

Russian Across the Curriculum: Models and Implementation  
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**My previous paper and the LAC web site**

At the 2012 I SCMLA conference in San Antonio I read a paper on this panel called “Current Issues in the Teaching of Russian across the Curriculum.” I discussed the historical background of Languages Across the Curriculum and some of the theoretical issues involved in teaching it. That paper is available at [LanguagesAcrossTheCurriculum.com](http://LanguagesAcrossTheCurriculum.com). Here I will just repeat a short comment on terminology and definitions: “[...]there are many terms that describe content and language integration. The three most popular are Languages Across the Curriculum, Content Based Instruction, and Content and Language Integrated Learning. Each of these terms is generally referred to by its abbreviation: LAC, CBI, and CLIL. Often LAC and CLIL are pronounced as acronyms.

The terms refer to three related but not identical curricular models. LAC generally means the use of a language other than English to teach courses outside of language and literature departments. CBI [...] signifies a curriculum that (according to Stephen Stryker and Betty Lou Leaver) "1) is based on a subject-matter core, 2) uses authentic languages and texts, and 3) is appropriate to the needs of specific groups of students" (Stryker and Leaver 1997, p 5). Finally, CLIL is the term favored over the past fifteen years or so in Europe and, increasingly, Asia and Latin America. According to Christiane Dalton-Puffer it 'can be described as an educational approach where curricular content is taught through the medium of a foreign language, typically to students participating in some form of mainstream education at the secondary, or tertiary level' (Dalton-Puffer 2011, p. 183)

## **The Trinity LAC Model**

At Trinity the teaching of content courses in languages other than English is referred to as Languages Across the Curriculum, which is the term we have used since the inception of our program. However, the more inclusive term CLIL would probably be more appropriate for what we are doing now. Trinity uses two basic approaches. The first is to offer courses in departments other than Modern Languages and Literatures that are taught either completely or partially in a second language; the second is to offer courses within the department of Modern Languages and Literatures, taught either partially or completely in one of our languages, whose subject matter extends beyond the teacher's original professional specialty.

## **Trinity Russian Strategy**

The Trinity Russian program includes three Languages Across the Curriculum courses: a one-credit Russian-language art history course taught in conjunction with a three-credit English-language course; a one-credit Russian-language culture course taught in conjunction with a three-credit English-language course; and a one-credit introductory Russian course with no prerequisite designed for students with a specialized need to learn some Russian. Graduates of that course have included a student who received a Fulbright grant to conduct research in Poland, and a student who joined the Peace Corps and was assigned to Mongolia. Our third-year, second-semester Russian course also integrates content and language insofar as it consists almost entirely of reading, writing about, and discussing articles from the Russian press related to the students' individual interests. Two recent graduates of this class focused on political and military subjects; one is about to receive his commission in the United States Navy, the other in the United States Marine Corps. Both had intended originally to serve in fields related to intelligence and security. Instead, they have been assigned, respectively, to surface warfare and flight training. These are good outcomes that undoubtedly reflect the needs of the

Navy and Marine Corps, but we would like the Russian program to provide such students with the best possibility to achieve their language-related goals.

All of these courses, including the English-language culture and art history courses, are taught either by me or by another member of the Russian section, which includes one full-time and one part-time teacher. Our intention is to expand content and language integrated learning. Prospects outside of the Russian program are limited, however, because the University has systematically replaced retiring Russian specialists in other departments with specialists in such fields as Latin American Studies and African Studies. When our professor of Russian history, who also taught courses in general European history, retired recently, he was replaced by a Germanist. We have encouraged the university to hire Russian specialists, but without much success to date (although that may change in light of recent events). In the meantime we are taking the following measures within our Russian program:

### **Self-contained one year language courses**

One positive development in recent years has been the small but steady presence at Trinity of heritage speakers and students from the former Soviet Union who want to take our courses. These students are capable of taking content courses in Russian. There have also been a number of incoming students who studied Russian either on their own or in summer programs because their local school districts never offered Russian, or stopped offering it. Many of these students do not need to start with first-semester Russian. We also have many students, such as a prospective medical student at present, who begin taking Russian late in their undergraduate careers with the hope of learning enough Russian to apply it in their professions. And, we still have a few students (more this year) who begin Russian in their first year of college with the intention of studying it for four years. To serve such a diverse group of students we need our year-long courses to be self contained. First-year students must get a thorough introduction to the grammar and a fair amount of vocabulary in one year, while students coming in at

higher levels must take courses that reflect their prior knowledge of Russian.

### **Use of the new Yale first-year textbook**

To achieve this goal we have switched this year from *Russian Stage One* Volumes 1 and 2, which in the past took us 3 semesters to complete and was followed by 2 semesters of *Russian Stage Two*, to the new textbook from Yale University Press, *Russian Full Circle*, whose authors claim that it “allows instructors to deliver in one academic year a full first-year Russian language curriculum” and “provides a needed alternative to the two-volume, densely packed first-year Russian textbooks currently on the market.” We believe that such a textbook will reduce the time that it takes to prepare continuing students for the use of Russian to study academic content; will allow students, and seniors in particular, to go on after one year and study Russian elsewhere in accordance with their own needs; will allow students who enter the program at the intermediate or advanced level to take courses that are not a continuation of the “Kevin” story; and allow the instructor more flexibility in these intermediate and advanced courses to differentiate instruction and introduce academic content.

*Russian Full Circle* provides dialogues and a “Culture” section at the end of each chapter but its principal method is to integrate the formal teaching of grammar into each lesson. Of course this is a controversial subject. In 1981 the influential second language acquisition specialist Stephen Krashen espoused methods based on the premise that “language will be learned inductively, that is, students will work out the correct form of the rule during the class activity” (142). In general he believed that non-classroom activities were most effective: “We have reached the conclusion,” he wrote, “that an interesting conversation in a second language, and reading something for pleasure, are excellent language lessons. This comes as no surprise to the millions of people who have acquired languages using only these 'methods,' and have acquired them very well” (167). Such views have become popular during the intervening decades, especially in the teaching of languages closer to English. We wish they

were true, because they would allow Russian students to begin taking content courses almost immediately. Experience, however, suggests that Slavic languages cannot be “acquired [...] very well” in this manner by adult speakers of English. A recent article in the *Slavic and East European Journal* by Oscar Swan has generated considerable debate by asserting that “[t]he achievement of proficiency by English-speaking adults in a morphologically complex language does not necessarily come of its own accord over time, however long one spends at it, merely from a learner's hearing 'meaningful input' and putting it into use in 'communicative situations.' Teaching methodologies that hold otherwise may possibly have short-term success, but in the long run can be expected to fail with many if not most learners.” He concludes by arguing that acquisition of a language “is not dependent on aptitude or opportunity, but must be carefully taught and laboriously learned” (130). There are advantages and disadvantages to all methods but we believe that the use of *Russian Full Circle* will bring us closer to our goal of content and language integration.

### **Revise the Major**

Our first step has been to revise the Russian Major at Trinity. We are in the process of doing this now. We envision a Russian Area Studies Major, similar to majors that have been created at other institutions in recent years, that requires fewer traditional courses in Russian and, regrettably but unavoidably, fewer literature courses, but includes courses from other departments, LAC courses, and various independent study options that require the use of Russian as a research.

### **Determine student interests**

The next step in our implementation of content and language integration is to determine what subjects the students would like to study in a language other than English. Our Department of Modern Languages and Literatures submits a long assessment report every year (written by me) that includes

exit questionnaires from all graduating seniors. Two things are clear from these questionnaires over the past five years. First, students do not see an inevitable connection between the study of a language and the thorough study of literature written in that language; second, they would like to see a variety of academic subjects taught in different languages. This year's seniors asked for "more German folklore and film classes, more French news and current events, more classical Chinese, a wider range of classes in Spanish including culture and special topics, more advanced French courses not involving literature, and more interdisciplinary courses involving German, Russian, and French." The 2010 students mentioned "music, political science, history, culture courses, gender studies courses, country-specific courses in the case of Spanish, religion, and internships." Virtually every one of these subjects can be taught by members of our department.

The goal now, at least for the Russian program, is to determine the interests of our students at the beginning of their careers rather than at the end of their final semester. We have begun giving short surveys to our first-year students, asking them to list their academic and professional goals that might be related to the study of Russian. Two of this year's students expressed a desire to read the Russian classics in the original and we certainly intend to keep literature in the curriculum, but others mentioned the desire to work in the diplomatic corps or corporate mediation, work in the intelligence community, study the Slavic musical tradition, become a foreign service officer, and become a translator.

The final stage is to expand our teaching repertoire within the competence of our instructors but beyond the traditional boundaries of literature, culture, and film; and to introduce materials that relate to the interests of the students in courses for which they receive credit. This brings us to a discussion of course models.

## **Models**

In my talk two years ago I spoke about course models that are being taught around the world in various languages. A list of these courses is appended to my talk and is still available, as I said earlier, at [LanguagesAcrossTheCurriculum.com](http://LanguagesAcrossTheCurriculum.com). This year I will confine myself primarily to Russian models that are in use now.

### **Trinity: ML&L teachers teach LAC classes**

I will begin with Trinity. As I noted earlier, in our Russian program we teach three LAC classes. They are all 1 credit classes. In the case of Culture and Art History, students take a 3 credit class in English and meet one hour a week to discuss supplemental Russian readings in Russian. This companion course model was the original model at Trinity, and teachers in the department of Modern Languages and Literatures teach them on many different subjects that lie outside the traditional boundaries of language and literature. Some of these courses have become 1-credit and 3-credit stand-alone courses. Three examples that seem relevant for the Russian model are courses on Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico, taught in each case by natives of those countries. There are few if any other courses in the Trinity Curriculum that involve these countries. The instructors introduce materials from many academic disciplines including literature but also music and the fine arts, history, anthropology, sociology, and political science, to provide an overview of the countries. This model might generate a number of Russian and East European Area Studies courses.

### **Trinity: New curriculum, and interdisciplinary cluster**

Trinity is currently involved in the implementation of a new curriculum that took us three years to create and involves entirely new General Education categories. A number of these categories, such as a mandatory 6-credit First Year Experience, will lend themselves to content and language integrated learning. The Russian program is focusing right now on a curricular element called the

Interdisciplinary Cluster, which students fulfill “by successfully completing three courses (totaling no fewer than 9 credit hours) from three disciplines in at least two disciplinary groups.” According to our new Bulletin, the Interdisciplinary Clusters “hold great potential to integrate Trinity’s liberal arts and pre-professional programs and to encourage productive collisions among disciplines.” The Russian Program is currently helping to develop a Cluster called “Wealth and Prosperity” together with a French professor from my department (Dr. Nanette LeCoat, one of the founders of our LAC program) and professors from the departments of Economics, Finance, and Religion. Each of us will teach a course that treats wealth and prosperity from his or her own disciplinary perspective. Students will be required in each class to make use of material from other classes. My plan is to design a version of our 19<sup>th</sup> century literature survey that focuses on the subjects of wealth and prosperity, and list it both as a literature-in-translation course and a Russian course. Students who receive Russian credit will be required, as they are now, to read some works in the original and use Russian as a research language, but also to read some authentic material in Russian from the other disciplines, which I will help them find in consultation with the my colleagues.

Next I will address some initiatives from other universities. I have no first-hand experiences of these programs but I have researched them via their web sites and have found a number of interesting approaches.

### **Harvard/Yale/Princeton/Brown**

Among the Ivy League schools, the Harvard, Yale and Princeton Russian programs offer courses called, respectively, “Advanced Russian: Introduction to the Language of Social Sciences and the Media”; “Advanced Russian Conversation through Contemporary Media”; and “Advanced Russian through History and Culture.” Harvard describes its course as an “Introduction to the language of Russian newspapers, journals, and historical writing. Basic vocabulary for such areas as current events,



including politics, history, economics, military issues, society, and the environment.” Descriptions at the other universities are similar. Brown, meanwhile, offers a course called “New Russia and Ukraine: Culture and Politic [sic] in Post-Soviet Space.” The online course list for Spring, 2015 does not list a prerequisite or indicate if Russian will be used. It does say “Politic” rather than “Politics.” It also lists the instructor, Sergei N. Khrushchev, which suggests that students will be able to use their Russian to some extent in the course.

### **UT-Arlington**

UT-Arlington provides a strong example of content and language integration. It has a two-semester sequence of courses on translation. It also has several courses cross-listed in Russian and other departments, including “Political Systems of Eastern and Central Europe” which stipulates that “Students receiving credit in Russian will complete projects using the Russian language”; “Propaganda and Ideology in Soviet Art and Literature,” which notes that “Students majoring in Russian read some texts in the original”; three other Political Science courses with similar Russian requirements; and two Business courses with Russian-language prerequisites.

### **University of Oregon**

The University of Oregon offers a History course called “Soviet Culture: Intellectuals, Ideas, and the Arts from Stalin to Gorbachev,” that lists several possible final paper assignments, including one “for readers of Russian only: a study of one of the major intellectual journals, *Novyi mir*, *Literaturnaia gazeta*, or a specialized journal (history, ethnography, etc.) over the course of a decade or two. Your aim should be to characterize and interpret the changes in content and editorial stance in the period that you have chosen.”

## **UCLA**

UCLA has an extensive list of “Russian for Native Speakers” courses, including courses for “students who speak Russian but have difficulty reading and writing or cannot read and write” and for “students who can speak, read, and write in Russian, and who have reached a high level of language proficiency.” There are established courses on “Literature and Film,” “Russian National Identity,” “Russian for Social and Cultural Studies” (which focuses on history) and “Business Russian.” There is also a “Special Topics and projects” rubric that allows students to design their own courses.

## **The University of Wisconsin-Madison**

Students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison can major in “Russian language and civilization,” which requires them to take a number of traditional Russian courses but also “9 credits in area studies courses in which they use Russian as a research language.” These courses are from virtually every Humanities and Social Science department in the university. The description of the major specifies that “[f]or all these courses, students must write a 10-15 page paper in English in which they use Russian sources and cite them in Russian [...] Students give the paper to the professor of the course to fulfill course requirements and bring a copy of the paper to the advisor for the Russian major for endorsement for the 9-credit area studies requirement. Students who do not bring their papers for endorsement will not get the area studies requirement filled! In addition to the courses listed above, other courses may be available to fill this requirement. Bring a copy of the course syllabus to the Russian advisor for approval.”

## **Oxford**

Finally, Oxford University in England allows students to earn a major that combines the study of a modern language with another discipline. The History Department says, for example, that “This

course is suitable for students wishing to combine the study of one European language with History,” and the Linguistics Department notes that “This course allows students to study one modern language alongside linguistics, the study of language itself.”

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