

# Remy Attig, B.A. French and Spanish, 2006

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*“You have to get on and pedal. Sometimes you’ll fall, but if you don’t get on, you’ll never get comfortable.”*



When he enrolled at WKU, Remy Attig had recently returned from living in the Dominican Republic and had spoken Spanish most of his life. Since French is an important language in the Americas, he wanted to add it to his linguistic repertoire. In the summer after his freshman year, he followed his interest in French and took a short trip to Montreal and fell in love with the city. The following year he did a study abroad and learned about the translation and interpreting industries and decided to major in French and minor in Spanish to refine his language skills. He later immigrated to Canada where he lived and worked in bilingual and Francophone contexts for 13 years. Today, he is an assistant professor of Spanish at Bowling Green State University.

WKU’s language programs were small and Attig benefitted from strong relationships with his professors. Consequently, in the French major the professors often tailored the course offerings to balance their own interests and those of the small cohort of students. According to Attig, he is confident that his own interest in Canada and in translation is what led to Drs. Egloff and Love to teach courses on those topics during his BA program.

During Attig’s undergrad, he worked full time and wasn’t able to enjoy all of the academic life on campus as he might have liked. Nevertheless, there were two activities that he tried never to miss, namely the French coffee hour and the movie nights. French coffee hour was an informal activity that Attig organized with several other French majors, minors, and Francophone students in other programs as an extension of the formally-organized French club events. Once a week, after class, students would gather to talk about whatever they wanted, but it had to be in French. They were a small group, but it allowed students to improve their fluency by discussing topics outside the scope of classroom themes, like dating, politics, music, etc. Similarly, the movie nights

organized by the department gave Attig an insight into what was happening in the cultural scenes of the Spanish and French-speaking worlds. In a time before Netflix, it was a crucial window into the cultures he was studying.

In addition to extracurriculars, Attig additionally had some interesting international opportunities. He had a unique opportunity to intern with a Bloc Québécois member of the Canadian parliament during the summer in which marriage equality became federal law in Canada. His internship, completely in French, allowed him to research policy related to official bilingualism in Canada, and linguistic demographics in Quebec. Furthermore, he gained insight into an aspect of Québécois identity that is often misunderstood from the outside, the desire for independence from the rest of Canada. This concrete French-language work experience expanded on Attig's language and literature courses at WKU and gave him Canadian work experience, which helped him to get a job teaching advanced English to government employees upon moving to Canada two years later.

There were a number of factors that affected Attig's decision to go graduate school. He first began teaching Spanish as a tutor in high school. During his years at WKU, he continued tutoring and also taught classes for Bowling Green-Warren County Community Education. Upon moving to Canada, he began teaching English as a second language. Attig primarily decided to go to graduate school because he enjoyed teaching languages and thought that he would enjoy teaching in a more specialized and advanced context. With a specific interest in translation and bilingual/multilingual communities, pursuing a PhD in Spanish and Translation Studies at the bilingual (French/English) University of Ottawa was a logical fit for Attig. During his graduate school years, he added his three primary languages together and taught Spanish as a second language to native speakers of both English and French.

Attig believes there are a number of reasons students should consider majoring or minoring in a language: if one considers the soft skills first, learning another language and culture teaches students to see things differently. By building relationships with people who have a different worldview, students can learn to appreciate things from more than one angle. Attig explains that the ability to reflect and see things from a different point of view has never been more important than it is now. The US has become ever more polarized and he believes that much of this polarization is due to the inability of people to see things through others' eyes. Similarly, the ability to think critically about the information that is presented to students can help them assess reality and separate it from false rhetoric.

Attig states that from a practical angle, globalization is here. In a post-COVID-19 world, employers know that working remotely is the new normal. Since employers can look literally anywhere in the world to hire for positions, speaking more than one language is essential. Many students around the world learn English very well; if Americans don't prioritize acquiring fluency in other languages, they will be at a disadvantage when it comes to employability.

Attig gives important advice on language learning: according to him, his students who struggle most are those who want to focus on rules and "get it right." "That's important," he says, "but learning a language is like riding a bike. One can't just read a book about riding a bike and then expect to do it flawlessly. You have to get on and pedal. Sometimes you'll fall, but if you don't get on, you'll never get comfortable."

