



FRANCO AMERICAN PROGRAMS FALL NEWSLETTER

Letter from the Director

Each fall semester, I teach a course called "Introduction to Franco American Studies." Taught in entirely in English, this course examines French culture in North America, focusing specifically on the people of Maine and the northeastern region. We study the European origins of French Canadians and subsequent migrations into the United States, the impact of gender and class, the social meaning of language, individual and collective expression, the effects of assimilation and the challenges that Franco Americans face today. As this course fulfills other requirements for a university degree, I often have students who are not Franco - or at least do not self-identify as such. This lack of self-identification among young Franco Americans is a common story I hear from others as well: children in a classroom will not raise their hand if asked if they are French but they will if asked if they have a *mémère*. For some, this is a sign that Franco American ethnic identity is dying. Yet to me, this proves that Franco American identity is still quite alive. I have many Italian American students who no longer speak Italian but who wax poetic about their grandmother's cooking or their grandfather's garden. Yet Franco Americans kids are different. Once they no longer speak French, they don't feel authorized to see themselves as French -- and I think that difference shows that these young people still hold the values that have defined French Canadian society... *Qui perd sa langue, perd sa foi*. For many of my students, to be Franco American, you must speak French. Once these young people "lose" their language, they no longer feel they can consider themselves French - which shows, almost ironically, the persistence of the ideas of French Canadian nationalism and survival among these young folks -- even if it appears in reverse and in English.

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Letter from the Coordinator of Community Engagement

During this Holiday Season let us not forget those that are less fortunate by donating to your local food pantry or buying a gift for a Christmas Angel. As I write this I am counting mine, this fall has been a very blessed one.

We held our grand opening and dedication for the Adrien Lanthier Ringuette Genealogy Library. Celeste Ringuette and many family members and community folks attended the ceremony. Franco American Programs was gifted with an endowment from Celeste. This gift will ensure the continued care and upkeep necessary to make the holdings accessible to all. We are currently seeking volunteers to catalogue the collection. Our community group volunteered

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Since my arrival in October 2014 as a half-time research associate with the Franco-American Program (FAP), I have been in discovery mode. Although the FAP is new, the forces that joined to form it are not. The Centre Franco-Américain will celebrate its 45th anniversary in 2016 and Franco-American Studies was developed as the result of efforts extending back as far as the Centre. Results of this longevity include a rich heritage and many curious resources to explore.

What I keep finding is the important though obvious fact that Franco-American communities are not objects of study. These communities must be active partners in defining the research, the ‘data’ and the data collection methods. Why? Because the data collected, and hence the research, come from the lives and souls of communities, groups, families and connected individuals. So, in a very real way, the people must be *able* and *willing* to own the research. *Able* to own the research because it belongs to the communities it derives from, so those communities have rights over how that data, that living information about them, is used and presented. *Willing* to own the research because the research may not say what they would prefer to hear.

Where, you may ask, am I in all this? I am an “estranged” Acadian (on my father’s side) who has *perd sa langue*. Though mémé and pépé spent six months a year with us through much of my childhood, I only learned to listen to their French, not to speak it as mine. I know my tongue learned something from theirs because I had to be practiced out of wrong pronunciations when I took French formally in high school. I can lip-read a little but never attained fluency in any form of the language. So please allow me in advance to beg forgiveness that for now I will have to ask that we conduct our conversation in English when we meet. Excusez-là. Still, I want to meet, to learn what Francos talk about when they talk about being Franco, what they talk about when talking to other Francos, and what they talk about being (or not being) Franco when talking in English.

Joe Arseneault, Research Associate

We launched our French after-school program this fall; this semester, we have 21 children involved. The program is designed for those with no exposure to French and for those with some experience in the language. Our aim is to make learning French fun in a safe, after-school environment. We hold classes in Old Town at the Old Town elementary on Mondays and Wednesdays and in Orono on Tuesdays and Thursdays. These classes are open to other children in the area.

Letter from the Director (continued)

These classroom observations have informed my research trajectory on Franco American literature, my pedagogy, and are informing my work as director of Franco American Programs. I think one of the main roles of Franco American Programs at the University of Maine is work to better articulate and understand these very subtle – yet not so subtle – dynamics that structure and inform Franco American experience today.

Susan Pinette, Director

Letter from the Coordinator of Community Engagement (continued)

many hours to prepare and ready the materials donated for the genealogy library. This group of retired community folks not only volunteer, they help with cooking for events, spend hours labeling and mailing our publication, Le Forum, donate cash to help purchase materials and supplies, attend our functions. Thank you for all you do!

The Franco-American Centre was able to obtain some beautiful furniture that was located at our local Senior Center in Bangor. What a wonderful addition to our space, making it more comfortable for our students and guests. I also want to thank those that helped to move the furniture to the Centre, Glen Lebel, Marcus Desjardins, Tony Brinkley and Joe Arsenault. I can't thank you all enough!

Lisa Michaud, Coordinator



FAS Spring courses

FAS 270: Immigration Yesterday and Today

FAS 329: History as Unwilled Memory, an independent study in cooperation with courses in other programs

Weekly Gatherings

We hold weekly gatherings on Tuesday afternoon for conversation, sharing food and just hanging out. Come join us!

Letter from the Senior Faculty Associate

One of the great privileges of my life has been to work with the Franco-American Centre (now for over 25 years), with Yvon Labbé, Jim Bishop, Rhea Côté Robbins, Jacob Albert, and now with Susan Pinette, Lisa Michaud, and Joe Arsenault. The Centre exists at the University of Maine but works with Maine's cultural realities at depths that are rarely acknowledged or engaged elsewhere at the University. Nowhere else do I find such a full understanding that the University of Maine should be a university *for all* the people of Maine and that it should be a university without walls.

There have been so many initiatives for which the Franco-American Centre has been a catalyst over the years. Here are just a few. The Franco-American Centre initially organized the effort that led to the *Maine Historical Atlas*. While a beautiful outcome, what we had in mind was not a historical but a people's atlas in which Maine people--for example, Franco Americans--in all their diverse complexities would have been focal, not marginal. A people's atlas is still a work in progress, and the Franco-American Centre is developing research that can inform it.

For example: the Franco-American Centre, working with Chris Potholm, has produced the first systematic demographic study of the French reality in Maine. From this study we now know, for example, that at least 100,000 of our neighbors would like to have medical services offered in French as well as in English. From the study we have learned that more than 30% of our Franco-American neighbors think of French as a language in which they are fluent (that, despite dire predictions, the French language is *not* dead in Maine).



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Over the last few years, the Centre has been a founding partner in the collaboration that created the Bridge Year in Maine. Bridge Year is an educational program in which cohorts of high school students take college courses in their high schools, learn a trade in Maine's Technical Centers, and graduate from high school with 30 college credits (the equivalent of a year of college) at a fraction of the cost. In the near future Bridge Year will be announcing a needs-based scholarship program that will not only fund students in the Bridge Year program but cover tuition and associated expenses throughout their years in college

At this season, I would like to thank all the friends who have helped the Centre sustain its mission and to name a few with whom I have had the honor of working in recent years: Severin Beliveau, Robert Kennedy, Paul Ferguson, Ken Fredette, Brian Langely, Christian Potholm, Daniel Devoe, and Paul LePage. All have played essential roles in reminding the University of Maine that over 30% of Maine people are Franco-Americans and that a full cultural understanding of *all* Maine people is central to the University's mission and to our reason for existing.

Tony Brinkley, Senior Faculty Associate



Le bruit court dans la ville at the opening celebration for our after-school French program

Contact Information

We can be reached at (207) 581-3764 or individually through email: (first name.last name@umit.maine.edu)

Save the dates

On Feb. 9th we will be holding our annual Mardi Gras, an evening filled with fun, food and music!

Our annual Writers and Artists gathering will be held on the weekend of April 22, 2016. Last year, we were able to hold this event (including space rental, room and board) for \$150/person. We are hoping to do the same this year and will again be offering scholarships for those who cannot afford the cost.