Faculty & Staff Focus, General Information

LSU Museum of Natural Science Partners With the French Education Project
Virtual Museum brings professional development opportunities to Louisiana science teachers, K-8 and immersion

05/01/2007 08:42 AM
In the mid 1700s, French settlers known as Acadians, who had come to Nova Scotia more than 100 years earlier, were deported from their homes as part of the British kingdom’s campaign against Catholicism. These people, many of whom resettled in South Louisiana, became known as Cajuns and their contributions to the state’s culture became an integral and inseparable part of Louisiana’s history and heritage.

Today, many people are fighting to keep Cajun culture and French as a second language not simply alive, but thriving. French immersion programs, where students are taught the entire curriculum, including science, in French, are some of the most successful methods employed locally. In fact, more than 30 percent of all French immersion programs are located in South Louisiana, typically situated in the historically high-need school districts known collectively as “Cajun Country.”

The LSU Museum of Natural Science, or LSU MNS, and the LSU French Education Project, or FEP, have joined forces with the goal of supporting these teachers by providing a professional development workshop called the Virtual Museum, particularly targeting educators working in immersion environments. Workshop materials will be available in both English and French, and non-immersion faculty will also have the opportunity to take advantage of these much-needed pedagogical materials.

The project is being funded by a grant from the Louisiana Board of Regents. Sophie Warny, education director at the LSU MNS, co-wrote the $38,000 grant with Denise Egéa-Kuehne, LSU professor of education and principal investigator of the Virtual Museum, and Arnaud Sgambato, director of the French Education Project’s National Resource Center for Teachers of French.
Professional development workshops will be available through compressed videoconferencing, providing guidance and instruction for using the materials provided online at the LSU MNS education Web site.

Events are scheduled to include six compressed video workshops, three of which will be held this spring. They will be conducted via videoconference in the distance-learning centers at universities across the state. On Friday, May 11, from 2:30 to 4 p.m., participants will meet at McNeese State University in Lake Charles, in Burton Bus Room 118. The topic will be “Hunting for Fossils in Louisiana.”

Dates will be assigned to upcoming workshops at a later date. Topics and locations include:

- Nicholls State University, Thibodeaux. Materials will focus on rocks and minerals.
- Louisiana Technical College at Lafayette. The group will study the Gulf Coast sea line.
- University of Louisiana at Monroe. Topics will include Native Americans in Louisiana.
- University of New Orleans. Topic to be announced.

This partnership not only represents a bridge between foreign languages and science, but also a group effort involving LSU, the Louisiana Consortium of Immersion Schools, the Louisiana Department of Education, the French Culture Services in New Orleans and various parish school districts. It also will provide educators with the opportunity to earn Continuing Learning Units, or CLUs, which may be submitted for five-year teacher re-certification or to meet the Highly Qualified Teacher certification requirements.

“This is a wonderful opportunity for us to share resources with teachers in Louisiana, taking them virtually behind the door to see our collections, find out details about our curators, learn some interesting facts about each collection and figure out how to integrate these fantastic resources into the French and Science curriculum,” said Warny. “The French heritage is one of the many reasons why Louisiana is such a unique place to live in the United States, and we are glad to help not only improve science literacy in Louisiana, but to do so while promoting Louisiana’s rich French heritage.” The museum houses the fourth largest university-based bird collection in the world; 81,000 reptile and amphibian specimens; 1.25 million archeological artifacts; 270,000 fish specimens; 37,000 mammal specimens; and one of the world’s largest collections of frozen tissue samples.

For more information, contact Sophie Warny at mused@lsu.edu or 225-578-3080.

The mission of the LSU Museum of Natural Science is the acquisition, preparation and study of research collections by museum faculty, staff and students to generate knowledge of regional and global biodiversity, geological history and human history and
prehistory for the benefit of the people of the state, the nation and the world. The vast storehouse of scientific information held within LSU MNS collections helps researchers understand the historical and contemporary processes that have shaped the world’s biological diversity. With nearly 3 million specimens and growing, the LSU MNS collections are an invaluable resource that are likely to yield countless important discoveries for generations to come.

-30-

Ashley Berthelot
LSU Media Relations
225-578-3870