Professional Development Internal Review, PhD Program in French
(Current Students, 2014-2015)

To assess the professional development student representatives who serve on the Executive Committee developed a survey after a conversation with students and input from the Executive Committee faculty. Four distinct areas have been defined as essential to students’ professionalization: teaching training, department activities, research development, and preparation for the job market. The survey was conducted by students’ representative and elicited complete responses from 23 students. In total 27 students were responding, a very high number for a program with less than 50 students currently enrolled.

Teaching Training

Most students feel that current preparation for teaching they receive at CUNY colleges and the Graduate Center is insufficient or inadequate. Indeed, for the last three years students were attending mandatory lectures conducted by ILTEC. Students strongly object to the essentially theoretical approach to teaching language that doesn’t address practical matters that need to be discussed before a rookie instructor enters a classroom. *The French program is addressing this issue in three separate but complementary ways. In addition to pairing a rookie teacher with an accomplished one, the program organizes in late April 2015 visits to Hunter College language classes taught by experienced instructors. This activity will be complemented by a hands-on workshop in mid-May. Experienced students will demonstrate their teaching skills and share practical advice with newly minted GTF and students who wish to improve their teaching skills.*

Department Activities

Overall students feel involved in the intellectual and administrative life of the French Program. They express satisfaction with serving on the four standing committees (executive, admissions, faculty, and curriculum). A few students write that they don’t have a strong grounding on the running of the program because they didn’t make an effort to get involved. Most students expressed satisfaction with the organization of lectures and conferences organized by the Program.

Research development

Students’ answers are based on individual experiences that vary immensely. One student recognizes Program’s recent efforts to mobilize students to apply for funding. A few students acknowledge faculty help in writing abstracts and/or reviewing papers they presented at conferences. Other students would like to see more workshops about grant writing. Most students would like to receive more guidance and help from faculty in publishing their work. Practically all students complain about insufficient funds to cover skyrocketing costs of attending conferences.

Preparation for the job market

Again students’ answers are based on individual experiences and hopes that vary immensely. One respondent would like the French program to organize a workshop about
non academic positions that are available to individuals with PhD in French literature and culture. Most respondents wish to receive more help in preparing for an academic job search. However, only a few students have reached the stage of actively looking for a teaching position. Those who are currently seeking a university position write in their individual comments about the guidance they received from their advisors and other faculty in writing their cover letters and preparing for the interviews at the Modern Language Association conference, a national “academic job fair.” A few students recognize the importance and immense help of mock interviews organized by the French program. I am convinced that in 2014-2015 academic year our program’s collective efforts has helped a student finishing her dissertation to secure a tenure track teaching position at a first rate research institution.