

From: Dr. Lélia Young, French Studies

Re: The creation of an International Centre of Multidisciplinary Francophone Research

Date: January 29<sup>rd</sup>, 2005

Note: This proposal was originally sent to David Dewitt, on December 6, 2004. The present version contains some minor modifications and has added an addendum

Addendum: Added to address details of how the current proposal and that of Raymond Mougeon are complementary and should lead to collaboration

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT**

**Project.** I am endeavoring to create an International Centre of Multidisciplinary Francophone Research. The center would focus on the fields of Francophone culture, language and literature. It would be constituted by a network of researchers affiliated with universities and institutes of research at an international level. I have proposed to the Council on International Francophone Studies (CIEF), which is headquartered in Louisiana at Lafayette (USA), and of which I am a member of the Administrative Council, to house the center. Its Executive Committee, headed by Dr. Catherine Perry (President) and Karen McPherson (Vice-President), has considered my proposal with much enthusiasm and can see its realization as an important impetus for the aspirations of the organization. They asked me to present my project during their next meeting in Ottawa at the end of June 2005.

I would like to see York hold an important place in the creation of such a network. Moreover, aside from functioning as an active research site in terms of organizing research conferences on selected topics, financially supporting a scholarly journal, soliciting and distributing funds for small research projects, it could become the CIEF's second or satellite office. We will promote a hub and spoke network design enabling research clusters at various universities and research institutes to link to the academic enterprise that will emerge from this Centre.

**Purpose.** The realization of such a project will encourage knowledge creation and dissemination as well as critical thought on multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary francophone studies. It will bring scholars together and will make easier cross-cultural

communication. By facilitating the creation of such an International Centre of Multidisciplinary Francophone Research York will be sustaining the francophone culture within Ontario and outside Quebec, while creating solid interdisciplinary links to Quebec and to the international community of francophone scholars. Canada is a bilingual country and the expansion of its francophone wing represents a strength that cannot be underestimated at the national level. York should be a leader in this regard, with its focus on innovation, expansion, dynamism, multiculturalism, and research. The center can be a force in how to understand, appreciate and ameliorate the language and historico-politico-cultural factors that influence our lives in Canada, in general, and in Ontario and the francophone community, in particular. The latter community needs a focus such as this, for it risks isolation, assimilation, and diminution unless it can identify better with its roots and see a cultural future where its rights are respected, protected, and fostered. At a more macroscopic level, the center will serve York's purpose of respecting international human rights and promoting homegrown businesses, *in the face of increasing global competition*, by helping them *attract, train and retain their employees*. The objective will be to value *leading-edge collaborative research* both within the francophone world and across the francophone and Anglophone communities *that responds to overarching and central issues of intellectual and cultural significance*, inevitably having favorable educational but also political and social impact. This project offers *significant promise to Canadian, Ontarian, and international communities*. We will encourage *researchers funded through different or the same programs, to get together in order to share and disseminate ideas and knowledge at the outset and on a regular basis throughout their projects in order to increase the collective value and impact of their research* (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Annual Report 2002-2003).

**Methods.** This International Centre of Multidisciplinary Francophone Research will exist by functioning within a network of universities and research institutes at the provincial, national, and international levels. It will be a single organization with two hubs: the CIEF in Louisiana and York in Ontario. This expansion of York into a research center with an international and with a francophone perspective represents an enrichment and strength because it involves a Canadian university that promotes the two national

languages of Canada. The creation of a web site is a key element of this project, for it will be a public forum that will facilitate communication and advertisement. There will be much need of communication among the major players at first, with much exploration of avenues of financing. The steps needed to finance the scholarly journal *Nouvelles Études Francophones* will take much administrative time. The journal is established, the editorial board is represented by more than forty distinguished international experts in their fields, and high quality contributions can be solicited from the international research community. The official journal of the Conseil International d'Études Francophones (CIÉF), will be published under the title *Nouvelles Études Francophones* or *NEF* (ISSN 1552-3152). Catherine Perry (University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 46556, USA.), President of the CIÉF, is the interim Editor-in-chief of the new journal *NEF*.

My CIEF colleagues already have indicated interest and enthusiasm for this proposal. What is now required is to establish the Centre's viability through York's institutional support and intellectual commitment. Although it is clear that such an undertaking will require active and successful efforts at external fundraising – and in this I will hopefully have the support in principle from CIEF colleagues (I submitted to them a detailed summary explaining my vision by email on November 18, 2004) – I now need some assistance to move the idea forward into a practical project proposal. The timeline is June 2005 when I would present a fully developed proposal to the CIEF Council. I am prepared to commit my time and energy to do this. I already have consulted with David Dewitt in his capacity as chair of the Center of International Studies (ISRGroup), and from my discussions with him I have drafted this statement of intent and provide the following thoughts on the kind of institutional support I will require to move this project forward.

- Creation of a French language website. Ultimately this could be housed at a partner institution anywhere in the francophone world, though we would recommend that it be initiated by York and preferably housed at York in the initial stages of this project.
- A research assistant, preferably bilingual, with appropriate skills and preferably with sufficient support to continue beyond the end of the winter term in order to provide assistance through the Ottawa conference at the end of June 2005 and, if possible, the summer in order to move the project forward. Similarly, I would then seek a

designated RA from FGS in support of this project, under the auspices of the ISRGroup.

- I would request some teaching release time to devote to moving it from the proposal stage through various start-up processes, including the preparation various national and international funding applications, the administrative and management structures, etc. Obviously the teaching release grant would have to be reviewed at the end of the first academic year in terms of our successes.
- The most immediate outreach effort will consist in the creation of a subcommittee of the board (advisory board) of which I will be the PI. The international community will be represented by three members of the board, of its total of 6 members. The board will strive to assure that Franco Ontarian interests will be considered, and there will be York representation on the board.
- The next task will be external funding. This can come to us from within Canada (funding agencies such as the SSHRC, provincial bodies, universities involved in wishing to be part of a national Francophone initiative, etc). Of great importance will be international sources, both governmental departments and agencies as well as non-governmental foundations, supporting Francophone research, and for this I will draw on the excellent range of colleagues. I anticipate that our requests will be a mix of infrastructure support as well as programs and projects in support of research, pedagogy, and outreach (e.g., conferences, the journal, fellowships, and program or project travel).

## **ADDENDUM**

(Preliminary form)

Note that what I have proposed for a research center maps perfectly onto the proposal of Professor Raymond Mougeon. I suggest that we collaborate closely, as the proposal that I have made for a research center includes elements that he has not included in his. For example, I am a member of the administrative council of the international French organization, le CIEF, [le Conseil International d'Etudes Francophones] and in my proposal you can see that I am suggesting that York works closely with this group, so that the research center consist of two hubs. Such a contact will afford quick communication

with Francophone researchers worldwide, allow us to coordinate with their annual conferences, etc.

An important theme for me concerns linguistics approaches to literature, which is a key theme that I will be underlining in my position with the CIEF. Moreover, part of my proposal mentions a research journal administered by the CIEF, of which I am the advertising director. These points could become elements in our collaboration.

It should be noted that my proposal could be expanded to include another journal, *Langage et Créativité*, this one more on creativity and criticism, a journal that I have already launched as founder and editor through two issues. It speaks to the cultural aspect of my interests, an aspect which I think is important to emphasize in a multidisciplinary Francophone research center.

Another interesting aspect of my work is that I organized in 2004 la *Journée internationale de la francophonie* at the Keele Campus, which is complementary to the one at Glendon. This side of my work could become an organizing point of an increased cultural component of the proposed research center. It would include inviting creative writers, scholarly thinkers on creative writing, and so on. All of these suggestions fit the theme of cultural contact in Professor Mougeon's proposal. They help give it a living component.

In this regard, among my diverse activities, I have been involved administratively in the organization called the SET, [*La Société des écrivaine-e-s de Toronto*, or the Toronto French Writers Society]. Through the years, I have obtained grants from the Canada Council for the SET, so that we could invite francophone writers to present and discuss their work in Toronto. Similarly, note that I am a member of the administrative council of the AAOF [*l'Association des auteur-e-s de l'Ontario français*, or the Association of Franco-Ontarian Writers]. For this organization, I also organize literary events such as those for the SET. Finally, we have such events at the CIEF, and I would like to

incorporate them into my activities at York, making the CIEF another organization participating in such events.

These are some of the ideas that I am suggesting. I appreciate all the details that Professor Mougeon has worked out already in his proposal, and the impressive roster of researchers whom he has recruited to be part of the center. In contrast, at this level, my proposal is still in its infancy, but it is still quite feasible. The CIEF will be considering it in June, and if their cooperation is confirmed, I will be proceeding to organize more the details of my proposal.

Note that the proposals of myself and Professor Mougeon are complementary and could form the basis of a collaboration. I think that the cooperation would help cohere work among members of the two French departments, which would be an added bonus.

Finally, note that these ideas presented will take much administrative time to implement, and they will need that I have an official status within the administration of a proposed research center. To implement these ideas, I will still need space and financial support, along with release time, as described in my proposal.