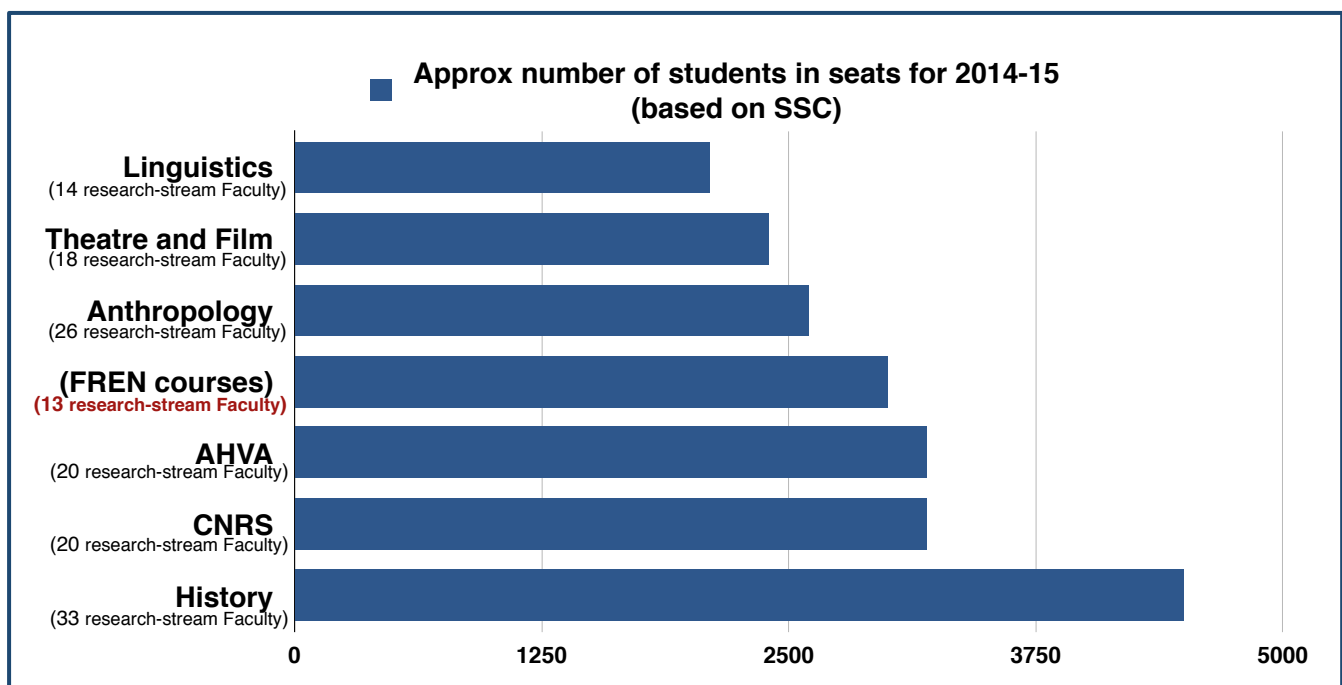


A Department of French and Francophone Studies for UBC

The recent talks regarding the possible merger of FHIS and CENES have led the continuing faculty of the French section to think strategically about the status of French within the Faculty of Arts and at UBC and to put forward what we believe to be a viable alternative.

A discipline taught at UBC since the establishment of the university in 1915, French has enjoyed a long tradition of teaching and research excellence in the fields of Language, Linguistics and Literature. However, since the forced merger of French and Hispanic & Italian Studies in 1998, UBC stands as the only major research university in Canada that does not have an independent department of French, and does not take advantage of the potential it represents in a bilingual country. As evidenced by the results of the questionnaire circulated by the Acting Head of FHIS in preparation of a meeting with Dean Gage Averill, the overwhelming majority of French faculty think that the proposed merger would only exacerbate the marginalization of French in terms of faculty replacement, graduate recruitment, and presence at the provincial and national levels.

There is no getting around the fact that within the education system in British Columbia, the status of and interest in French is unlike that of any other language. As one of Canada's official languages, French has never been so popular in the schools of British Columbia. French courses enjoy steady enrolments at UBC with a total of about 4,000 students in 2014-2015 (2,884 in FHIS, 758 in Continuing Studies and 338 in the Faculty of Education's LLED). With a teaching staff of 18 continuing faculty members (13 in the professorial ranks and 5 Twelve-Month Lecturers), the French section is indeed economically viable. Year in, year out, the French section teaches more students than Linguistics, Anthropology, Theatre and Film, with fewer continuing faculty members.



Looking outside UBC, one sees that French remains very strong and that in many cases it is taught and researched in the context of an autonomous department. The vast majority of Canadian universities host a Department of French, including the other two members of the top three (Toronto and McGill). In British Columbia, UVic and SFU both have a Department of French. At the North American level, major institutions public and private such as UCLA, Berkeley, Yale, NYU, and Brown have distinguished, long-standing departments of French or Francophone Studies. In the case of Berkeley and UCLA, we are looking at large public universities not unlike UBC in a state with an arguably greater budgetary crisis than British Columbia and in a country where French is not an official language.

There are no apparent indicators that call for sidelining French at UBC. *Au contraire*, the university and its Faculty of Arts have everything to gain by endorsing a strong French program. This prospective move will be in line with their strategic vision that promotes international engagement, scholarly visibility, intercultural understanding, and community engagement. The current administrative structure of FHS — and the situation would only worsen after the proposed merger — does not allow us to establish fully the French presence a Canadian university like UBC deserves.

A Department of French and Francophone Studies will be in a strong position to meet the increasing demand for French education in British Columbia. Unlike some language programs that rely on courses in translation, the French program at UBC welcomes graduates from schools of the Francophone School Authority and from immersion programs who are eager to keep studying in the discipline. Many of our students majoring in French will go on to the Faculty of Education to become immersion teachers and work in the school system where they are needed. An autonomous department is better equipped to offer an integrated experience and flexible learning to students, to reach out to a Francophone

Non-francophone research universities with independent French departments

In British Columbia

- Simon Fraser
- University of Victoria

In Canada

- University of Toronto
- Queen's University
- McMaster University
- Western University
- University of Waterloo
- York University
- Trent University
- Dalhousie University
- McGill University
- Concordia University
- Carleton University
- ...

In the United States

- UCLA
- UC Berkeley
- UC Davis
- Brown University
- Yale University
- NYU
- Vanderbilt University
- Georgetown University
- Rice University
- Ohio State
- Penn State
- U of Virginia
- U of Minnesota
- U of Colorado
- ...

community which, in our province, is more and more diverse, to develop and foster partnerships within UBC, British Columbia and beyond, and to play a prominent role on the Canadian and international Francophone stages.

Existing French initiatives and partnerships at UBC

- Centre de la francophonie de UBC
- Dual program Option UBC and Sciences Po
- PWIAS and Collège de France
- French Scholar Series at the PWIAS
- Joint PhD or “cotutelle” France / Canada
- *Canadian Literature / Littérature canadienne* journal
- Summer Global Seminars in Montréal and Lyon
- Nearly 20 partnerships with institutions in France, Québec, Belgium, Switzerland and other francophone countries.

A department that focuses on French will be much more efficient in terms of governance, curriculum development, and graduate student recruitment as the only institution to offer a doctoral program in French in BC. With many faculty members soon to retire, the French program stands to renew and redefine itself. This is a time of remarkable opportunity: an independent Department of French and Francophone Studies will be in an ideal position to attract top candidates in its pursuit of excellence. Amidst merger talks and at the same time calls for alternate proposals, the French program seeks to regain control of its own identity and, by doing so, to give other sections of FHS the opportunity to reinvent themselves.

With an excellent continuing faculty/student ratio and the infrastructure already in place, re-establishing a Department of French, at no cost,

represents a persuasive and sustainable option for UBC. At the same time the administration can bolster its international visibility by making French — a language spoken by more than 270 million people worldwide — part of its winning profile as one of the leading universities in a bilingual country. We are convinced that this is the best way to transform our program into an efficient, broad-minded and competitive department that will flourish in the future.