

## The UMUC Foreign Language Program in Europe and Downrange

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On my library shelves in Frankfurt is a curious relic of bygone European Division days, one which I may claim to have rescued from the dustbin of history. For when I was clearing out my Heidelberg office in July of 2011 and asked to whom I should pass it on, the reply I received was: “Why don’t you take it yourself, if you want to? It’ll only be thrown out later.”

The relic in question is a ledger, its pages lined as in an accounts book, containing hand-written records of all applications for foreign language teaching in Europe over a period of forty years. Measuring 30 cm by 16.5 cm and with a timeworn black cover bearing the inscription, in uneven block capitals: “LANGUAGE TEACHER APPLICATIONS”, it contains 150 double pages, each one with 30 records, so some 4,500 in all. Each entry is date-stamped and, besides the applicant’s name, lists the language or languages in question, the education center(s) where the candidate was likely to teach – and whether the candidate was approved or not.

The first entry is dated December 12, 1961: a lieutenant-colonel and chaplain in the Army applied to teach German at Toul-Rosières (anyone remember teaching there?) – application successful. Overwhelmingly, the candidates were civilians, however. The last entry is Fred Tadros, who was approved to teach Arabic in K-Town and Heidelberg, application dated February 7, 2002. I remember Fred very well from my time as overseer of, *inter alia*, the foreign languages program (2005-11). An excellent language teacher, he used to address his students as *taliban*, which unnerved many initially – until they learned that the word simply means *students* in Arabic.

By no means all applicants were approved, by the way; I see next to one applicant (who shall remain anonymous) the remark, in ballpoint pen: “interviewed” and then, in pencil: “No, No, No, No!!!”

My name is in there too, approved to teach French and German in Munich on September 11, 1979. I never taught French, and I never taught in Munich (my main subject area was English composition and literature, and my happy hunting ground the Rhine-Main area). But I did teach German language courses fifty-odd times, to include some DE classes, as well as German Life and Culture courses. (I even taught German after leaving UMUC – to refugees after the massive influx into Germany in the fall of 2015. One day, an interesting roundabout connection to UMUC’s downrange program popped up: during a class an Afghani refugee produced from his wallet his treasured base pass, which he still possessed from working for the US Military in Afghanistan.)

When I supervised the foreign language program in Europe, we offered eleven languages: German, Italian, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Modern Greek, Dutch, Serbo-Croatian, Arabic, Albanian, and Turkish. (Latin was also offered once, but the course did not go.) The

abovementioned ledger of applications lists more languages, however, to include Icelandic, Russian, Hungarian, Polish, Czech, and Ukrainian. I recall the first three being on the schedule, but I'm pretty sure the latter three were never taught. In general, the health of the language program in Europe bore witness to students' curiosity to learn about the culture of the lands to which they were posted.

My own records show that in 2007, when I became assistant dean, there were 70 to 80 language teachers working for UMUC Europe, the biggest group teaching German, followed by Italian then Spanish. Languages were by no means taught only in their country of origin: German was taught in the UK and the Balkans, and students took Spanish everywhere because of its importance in the United States.

Working with the foreign language staff was always full of surprises, most of them pleasant ones. In the spring of 2006, I spent a week organizing workshops for the Italian faculty in Naples and Aviano. Teaching methods demonstrated in the workshops varied from sophisticated application of laptop and projector to using *commedia dell'arte* hand puppets to teach dialogs. What price pedagogical uniformity? The week's program included tours of Roman ruins on the coast by Naples, the usual conversation-rich, two-hour-plus Italian lunches, and sitting together of an evening watching Roberto Benigni recite Dante on Italian TV – my enjoyment little impaired by the fact that I understood only about 10%.

We also discussed the introduction of the new textbook, chosen collectively by the Italian faculty over the previous few months. As assistant dean, I attempted to introduce this principle not just in languages: that faculty – collectively – select course textbooks should the need for new ones arise. That same year, we conducted a massive operation to select a new German textbook, involving mailing the ten candidates by APO around Germany and, through face-to-face meetings and online discussions, whittling the number down until only one remained. (As a footnote, my records show that enrollments in German language courses still accounted for 4% of all European enrollments that year of 2006.)

A smaller operation was conducted to choose a new Spanish textbook. For the “minor languages” individual instructors made suggestions, which it was always necessary to vet, however: at one extreme, a suggestion for a Modern Greek text proved to be little more than a tourist's phrasebook; at the other, an “Albanian for beginners” text used an Albanian translation of Shakespeare's *King Lear* as a basis to teach the language, presumably on the assumption that English speakers would already be familiar with the bard's work. Why *King Lear*? “O reason not the need!”

As for that ledger of language applications: it is in safe hands here in Frankfurt. However, should there be an official UMUC archive of overseas memorabilia in the States, whose guardians may consider it to be of sufficient value, I'd be willing to send it by registered mail to the appropriate address.

