

**French 3295: Special Topics in Cajun French**  
**Partnering with Native Speakers**  
**to Document Louisiana French**  
**A Service-Learning Course**

**Spring 2007**  
**T-Th 1:30 -3:00 PM**

**Instructor:** Amanda LaFleur  
**Office:** 435 Hodges Hall  
**Office Phone:** 578-0545  
**Email:** lafleur@lsu.edu  
**Office Hours:** TBA

**Community Partner:** Cajun French Music Association (CFMA)  
**Community Liaison:** Maurice Lasserre  
**Phone:** (225) 293-4848

**Pre-requisites**

Successful completion of French 2101, 2201 or equivalent French fluency

**Course Description**

During the course of the semester we will study the particularities of the French spoken by Cajuns and Creoles in Louisiana and apply this knowledge to an authentic language documentation project. The project will allow you to apply and enhance your linguistic skills as you interview fluent senior citizen Cajun French speakers, then preserve representative samples of their French speech in their oral histories and other narratives. You will transcribe, edit and translate these samples, and incorporate them with visual support into a multimedia presentation that you will present to the Cajun speakers as a family heirloom and to the T. Harry Williams Oral History Collection as a linguistic and historic artifact.

**Rationale and Overview**

The French-speaking elders of our community have a linguistic and cultural legacy to share with us, but most of them do not have the writing or technical skills to transform them into written or multimedia format. Students have writing and multimedia skills that need be honed through practical use, but most are familiar neither with the traits that make Cajun French unique nor the stories that make up the cultural experience of Louisiana's French-speaking population. In this course you will have an opportunity to learn the fundamental structure and lexicon of Cajun French and to apply this knowledge in first-hand contact with native speakers who have often in their lives been ignored or denigrated because they spoke French. By meeting and interacting with a Cajun speaker and recording personal narratives on a variety of topics, you will validate the linguistic ability of the speakers as well as their personal experiences. While your partners will receive personal validation, you will have an opportunity to understand wisdom and knowledge that comes from settings other than academic ones. You will provide the service of a unique kind of companionship to your senior partners (i.e. one in which they can interact in their native tongue). Further, both you and your community partners will be contributing to the documentation and preservation of Louisiana French for the greater community, providing recorded and transcribed narratives to the families of senior partners and to an established, public archive. On a more personal level, you will create a family

artifact that future generations of your partner's family will be able to appreciate, even if they don't speak Cajun French. Finally, you will reflect upon your experiences, gaining insights into issues of aging, linguistic diversity and the community values of intergenerational transmission of knowledge and cultural preservation.

The first five weeks of the semester will be devoted to an intensive look at the structure and lexicon of Cajun French, preparing for the interview process and thinking about issues dealing with the service project. Then, you will concentrate on getting to know your senior partner, conducting interviews, processing the information you obtain and creating the multimedia presentation. The editing and feedback process will be informed by interactions with your classmates and me, self-evaluation and feedback from your senior partner, as well as our CFMA liaison. At the end of the semester, you will present your work as well as an evaluation of the experience to your partner and members of the CFMA.

### **What is service-learning?**

Service-learning is defined as a "course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility." (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995. "A Service-Learning Curriculum for Faculty." *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 2:112-122). It is important for students participating in the course to recognize that the language-learning component, the successful creation of a product and the thoughtful "processing" of the service-learning experience are all equally integral to this course and will all be assessed in the grading process.

### **Academic learning goals:**

- Learn the major structural, lexical and phonological features of Louisiana French;
- Increase fluency in spoken French;
- Develop listening and speaking skills and comprehension in French by engaging in the interview process;
- Develop comprehension and decoding skills by transcribing and translating authentic oral language samples;
- Apply theoretical knowledge of dialects in authentic interaction with speakers;
- Develop a better understanding of historical events through the context of first-hand accounts.

### **Civic learning goals:**

- Understand the historical context leading to the challenges faced by Cajun French speakers
- Develop a respect and understanding that transcends stereotypes of a minority linguistic and cultural group
- Honor Cajun speakers as a unique community resource by listening to and documenting their stories;
- Recognize and validate the experiential knowledge among people who do not necessarily possess a formal education.
- Develop skills in intergenerational communication
- Appreciate problems of the elderly in communication and social interaction.

### **Our Community Partner Agency**

We will be working in partnership with the Baton Rouge chapter of the Cajun French Music Association (CFMA). Our CFMA liaison is Mr. Maurice Lasserre. Mr. Lasserre will be responsible for identifying citizens in the Baton Rouge area who are interested in working with us on the project. Alternatively, you may elect to work with someone you know, a family friend or relative.

### Meeting with your senior partner

For reasons of your own security as well as those of your senior partner, students will work in pairs. The first meeting will take place during class time at a common location to be announced. Mr. Lasserre and I will both be there to facilitate introductions and “ice-breaking” between students and their partners. It is your responsibility to schedule at least two subsequent meetings with your senior partner during which you will record your partner’s life story and reminiscences. . Your final product will be a multimedia presentation that will include a general biography of your senior partner and a selection of three to five audio selections (3-5 minutes each for a total of 10 minutes) that you will transcribe and translate as part of your multimedia document. Ideally, one selection will be a personal narrative (“true-life story”), one will be a folklife artifact or performance (folktale, song, joke, recipe) and the third will be an oral account of a significant community event (flood, storm, depression, war, epidemic) or description of a public figure. However, as the interests and experiences of your partner will vary, you may find that one type of discours predominates your discussions and you may elect to transcribe more than one of the same type of narrative. We will discuss the orientation of your interviews in detail in class during the semester.

You will record all interviews using digital recording devices. These are available on loan from the Foreign Language Laboratory in Prescott Hall. It will also be important to have access to a digital camera so that you can obtain visual support for your multimedia presentation.

### Course Evaluation Criteria

Mid-term exam	15%	The mid-term exam will be based upon Cajun French grammar and linguistic concepts presented in class
Transcription exercises	20%	These practical exercises will be assigned as either group and individual work. They are intended to prepare students for the actual transcriptions of their partners’ interviews.
Journal de bord	20%	You will be assigned writing tasks at various points during the semester, in particular after encounters with senior partners. Questions will be provided to guide your reflective process. You will be expected to demonstrate your ability not only to recount your experience, but to analyse and interpret them in light of the issues raised during the course of the semester. At the end of the semester, your final presentation should include the most salient of your conclusions.
Final oral presentation	15%	You will orally recount and interpret your experience present your multimedia product. You will include a linguistic analysis of the narratives and a qualitative analysis of the service-learning experience.
Multimedia project	20%	This product, which will typically take the form of a PowerPoint or Keynote presentation, will include a biography of your senior partner as well as three narratives that you will have transcribed and translated into English.
Participation	10%	This grade will be based upon your contribution to class editing and discussions, as well as evidence of your preparation and participation in interviews.