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SOUTHWESTERN AT MEMPHIS

MEMPHIS 12, TENNESSEE

Date February 18 19 58

MEMORANDUM TO President Rhodes Re: Language Laboratory as related to Modern Language Teaching at SW.

Your memo on the Georgetown Institute and your observations on it, its relation to our language center and our language teaching program in the college were very enlightening and interesting. I should like to separate two discussion questions: the setting up of the language center; the use of that center in our regular program. They are very definitely related but our present problem and the approach to it can be handled more effectively and economically by keeping at least the paper record of the two questions separated.

The modern foreign language staff has been meeting at intervals since early last fall on ways and means of improving our program. Dean Jones gave our planning some impetus by meeting with us in our first two meetings. We worked out a very definite program which envisages considerable use of some kind of a laboratory set-up.

Essentially and briefly it is as follows:

One spot on the schedule would be set aside for modern foreign language, possibly the less used 11:30-12:30 hour on MWF or TThS. All students in each course would meet in a large group.

- 1st meeting - presentation of week's work, demonstration, exposition, explanation, etc. by one professor
- 2nd meeting - use of recorded material on tape for repetition and rehearsal by groups if one group too large
- 3rd meeting - quiz section, review, dictation, oral and written testing, presentation of cultural material, at times suitable movies and slides, lectures.

For all the above, one professor would be in charge of each course altho he might call in other members of the departments when needed.

Two supplementary meetings, in small sections on the other two days of the week, scattered over the schedule at present:

- 1 meeting - with conversational assistant, native of language
- 1 meeting - with professor, for careful, individual work, drill, interrogation by both student and professor

In addition students would be required to spend a certain amount of preparation time in the language laboratory. Through experience, we may find that more or less should be done by controlled groups or individually; this would affect use of 2nd meeting of large group.

This program has been discussed at length by all members of the modern foreign language staff and accepted by them and by Dean Jones. The scheduling problem has been discussed with the Registrar, Mr. Evans, who thinks it feasible, since we would be grouping enough regular sections to fill one of the less crowded hours on the schedule. He recognizes that it will present some problems however.

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We had seriously considered trying to start such a program for the session of 1958-59, but after considering all the angles, such as commitment of several professors to complete the Ph.D., the large amount of work necessary to plan such a course, adapting the materials available, etc. we reached the conclusion that it would be better to aim for 1959-60, with some experimentation and gradual conversion in 1958-59 where possible. It appears that it would be almost necessary to prepare a syllabus of almost textbook proportions for each course. If possible it would be desirable to have one man start working on such a syllabus for each course, with some relief from teaching during the next session and(or) a grant to devote a part of his summer to it.

The advantages of such a program are apparent: economy of teaching hours as one man will handle large numbers in the general section meetings; increased interest thru lively program; increased cultural and liberal art values thru lectures and visual aids; closer individual work in the small, intimate meetings once a week with professor and once with foreign student. The disadvantages are the dangers of making the program too mechanical, of relying too much on standardization and impersonal mass methods. We think that the one small intimate meeting with a professor will counteract this, as it will actually give the student a more personal contact than he has at present.

The use of a language laboratory on a rather large scale is a natural requisite. We have been using tape recordings as well as records in the French program rather effectively, although we are hampered by the inadequacy of our space and our equipment -- all of the material used in class in first year and some in second year is available for hearing and repetition by the student. The staff in Spanish and German have expressed an interest to begin this semester such use of a language laboratory as soon as it is available. If we require language laboratory work by every student in modern foreign languages, the money Pritchard says is available will be inadequate to provide enough machines. If we put it on a voluntary basis we might get by if we did not use the dual head type of recorder which you found desirable in the Georgetown setup for general use. However, I agree with you: that is the desirable equipment. At least my study in the learned journals indicates that.

I think it very important, at this point, to point out that in a liberal arts college the practical aspect of learning to speak a language as a tool is only a part of our program. Learning to read the language and reading the literary works, getting to know another land, its people and its culture are more important and we must not let an enthusiasm for one phase of the program overshadow our cultural objective. The laboratory can aid us tremendously in our oral objectives but cannot do the other job for us.

cc - Dea. Jones, Wenger, Southard

J. E. Emley