

Two Decades of Romanian Teaching at the University of Los Angeles, California

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This article describes the Romanian lectureship at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), in the period of 1990–2010 (see Gălățeanu-Fârnoagă 2000, Gălățeanu-Fârnoagă 2008). The following areas are analyzed: course offerings, core faculty, students, textbooks, and general methodology.

Course offerings

Courses in Romanian language, culture, literature, and folklore were first taught systematically at UCLA from 1974 to 1986 by visiting Fulbright scholars from Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, and Iași. The Fulbright exchanges were discontinued during the last years of communism, but in the 1990's the Romanian program was re-established as a part-time lectureship.

The following three courses are usually taught during the regular academic year: *Elementary Romanian* (Ro 101), *An Introduction to Romanian Civilization* (Ro 90), and *A Survey of Romanian Literature* (Ro 152). Before 2003 a second-year language course entitled *Advanced Romanian* (Ro 102) was also offered, in alternation with *Elementary Romanian*. Beginning with 2003, a two-year cycle of *Advanced Romanian Language Instruction Tutorials* (Ro 187 A-B-C-D-E-F and Ro 187 G-I-J-K-L-M) has replaced Ro 102¹.

During the summer, students can take an intensive *Elementary Romanian* course (Ro 103), which covers the same language material, in the same number of hours, as Ro 101.

Two broader courses which include Romania are *Culture and Society in Central and Eastern Europe* (CEE STD 91) and *Women and Literature in Southeastern Europe* (HNRS 165).

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¹ The *Advanced Romanian Language Instruction Tutorials* have been funded by a U.S. Department of Education Title VI grant.

At UCLA the academic year is divided into three ten-week quarters. *Elementary Romanian* meets 5 hours a week for three quarters (Ro 101A, 101B, and 101C). It is an upper-division class worth five academic credits per quarter, and a year of study fulfills the university foreign language requirement (as does the summer language course Ro 103). *A Survey of Romanian Literature* (one quarter, 30 hours) is also an upper-division course. It is worth four credits and fulfills the requirement for the study of a literature in translation for some majors. *An Introduction to Romanian Civilization* is a lower-division, general education elective course (one quarter, 30 hours, 4 credits). In the *Advanced Romanian Tutorials*, instruction has been structured in six 2-unit blocks covering the equivalent of one year (12 units) of advanced instruction at the upper-division level². The *Tutorials* are part of the courses leading to a East-Central European major or minor with a Romanian concentration (see below).

Enrollment in the Romanian language, culture, and literature courses has increased steadily over the past decades due both to the students' growing interest in Romania (largest country in S-E Europe, strategic position/language, EU and NATO membership) and the quality of instruction.

In response to student demand and faculty suggestions for a specialization in East-Central European Studies, in 2006 the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures established a new B.A. degree (or major), *Central and East European Languages and Cultures*, and a new subsidiary specialization (or minor), *Central and East European Studies*. Both specializations are interdisciplinary, allowing students to cross boundaries between several disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and to develop approaches to studying East-Central European societies and cultures consonant with the changes taking place in that region³. Within the new major and minor, undergraduates must focus their studies on a particular country in the area. The students who pursue a Romanian concentration acquire and/or expand their mastery of the Romanian language and knowledge of Romanian literature, attain a historical perspective on Romanian and East-Central European issues, and examine Romanian society and culture within its East-Central European context.

All the Romanian courses offered at UCLA are included in the curriculum of the new major and minor. *An Introduction to Romanian Civilization* can serve as a prerequisite course for the Romanian concentration; *Elementary Romanian*, *Advanced Romanian Language Instruction Tutorials*, and *A Survey of Romanian Literature* are part of the recommended courses⁴.

Core faculty

Distinguished UCLA faculty members integrate Romania into their undergraduate and graduate courses. In Sociology, Professors Gail Kligman and

² A detailed description of the Romanian courses can be found at http://www.registrar.ucla.edu/catalog/catalog08-09-745.htm#174071912_pgflid-177901.

³ For a list of required courses for the major in Central and East European Languages and Cultures see <http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/slavic/undergrad/slavit.html>. For the minor in Central and East European Studies see <http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/slavic/undergrad/minorslavit.html>.

⁴ Some or all of these courses are also taken by doctoral students who specialize in Romanian topics in various UCLA departments.

Rogers Brubaker specialize in gender, ethnicity, and nationalism in socialist and postsocialist countries, with a focus on Romania. In the History Department, Romanian history is covered in courses taught by Professor Ivan Berend. Prominent Romanian authors are discussed in courses given by Professor Michael Heim (Slavic Languages and Literatures/ Comparative Literature). These professors also direct the research of doctoral students – some from Romania – and guide undergraduate honors theses on themes related to Romania.

The courses in Romanian language, culture, and literature, as well as the course on *Culture and Society in Central and Eastern Europe* are taught in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures by Lecturer Georgiana Gălățeanu-Fârnoagă⁵. The course on *Women and Literature in Southeastern Europe* was hosted by UCLA's College Honors Program.

Since the 1990's, prestigious visiting professors from Romania have taught in the Anderson School of Business, Public Policy, and Sociology.

Students

UCLA is the only university on the West Coast where courses in Romanian language, culture, and literature have been taught on a regular basis since 1990. As a result, these classes are attended by UCLA undergraduate and graduate students, Los Angeles professionals and high school students, as well as students from other University of California campuses⁶ and universities from other states. Heritage speakers and students from individual study programs at universities throughout the U.S. take language proficiency exams at UCLA. Such institutions have included UC universities with large populations of Romanian-American students (UC Davis, UC Irvine, UC Riverside), private Californian universities (Stanford University, the University of Southern California), and universities from other states (East Texas Baptist University, Georgetown University, Hampshire College).

The students enrolled in Romanian courses during the academic year have a wide range of interests and goals. Doctoral students in comparative literature, history, Indo-European studies, political science, sociology, or business study Romanian in order to carry out research and conduct field work⁷. Some undergraduate students pursuing a major or minor in Central and East European Languages and Cultures, Central and East European Studies, or European Studies have Romania as a focus. Graduates and undergraduates specializing in general linguistics, Romance linguistics, or a Romance language also enroll in Romanian classes. Other students are attracted to the study of Romanian language and culture because of a specific interest in Romania. These students come from both science and liberal arts

⁵ The Slavic Department offers five Slavic and three non-Slavic language and culture curricula. In the non-Slavic language group, Hungarian and Romanian have been taught regularly while Lithuanian has been offered periodically. As for non-Slavic literature and culture courses, only the Romanian courses have been taught on a regular basis.

⁶ There are ten campuses in the University of California (UC) system: Berkeley, Davis, Irvine, Los Angeles, Merced, Riverside, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Barbara, and Santa Cruz.

⁷ Many of the former doctoral students specializing on Romanian topics now teach at American or European universities, and their research/ dissertations have been published by prestigious university presses, e.g.: Birnir 2006, Fox, Grancea 2008, Levy 2001.

departments, and their majors range from computer science and chemistry to communication studies and philosophy. Some of these students take Romanian for personal reasons – charity or religious work in Romania, a Romanian fairy tale that charmed their childhood, Romanian-American friends or significant others. Others choose Romanian language and/ or literature to fulfill general education requirements (the study of a foreign language, a literature course in translation) because they have heard good things about these courses from their colleagues or friends. Finally, about one-fifth of the Romanian learners are heritage speakers, that is students of Romanian descent who are usually more or less proficient in spoken Romanian but have difficulty reading, writing, and using the formal register of the language. They also have a limited knowledge of Romanian culture and want to learn more.

The intensive summer language courses are attended by the same diverse populations as the courses taught during the regular academic year: UCLA undergraduate and graduate students, students from other UC campuses, high-school students, professionals, and mostly graduate students from other states.

Overall, about 450 students took Romanian courses during the regular academic year from 1990 to 2010, and 210 students learned Romanian in the 2005–2010 Summer Intensive language courses, two sections being offered for the past few summers to meet the demand.

Textbooks

I would like to begin this section by expressing my debt of gratitude to the leading scholars who, in the past half century, have shaped the teaching of Romanian as a foreign language by being active researchers, language instructors, and textbook authors. In this respect, I would like to mention the pioneering work of professors Ana Cartianu, Leon Levițchi, and Virgil Ștefănescu-Drăgănești (Cartianu, Levițchi, Ștefănescu-Drăgănești 1958), Boris Cazacu, Matilda Caragiu Marioțeanu, Clara Georgeta Chiosa, and Valeria Guțu Romalo (Cazacu, Caragiu Marioțeanu, Chiosa, Guțu Romalo 1980), as well as James Augerot and Florin Popescu (Augerot, Popescu 1983). Subsequent landmark textbooks and authors will be discussed below. Outstanding works focusing on grammar include Cojocaru 2003, and Doca 2004.

At present there are two kinds of language coursebooks widely available – texts produced in Romania (usually in the large university centers) and books published in Britain or the United States.

Throughout the 1990's and in the first half of the 2000's I successfully employed textbooks by faculty members at the University of Bucharest: Brâncuș, Ionescu, Saramandu ¹1996, and Bălănescu ¹1998. From Cluj-Napoca came Pop ¹1991, while the most comprehensive American text was Boțoman 1995. A concise British approach to the language and grammar was offered by Dennis Deletant and Yvonne Alexandrescu (Deletant, Alexandrescu ¹1992).

As in any language teaching situation, I had to adapt the Romanian texts available commercially to the specific needs of each *Elementary Romanian* class I taught. While I employed one or another of the above-mentioned titles I also created a variety of additional materials. For instance, in the early 1990's I ordered copies of

Brâncuș from Romania, and wrote situational dialogues and cultural passages to supplement the readings in the book. I devised communicative grammar activities for practice in class and assigned the exercises in the book for homework. I also ordered Liana Pop's text and audio cassettes for listening practice and colloquial language use. In the late 1990's I switched to Boțoman. I expanded the cultural component of the course by composing my own passage in Romanian, and taught the grammar in smaller steps, closer to the Brâncuș model. I created my own reference list of Romanian verbs, grouped alphabetically within each conjugation type. As auxiliary materials, I recommended Bantaș 1994, and the Berlitz tapes for beginning listening practice (they contain greetings and colloquial phrases pronounced both slowly and at the normal rate of speech). In the past few years I have used my own *Elementary Romanian* textbook, which is due for publication in 2012.

In the 1990's and early 2000's I helped the *Advanced Romanian* students consolidate their mastery of informal/ spoken vocabulary and expand their comprehension and use of the formal/ written register of the language. I also helped them expand their range of verb tenses, pronouns, articles, prepositions, and other complex or challenging forms. For readings, I selected articles from the internet and newspapers, general or cultural magazines (*Dilema, România literară, Clipa*, etc.), political and sociological essays, linguistic and literary studies, and classical and contemporary literature. I asked the students to read Romanian literary works, research Romania-related themes for term projects, write reports in Romanian, and present them orally in class.

The *Advanced Romanian Language Instruction Tutorials* have held a special place among the Romanian courses offered at UCLA since 2003. Funded by a U.S. Department of State Title VI grant (like similar tutorials in Czech, Hungarian, Polish, and Serbo-Croatian), these classes have provided instruction beyond the elementary level currently offered in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures. The weekly format for each 2-unit block has been a 90-minute long meeting with the instructor and four to five hours of homework, including use of a computer lab and web resources. The small group tutorial (6–10 students) and computer/web practice have maximized the students' developing proficiency in the four main-language skills: listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing. Instruction has also focused on vocabulary development, fine tuning of grammar, distinguishing oral from written discourse, stylistically and rhetorically appropriate language use, and cultural grounding.

The tutorials have included various combinations of the components listed below.

I. Readings in and analyses of:

1. Modern and/ or contemporary literature
2. General non-fiction

II. Developing speaking skills

1. Preparation for study or research in Romania
2. Class discussions
3. Class reports

III. Developing listening comprehension skills

1. Interactive listening
2. Non-interactive listening based on video, internet audiofiles, etc.

IV. Developing writing skills

1. Composition
2. Translation

V. Use of the web for research and cultural information

VI. Grammar

The choices of grammar topics have been related to specific student needs. While some of the grammar tutorials have been remedial, most have focused on advanced grammar necessary for interpreting texts and making oral and written presentations.

VII. Vocabulary development (Gălățeanu, Kresin, Kudyma, Lejko-Lacan 2003: 4–5).

I usually begin the ten-week *Survey of Romanian Literature* course with selections of literary folklore and continue with excerpts from classical, modern, and contemporary authors. My sources have included Snodgrass 1999, Treptow 1991, and Avădanei, Eulert 1973. To illustrate short fiction by major Romanian authors in the second half of the 20th century, I rely on Fârnoagă, King 1996. To introduce students to post-communist prose and theater I choose excerpts from translations of individual works. To exemplify recent Romanian poetry, I employ selections from the anthology Stănescu, Sorkin 1999.

For *Introduction to Romanian Civilization* I put together a reader consisting of chapters from relevant books.

Methodology

In teaching Romanian as a foreign language, I have applied the following principles:

1. Teaching progressive levels of language: Each elementary lesson is a controlled chunk of standard language, with selected vocabulary and restricted grammar.

2. Integrated development of language skills: In second language learning, as in real life, the activities of listening, speaking, reading, and writing co-exist and support each other. Therefore, language tasks that foster the development of all four areas are both realistic and effective.

3. Learning through interaction: Students negotiate meaning (and thus make progress in the language) through interaction with their peers and the instructor. Mistakes are part of the learning process, so are not frowned upon but are explained and corrected as needed.

4. Linguistic and cultural authenticity: Learners develop an understanding and appreciation of the target language and culture through exposure to meaningful and culturally rich material.

In implementing this pragmatic approach, I extensively use real-life language materials and personalized activities to encourage realistic language use and develop fluency. I place students in situational contexts to foster use of appropriate language functions. I show videos to highlight the cultural component of the readings. I give students Internet-related tasks to broaden their exposure to the language and culture.

In creating reading passages for my students and textbook I established the following criteria:

a. The readings should be topic based, with natural contexts, imaginative story lines and humor, even a little absurd, to arouse interest and motivation⁸. They should have both narrative and dialogue formats, and incorporate cultural information. The new vocabulary items should be repeated within the reading and the lesson as a whole. The subject of the reading should be used as a springboard for meaningful class discussion. The passages should be long enough to provide reading practice and follow-up work for at least 10–12 students.

b. The readings should also be grammar based. Progression should be from simple to complex, and from regular to irregular forms. Several examples should be given for each grammar point. There should be a healthy ratio of verbs to nouns, adjectives, and adverbs.

Engaging my students in controlled yet meaningful language practice and cultural study has been beneficial. They enjoy the course. Hardly any students miss classes. Class participation is high. Students prepare for class. Their retention of vocabulary is good. They feel confident in using the basic verb, noun, and adjective forms. They find the subjunctive, future, and past verb forms, as well as the Genitive/ Dative endings easy to learn after mastering the present indicative forms and nominative noun and adjective endings. However, the personal and reflexive pronouns remain a challenge throughout the course, no matter how much practice and variety of tasks students go through.

In the culture and literature courses I have alternated between lectures and seminar-type discussions, and between oral presentations by the students and written assignments.

Teaching heritage speakers

The challenge in working with Romanian-American students is that their needs are different not only from those of the students learning Romanian from scratch but also from each other. Some of the heritage speakers were born in the U.S. and therefore have limited vocabulary, little confidence in using the language, and hardly any reading or writing skills. Others went to school in Romania, so they are more proficient both in speaking and writing, and know more about the country. Members of both groups tend to enroll in advanced language classes, although a few choose to take the elementary course in order to “learn how to read and write” and/or “learn and practice the grammar”.

Over time I have tried to develop syllabi that meet the heritage speakers’ specific needs but are also beneficial to the other learners in the class. In general, all students express a desire to improve their language proficiency while learning more

⁸ Students have reacted positively to my imaginative readings. On their anonymous course evaluation forms they have written: “In one quarter we’ve learned as much Romanian as in one year of Spanish”. “I never know how the story is going to end. I can always predict the end in my other language textbook”. “It’s easy to remember the vocabulary because I remember the story”. “These characters are all idiosyncratic. I can hardly wait to find out what they’re going to do in the next lesson”. “I’ve told the food jokes to all my friends”. “I went to the library and checked out Caragiale’s stories”. “My friends envy me, because I have so much fun in the Romanian language class. They asked if they could enroll next quarter”. “Let’s go to a Romanian restaurant so we can practice the vocabulary”.

about Romanian traditions, literature, history, and current events, usually in that order. In addition, heritage speakers also specify one or several of the following: they want to be able to speak the standard language correctly, learn to read and write, improve their writing, learn or review grammar rules. Since many of the advanced heritage and non-heritage students have enrolled in the entire two-year cycle of *Advanced Romanian Language Instruction Tutorials* throughout the 2000's, each quarter I focused their study on one of the areas they had shown an interest in: traditions, literature, history, geography, art, current events, etc. To illustrate these themes I selected chapters from Romanian middle or high school textbooks, excerpts from works by classical and contemporary authors, as well as articles from print or online publications.

After introducing and practicing key vocabulary, we read and discuss the day's topic for which the students also gathered information in advance. Then I point out and explain certain grammatical structures in the reading and have students practice them orally and in writing. Finally, I ask the students to sum up the main points of the discussion, express their opinions about the subject, and/or share their own experiences, in class and/or for homework. For longer projects I ask the students to read selected Romanian literary works or research specific aspects of Romanian life and culture, write reports in Romanian, and present them orally.

Fortunately, all the language classes I have taught are of a mixture of heritage speakers and new language learners, and during the constant class interaction both groups learn from each other. Heritage speakers have first-hand cultural experience and knowledge, as well as a higher proficiency in using oral/colloquial language. New learners have a better grasp of the rules governing the linguistic system, and in many instances, more developed reading and writing skills.

On the whole, I think I have been quite successful in getting the overall linguistic and cultural content of the language courses across to both heritage and non-heritage learners, but less effective in improving the heritage students' written language. They usually comprehend and retain the facts taught, expand their vocabulary, and improve their speaking and reading skills, but make less progress in their writing. I have yet to devise a systematic approach to meet the heritage speakers' written and formal language needs. The main challenge is that the discrepancies in their language skills are far wider than the differences in their knowledge of Romanian culture and civilization.

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Abstract

Courses in Romanian language, culture, and literature were first taught at UCLA from 1974 to 1986 by visiting Fulbright professors from the universities of Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, and Iași. In the 1990s the Romanian program was re-established as a part-time lectureship, the following three courses being taught during the regular academic year: *Elementary Romanian*, *An Introduction to Romanian Civilization*, and *A Survey of Romanian Literature*. Since 2003, a two-year cycle of *Advanced Romanian Language Instruction Tutorials* has also been offered, with funding from a U.S. Department of Education Title VI grant. During the summer there are two sections of an intensive *Elementary Romanian* course.

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well as students from other University of California campuses and universities from other American states.

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In 2006 the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, where the Romanian courses are taught, established a new B.A. degree in *Central and East European Languages and Cultures*, and a new secondary specialization in *Central and East European Studies*. Within both the major and the minor, undergraduates must focus their studies on a particular country in the area, and some of the students have chosen a Romanian concentration.

Throughout the 1990's and the first half of the 2000's textbooks of Romanian as a foreign language published in Romania were used, while a new textbook was being slowly developed and tested. The language teaching methodology has fostered student participation and learning through exposure to authentic language content, personalized language use, cultural information, and carefully controlled language structures.