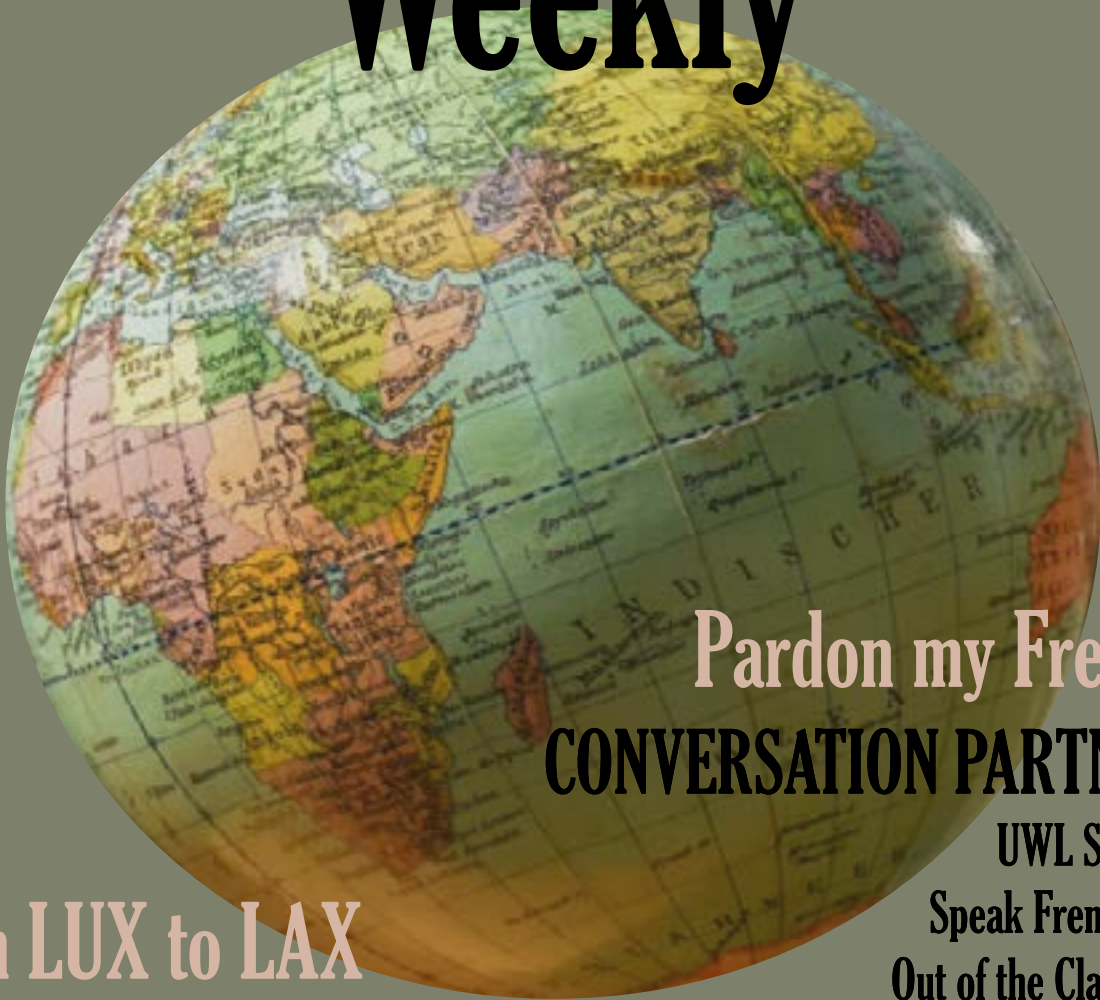


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Edition I

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Pardon my French!
CONVERSATION PARTNERS

**UWL Students
Speak French In &
Out of the Classroom**

From LUX to LAX

DR. DANY JACOB

**On Storytelling &
Collaborative Teaching**

Editor in Chief — Lauren LaLiberty

Created for ENG 327 — Dr. Lei Zhang

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The University of Wisconsin - La Crosse offers a wide variety of academic departments and disciplines, but one of its lesser known programs is French. Read more to find out what makes French so special at UWL!





About the Author

Lauren LaLiberty

Lauren is a senior at UWL majoring in English (Writing & Rhetoric Studies) and French, and minoring in Linguistics. On campus, she is involved in the Conversation Partners program, and in Spring 2025 she will be an intern with the French program focused on organizing a French film festival. In her free time, she likes to read books, do crafts, and watch movies with her friends. She also likes to travel when she can; she has made it to France, Scotland, Switzerland, and Costa Rica already, but has plans to explore more places after she graduates in May 2025.

In the photo above, she was hugging a tree she found on Oregon's Pacific Coast, which was one of her favorite places to visit!



A glimpse into French class

From LUX to LAX

An interview with Dr. Dany Jacob, Assistant Professor of French

“I LOVE STORIES,” says Dr. Dany Jacob, smiling. We’re sitting in a small cubicle in Cartwright, his temporary home until renovations in Graff are complete. Despite the short stay, Dr. Jacob has done what he can to make the space his own—a printed, colorful poster of the Eiffel Tower is pinned to the wall next to his computer. Nearby, a wooden plaque warning students they will be fined for complaints hangs above my chair.

Dr. Jacob himself is clothed in a neat suit and tie, a fashion norm for the professor. I recall a comment from one of his students, Hannah Griffin. “He always dresses nicely,” she notes, “and that makes me happy.”

Despite being shoved into a little box in an unfamiliar building, Dr. Jacob doesn’t appear bothered. He sits across from me for our interview, cross-legged, appearing comfortable in the spotlight. His voice, accented with something I can’t quite place, lilts as he reiterates his *raison d’être*: “I love storytelling.”

The professor's accent speaks to years of growing up in a multilingual and multicultural environment, which influences both his teaching methods and personal life still today. As an Assistant Professor of French at UWL, Dr. Jacob offers a distinct educational style in an institution where English-language, American homogeneity is the norm.

Language learning has always been a vital aspect of Dr. Jacob's life. Born in Luxembourg City, Luxembourg (a linguistically rich area in the heart of Western Europe), his first language was French, which was spoken at home by his immigrant mother. In school, he then acquired Luxembourgish (a "happy mix" of German and French, he says), German, academic French, and English. He comments that he failed his English exam in school, but in speaking to him now, I notice that his English is excellent. He is a living testament to the fact that language acquisition is not linear, nor is it easy, but it can be done: a wonderful piece of advice to any individual, student or not, who hopes to expand their linguistic horizons.

During his undergrad, Dr. Jacob then learned Portuguese, Ancient Greek (not spoken, but written), and Italian; and while teaching in Michigan, Dr. Jacob began his Spanish journey, which he learned from a colleague. Now, at UWL, Dr. Jacob aims to learn Russian and Chinese, two foreign languages present in the Global and Cultural Languages Department. This continuous cycle of community-based language learning connects to one of his

primary tenets in the classroom: collaboration. Dr. Jacob's teaching style revolves around collaborative, project-based assignments that take students out of the traditional college classroom and into the multilingual world around them. Kylie Homar, a French student at UWL that has had Dr. Jacob for a number of French courses, comments that, "he has a Freshh energy in the classroom for a college professor." Kylie wishes to add the capital "F" and the additional "h" to emphasize the novelty and freshness—so to speak—of Dr. Jacob's presence in the classroom.



Dr Jacob teaching

One such assignment was a translation of letters written by a French-speaking pioneer, which were completed by students in FRE 317 (Practice in Translation) last spring. In collaboration with UWL Special Collections and the archives in Platteville, students were provided photocopies of the original letters written by an individual named Mary Anna Fisher to her daughter, all in French, with varying levels of readability. Students were then instructed to work through the letters with a partner to provide a translation in both modern French (with accurate grammar, syntax, etc) and one in English.

Mass
ter

à la pointe St Ignace le 15 de May 1838

Ma chère enfant

J'ai reçu ta lettre datée de 6
de ce couvent qui a été une grande consolation d'apprendre
que vous vous portez toute bien pour moi j'ai été pressé
deux semaines à Mackinac j'ai été me faire saigner et
je suis revenues dimanche dernier en parfaite santé
j'ai écrit de Mackinac à toi et Eliza que j'espère que
tu aura reçus, je ne t'écris pas une long lettre pour
cette fois car l'occasion presse je te dirais seulement
une nouvelle qui vas beaucoup te surprendre c'est
que la vieille cateche vas se marier avec Henry ^{valiencau}
ils on été publiés dimanche dernier tu peux te faire
un idée quel sorte de ménage que se va être il
et un recueil de ses enfants et elle qui ne sais pas
comme ta grand mere lui a présenté tout cela ma
elle dit qu'il lui fait un mari, tu me feras bien
plaisir ma chère si tu veux m'envoyer des graines de
jardin et pour me coiff j'en ai un grand besoin
car j'ai seulement ceux que tu m'as fait, dit
Eliza que je lui envoie bien vite je suppose
bien que ta grand mere et notre tante vous
embrassent tous, ainsi que ~~de~~ revenant Mr Bondue
qui t'assure de ses respect pour le temps que
je va être chez nous je te dirai cela à la prochaine
j'ai que je t'embrasse avec mes chères petits enfants
pour moi te. Que mere Mary Anna Fisher

In this project, students were able to tell the stories of little-heard historical voices, and make them more widely accessible via translation to the archival community of Wisconsin. Collaborative, beyond-the-classroom projects such as this are common occurrences in Dr. Jacob's French classes.

Hannah Griffin, a student who took the translation course and worked on the collaborative translation project, appreciates that Dr. Jacob "involved other programs to educate people about French." Both UWL students and the archival community of Wisconsin benefited from this project, something that makes Dr. Jacob's teaching practices all the more compelling! Any motivated student can speak French—but the guiding hand of a quality professor can fulfill their potential even more, and teach us that there are many more stories to tell.

Dr. Jacob's personal life also displays his admiration for collaborative storytelling. In September, he took on a role in the UWL Arts & Music Department's Impressionist Soiree, in which he read poems in French

to an accompaniment of flute and piano. Lit by the stage lights and guided along by the delicate melodies and harmonies of a Debussy composition, Dr. Jacob was clearly in his element. He stood tall and confident, and it seemed to me, a mere audience member, that he took great pride standing upon the stage reciting poetry in his first language. This soiree, he reflects, was the "perfect marriage" of arts, literature, and music—a lifelong passion that began in one of the poorer districts of Luxembourg City, where a young Dany Jacob decided to pursue the arts track in school.

Dr. Jacob's positive contribution to the UWL French program is undisputed. He hopes that learning French will help students "open doors" to other places, both "intellectually and physically". His personal passion for art and storytelling has created something special in the UWL Global Cultures and Languages Department, and any student is sure to find something fascinating in one of his courses.

Dr. Sierra Rooney, Dr. Dany Jacob, Dr. Jonathon Borja, and Dr. Mary Tollefson at the Impressionist Soiree



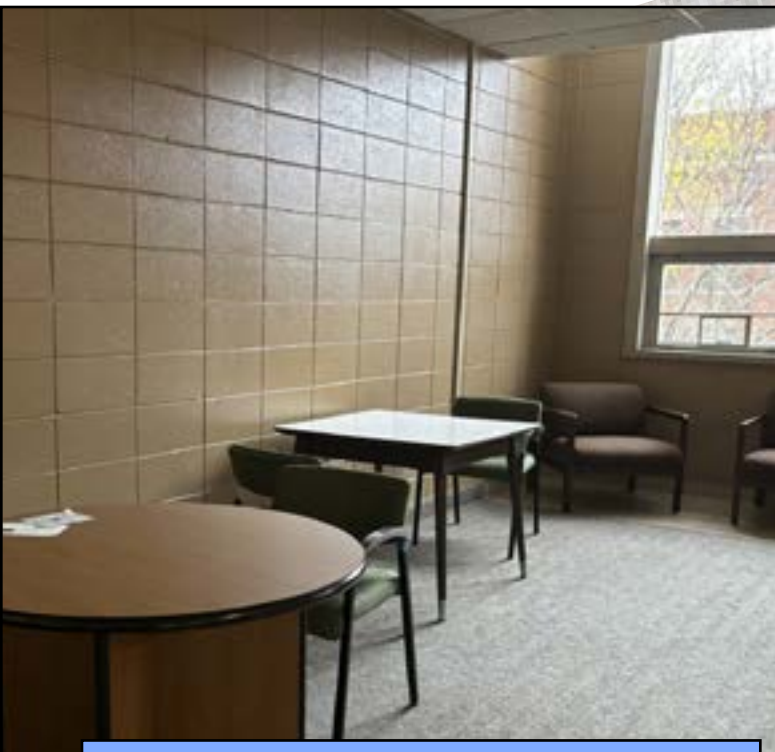
Pardon My French!

What is UWL's Conversation Partner Program?

THE NORTH END of the third floor of UWL's Cartwright Center is buzzing with activity. UWL students gather in a small carpeted area just past the stairs, which hosts a collection of small tables and cheap upholstered chairs, each accompanied by a printed out QR code urging participants to "Sign in for Conversation Partners." The small windows and faded, pale orange walls might appear gloomy, but the lively conversations within this academic parlor give the space a new sense of life.

This corner of Cartwright is the home of this semester's Conversation Partners program. Despite being ousted from its original home in the Language Resource Center (the LRC, for short) on the third floor of Graff Main Hall, Conversation Partners is still going strong. A division of the Global Cultures and Languages Department, Conversation Partners offers foreign language learners at UWL an opportunity to speak their target language outside of the classroom.

The director of the LRC and the primary facilitator of Conversation Partners, Dane Devetter, is no stranger to language learning; he was hired after participating in the Fullbright Program, where he served as an English teaching assistant in Germany. Dane looked forward to this new position back home, where he could develop a "social hub" for those engaged in language learning. The Conversation Partners program is one of the many social activities that occur through the LRC, which, Dane believes, provides "a chance for students proficient in various languages to put into practice their skills."



Conversation partner tables in Cartwright



The LRC in Graff

Lower-level students in these various language courses—such as French, German, Spanish, Russian, and Chinese—come to Cartwright once a week to spend fifteen minutes practicing their target language. Most of these students are in 100-level and 200-level language courses. Their partners are upper level language learners, who are often in 300-level courses or native speakers; they are “experts”, in other words.

Julia Bright, a fourth year at UWL, is one such expert. She participated in Conversation Partners for two semesters as a lower-level student and two semesters as an upper-level student. Back when she began as a lower-level student, Conversation Partners was located in the hallway next to the LRC in Graff Main Hall, where it will continue once HVAC renovations are completed. As someone who has been on both

sides of the language learning spectrum, Julia observes that Conversation Partners is a “mutually beneficial” experience, providing upper-level students the opportunity to teach and explain the concepts lower-level students do not know.

Some lower-level students admit that they occasionally feel stressed and put on-the-spot in larger classroom environments, where making a mistake in front of both the professor and all of their classmates can be anxiety-inducing. The more intimate setting of these weekly conversations, according to upper-level French speaker Kyla Dickson, offers a “low pressure environment” where students are allowed, and even encouraged, to make mistakes.

Conversation Partners has made a positive impact on Paige Huling, a third year student studying Theater at UWL. During one week this past semester, for example, Paige (who is currently enrolled in French 102) went over the vocabulary for colors in French with her upper-level partner. Situated at a circle table near a small window, Paige's partner pointed at various objects around them and asked, in French, "what color is this?". It was then Paige's turn to respond. "C'est vert!" (this is green), "c'est rouge!" (this is red), and even "c'est orange!" (this is orange, referring to the questionably painted walls beside them). Another week, Paige and her partner reviewed basic get-to-know-you questions, which would be vital in an interaction with a native French speaker. One thing Paige appreci-

ates about the program is that she is able to "take the content from the classroom and apply it to real life," such as knowing how to ask someone where they grew up, or if they go to school.

Conversation Partners offers an exciting opportunity for both lower-level and upper-level students engaged in language learning at UWL. The combination of academic work alongside social interaction is a unique experience; any prospective student, whether they are specializing in a foreign language or not, might consider enrolling in a language course in order to take part in such a special program.

Some conversation partners



Acknowledgements

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An additional thanks to Dr. Dany Jacob for allowing me to share your story for this project!

A final thank you to my professor, Dr. Lei Zhang, who guided me along with this project and helped it become what it is today.

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Page 10: Dane Devetter

Merci beaucoup !
Thank you very much!