

Hello and Goodbye?

Look, stop worrying! I'm passing through. It's hello and goodbye. Maybe I'm gone tomorrow.
--Hester in Athol Fugard's *Hello and Goodbye*

The images accompanying two pieces on language study in the mainstream US press last month are striking. I would like to draw your attention to them as we consider language and literature program consolidation, elimination, and realignment on campuses across the United States and Canada.



Jim Sollisch's *Wall Street Journal* opinion piece is illustrated by a cartoon, no doubt exemplifying the typical student about which he writes. Having been "forced" to take two years of a language, when asked to say something in it he can barely greet his unseen interlocutor. "Hello"—and nothing more—is all he is able to manage; "Bon jour" [sic]—pardon my French. A "short monologue," indeed.

And to illustrate Lisa W. Foderaro's article on the Draconian cuts recently made to language programs at US colleges, we see Nathaniel Brooks' photograph of a French class at SUNY Albany, which, we are reminded, "has suspended French as a major." Is it "Au revoir" for now, as the photo's caption leads us to believe? Or "Adieu," as the article's title would suggest? Whatever the case, why would readers of the *New York Times* care when what we see rehearsed in the photo seems so tiredly stereotypical: a French language classroom composed almost exclusively of women—all listening attentively to an instructor we do not see, who has been cut out of the picture and will soon be out of the business of teaching, but who probably does not and did not matter anyway.

Plus ça change?

As those of us in the academy continue to think about how constructively and creatively we might respond to the hard times we all face, let us not lose sight of the potential power of language, which Sollisch reminds us can help to "break down walls—both metaphorical and real—between cultures." A multifaceted public relations campaign by all of our members to redress negative public perception, as it has been perpetuated by misrepresentative images in the press, seems as good a place to start as any.



Works Cited

Foderaro, Lisa W. "Budget-Cutting Colleges Bid Some Languages Adieu." *New York Times*. New York Times, 3 Dec. 2010. Web. 2 January 2011.

Sollisch, Jim. "Money Out the Fenêtre." *Wall Street Journal*. Wall Street Journal, 16 Dec. 2010. Web. 2 January 2011.

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