of students and provide revenue.

### Value of French to UA Little Rock Programs and Students

The Senate *Ad Hoc* Committee believes that cutting French compromises the university's mission "to serve and strengthen society by enhancing awareness in scientific, technical, and cultural arenas; and to promote humane sensitivities and understanding of interdependence." This compromise to the mission is particularly clear in relation to our newest strategic plan, which is proposing as a high-level goal the commitment to "promote a culture that fosters thoughtful and transparent communication, inclusiveness, and respect for others."

The existing 2017 Strategic Plan identifies more specific objectives that relate to this mission: "UA Little Rock will improve understanding of diversity and global understanding in the campus community" (Goal 5, objective 3). The French program, through its courses, faculty research, and study abroad opportunities, contribute directly to this goal. French courses, research, and opportunities are

particularly relevant in Strategy 5: “Increase student participation in international educational experiences” because the French program teaches and researches not only about one nation—France—but about the global Francophone world, including Canada, parts of Africa, and the Caribbean, thus providing the campus community with rich educational experiences.

Since French is a service program as well as a major, this decision affects the rest of the university as well. Eliminating French will make it harder for programs to require a second language. Spanish and ASL would be the only options, and ASL doesn't offer online courses, which, as pointed out earlier, are necessary with the UA Little Rock trend towards online instruction. Eliminating French will put a burden on Spanish and provide students with only one choice of a spoken language. Programs that require a second language currently may decide against retaining this requirement when the choice is severely reduced. Spanish will be the only international language available to students and the only language available to online students, by default creating a Spanish requirement. If programs do drop the requirement based on this, Spanish enrollments will suffer.

Currently 13 of the 22 top feeder transfer institutions offer French. With only Spanish and ASL as options, transfer students with prior French study will have to start over with a new language when majoring in programs requiring a second language.

Additionally, eliminating French will be a disservice to our students who want to go on to complete a PhD in disciplines that require two languages.

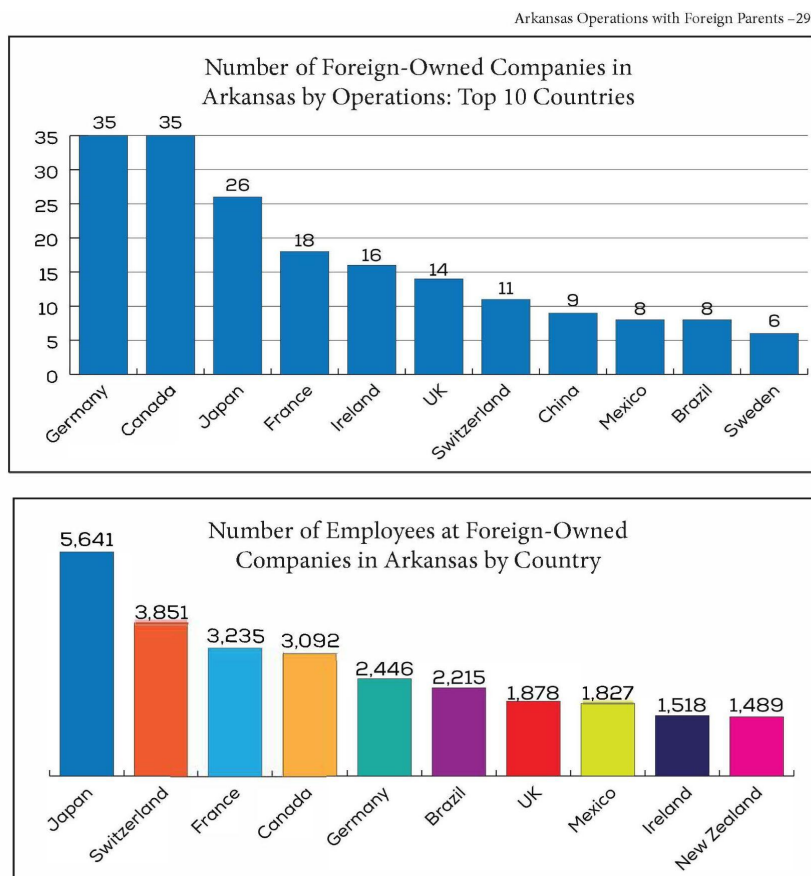


Figure 3

For additional information or to suggest corrections and/or additions, please contact: Arkansas Economic Development Commission (501) 682-1121

Source: Arkansas Economic Development Commission

There are also employment-related reasons to retain French. French companies are among the top foreign-owned companies operating in Arkansas. According to the Arkansas Development Commission, there are 18 French-owned companies in Arkansas, fourth most after Germany, Canada, and Japan. The French companies employ approximately 3235 employees, third most after Japan and Switzerland.

Since 22.8 percent of Canadians (Government of Canada, 2019, November), and 22.9% of Swiss (Swiss Confederation, 2022, January) speak French as their

first language, it is likely that the Canadian and Swiss companies need French-speakers as well. See Figure 3.

To that end, a review on March 8th, 2023, of *Indeed.com* for open positions in Arkansas revealed three openings for French k-12 instructors, five openings requiring or prioritizing French (as opposed to any other language), and 7 openings requiring or prioritizing French along with other languages.

French is also important economically, particularly with respect to the growing economic importance of Africa:

The need for French-speaking professionals in global business, philanthropy, diplomacy, education, and the military has never been greater. French blankets the entire African continent from Morocco to Madagascar and from Senegal to Djibouti. Seventy percent of the world's total of French-speaking people live in Africa (World Atlas, 2021). . . . Because of high birth rates, 85% of French speakers could live in Africa by 2050, according to the International Organization of La Francophonie and ODSEF.

French-speaking Africa is home to some of the world's fastest-growing economies (Mitchell, 2019) and French president Emmanuel Macron calls Africa—the continent of the future (BBC News, 2019). Goldman Sachs, McKinsey, The Brookings Institute, and the Council on Foreign Relations concur. (Gandolphi et al, 2021, p. 34.

In Arkansas, immigrants from Africa play a significant role in the economy, and as they increase, there will be a need for French speakers throughout the state. See Figure 4.

INCOME AND TAX CONTRIBUTIONS OF KEY GROUPS WITHIN ARKANSAS' IMMIGRANT POPULATION, 2014

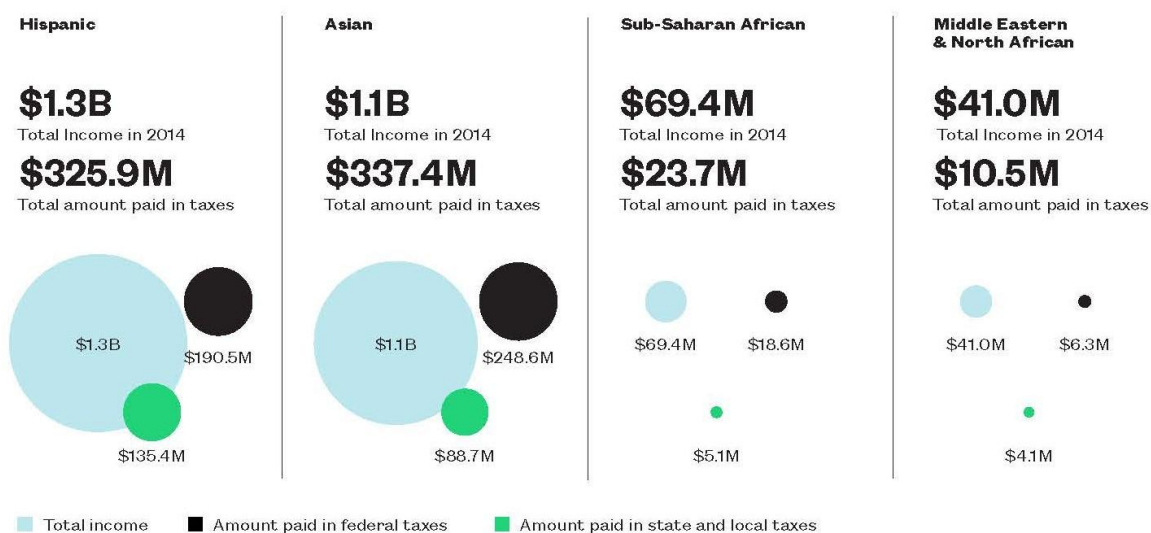


Figure 4  
Source: New American Economy

## The Goals of Academic Planning Retrenchment

While it is true that the 2020 report indicated there would be “a review of the French program in another year” (p. 8), there was in fact no such review. In the meantime three years have passed, arguably three of the most disruptive years ever in higher education; and as we emerge from the pandemic, we are also seeing how changes put in place in admission, recruitment, and retention are helping to turn around the massive university-wide drop in enrollment that we were experiencing in 2020. Board of Trustees policy 405.5 in the section on academic planning retrenchment speaks to decision-makers identifying “the needed level of retrenchment,” and it is reasonable to ask if the need has changed from 2020 to 2023.

It is also reasonable to ask whether cutting French is a sound economic decision that will lead to, as the 2020 report stated, “right-sizing the university.” The cost/benefit analysis shows that the French program makes a modest profit. (\$1457). If you include the 43.5 percent overhead, it loses around \$45,000. But 43.5 percent overhead is an average to account for programs that cost significantly more to operate than French, which doesn't need much lab space or sophisticated equipment. Research such as the Delaware Study shows that Foreign Languages are among the least expensive of university programs (Middaugh, et al., 2003).

In addition, in calculating the workload for the French faculty, the university ought to take into account the significant service load they have undertaken. Leadership in the CHASSE Assembly, the CHASSE Curriculum Committee, the Undergraduate Council, and the Faculty Senate will have to shift to other faculty, meaning the cost savings will be significantly reduced. There will also be a significant loss to institutional memory, as Professor Cheatham has been at UA Little Rock since its merger into the UA System.

In short, it is difficult to see how the benefits of cutting the French program outweigh the many costs to the students, to the university, and to Arkansas--now and in the future. Academic Planning Retrenchment is supposed to be done to allow “major reallocations of resources for academic or support services” (UA Board of Trustees 405.5). Given the low salary of French faculty and the low cost to run the program, it does not appear to lead to a “major reallocation of resources.”

Academic Planning should address more than numbers in evaluating the university's programs. We do not need only large programs, some of which are extremely expensive to run. The emphasis on counting SSCH has led to many unintended consequences across the university as programs seek to maintain their positions. Indeed, the decision by departments to eliminate their second language requirement is one of them. When what matters is SSCH, departments will seek to keep students for themselves so as to grow their SSCH. Another unintended consequence of the emphasis on capturing SSCH is the drift toward online classes. When on-campus classes are canceled or their instructors given reduced salary or credit, the “rational” decision for the unit is to stop offering courses on-campus and teach only online because those sections always “make.” We've seen this happen in summer courses; and we are seeing it happen in fall and spring semesters as well. (See Figure 1). The pandemic interrupted and exacerbated this trend, but this trend was happening before the pandemic;

notably our enrollment loss between 2015 and 2020 was primarily in on-campus students. Even now it's unclear whether we will be able to return to pre-pandemic on-campus offerings. Departments like French are currently struggling to offer on-campus courses but are fearful of what happens when the enrollment is too low.

Instead of always focusing on more and more enrollment, Academic Planning *should* help programs “right-size” their own offerings, address current problems, and use their resources to maximize their impact on students.

## Morale

We have heard from administrators that they are concerned about faculty morale. They know that the engine of a university is its faculty. Yet it is hard to imagine an event that hurt faculty morale more than the actions related to closing the French program. Across the campus, untenured tenure-track faculty are concerned, small programs are concerned, and faculty leaders are concerned. The Chancellor stated at the January Senate meeting that she “does not see any kind of catastrophic condition in our budget. There may be a point where we might have to tighten up a bit here or there, but right now it looks okay. . . . We are optimistic that we will come out with a net zero.” If “tightening up” means cutting small programs for so little gain, then it is no wonder that the mood on campus is far from optimistic. Everyone is worried about who will be on the chopping block next.

## Final words

The Senate *Ad Hoc* Committee sees little value to the university in cutting French, and we hope the Chancellor will reconsider this proposal. Additionally, if there are to be further cuts, we encourage the administration to create a plan that will give all programs fair warning about what is to come.

As we plan for the future, faculty welcome collaborative conversations to grow programs that are currently vulnerable and to enhance other programs.

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