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## FLARR Pages #5: FLARR: a Beginning Agenda for the Next 25 Years

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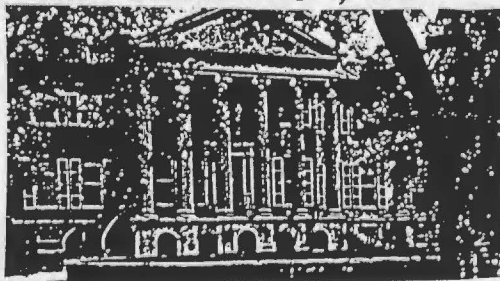
### **"FLARR: A Beginning Agenda for the Next 25 Years"**

-Thomas C. Turner, University of Minnesota, Morris

In the Fall of 1997 the Foreign Language Association of the Red River celebrates its 25th Anniversary. We are the oldest collaborative group of its kind in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

In mid-March I had a chance to attend the formation of a new collaborative group, an association of foreign language instructors of the COPLAC institutions, the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges, and the discussions there stimulated my thinking about FLARR and its future agenda. Many of the challenges highlighted at the COPLAC meeting are ones that we also face.

#### **COPLAC AT THE COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON, S.C.**



Charleston: A Historic City of Mansions, Gates, and Portals. The college is located in the downtown historic district.

COPLAC met at the beautiful College of Charleston, S.C. March 15-16, in shirt sleeve weather and with the azaleas in full bloom. The following topics were discussed as significant general concerns at all levels.

**Building Internal Support.** The participants felt that much should be done in the languages to build internal support for their programs. A well-designed mission statement or vision statement could be of great use in eliciting such support.

**Thinking Laterally in Program Design.** The foreign languages have much to offer to other disciplines both in content and skills. More discussions should take place between disciplines and, where possible, within communities and regions about needs.

**Developing Effective Programs at All Levels and Evaluating.** The issue of assessment and its uses was an important one at the COPLAC conference. Positive, helpful feedback is needed to fine tune programs not only in skills but also in culture and literature. What skills and knowledge should be introduced at which levels to ensure, for instance, significant and well-written papers at the advanced level? The nuts and bolts issues of student knowledge and accomplishment as well as measurement of such are paramount

concerns.

**Consulting between High Schools and Colleges.** An important area for the future is the fit between colleges and high schools. What is taught in each and how can a smooth transition be ensured for students?

**Choosing the Most Effective Use of Technologies.** The important question about technology is what are its most effective uses for foreign language teaching? What should be used in class? Out of class? Should technologies be used for presentation, for interactivity, or both (and when)? How can technology be used to extend our programs (e.g. to reach heritage students more effectively, to help students with disparate levels in the skills, to add a cultural dimension, to challenge false beginners, to teach style in literature, to help students maintain language over the Summer, to train students about different regional accents, to support less commonly taught languages, etc.) How can technology be used to solve the problems of our programs?

**Protecting Considerable Investments in French and German.** The glass is half full. Students need to be convinced of the value of the study of French and German. They need to know that there are no "easy" and "difficult" languages (they are all easy and difficult in different ways). Colleges should counsel undecided students to take French or German as well as students who may prefer Spanish, but must wait considerable time to get into a Spanish class (language is lost). It makes no sense on the college level to shift resources from senior staff in

French and German to temporary staff in Spanish. What does that do for the overall reputation of the institution? Administrators should value French and German now as special "niches" for their institutions which assure variety and attract students. Important investments have been made and at this time they must be nurtured.

**Balancing Language, Culture, and Literature.** This issue is a controversial one at the college level. Simply put, students must see the value of language study as a skill, possibly for future employment or travel, or as an entrance into another culture, and then, when there are sufficient numbers, they will populate the Seventeenth Century literature courses and the advanced area studies courses for the kind of deep understanding that they need.

**Preparing Excellent Teachers.** An important challenge is to prepare excellent teachers both on the college and high school level.

**Placing Students Properly.** This continues to be a perennial problem in high schools and colleges.

**Aiding Students with Handicaps.** The need for specialized programs in this area and new laws in many states make this a national concern.

**Continuing Effective Collaboration and Developing New Organizations.** There is strength in numbers and variety of points of view in differing contexts. This type of communication is crucial.

These are just a few of the areas that will continue to be challenges for us at FLARR over our next 25 years.