

French means diversity at SFU

The only place in the West to offer a doctorate totally in French



Greg Ehlers, LIDC

De gauche à droite: Ghizlane Laghzaoui, étudiant; Pierre Senay, étudiant; Betty Chin, Assistante aux programmes en éducation au BAFF (OFFA); Paule Desgroseilliers, étudiante.

It's Friday night and the 13 students in the first cohort of SFU's French Doctorate of Education program are tired and they say so, in French. For the last two years, they have spent most of their Friday evenings and Saturdays at the Vancouver campus taking classes such as "Ethics, Law & Professional Leadership" totally in French. As all of them are working professionals, and many have to commute into Vancouver by ferry or plane, they are usually exhausted by the time they arrive. "The first thing we do is eat. This always helps," says Diane Dagenais, one of the four professors

from the Faculty of Education who teach in the program.

This is how it is if you live in places such as Washington State, Kamloops, Victoria or Vancouver and you want to do your doctoral degree totally in French, because it's the only program of its kind in Western Canada. The program is modeled after the Doctorate in Educational Leadership in the Faculty of Education, but all courses, assignments, lectures and theses are done completely in French. Two years of courses are followed by a few years of thesis work. All graduates receive an Ed. D. degree.

The idea for this program was first raised at a meeting in 2005. "We were approached by a group of

Francophone school district representatives who told us there was a critical need for such a program," says Claire Trepanier, Interim Director of the Office of Francophone and Francophile Affairs. Many French-speaking community leaders in Western Canada are working professionals such as school principals, superintendents or school-board administrators. They have high-powered jobs and are well established in their communities, with families and social ties. It's unrealistic for most of them to go to Eastern Canada to study toward a doctorate all in French. "When we opened it up for admissions, there were applicants from many places, even some from Washington State," says Dagenais. The first cohort started in 2007 and students are now completing their theses. The next group begins in January 2011.

The program is unique in the way it examines a broad variety of topics related to diversity in educational contexts. Doctorates in French typically focus on language and literature, but the Ed.D. cohort en français students go beyond this to research immigration, multiculturalism, bilingualism, and any number of educational issues involved in managing diversity.

According to Marianne Jacquet, another professor who teaches in the program, classes are fascinating because the students are so eager to share their real-life problems managing change in organizations with a lot of cultural diversity. They discuss controversial issues such as how to accommodate different religious needs in school contexts. "We used case studies to explore this issue in multiethnic school settings, and to learn more about the legal, policy and educational frameworks.

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What could we do to make links between theory and practice?" says Jacquet. "These are senior administrators who are very committed to the people they serve as well as to each other, and to improving the conditions for Francophones living in BC," says Dagenais. For example they want to ensure that French learning materials are readily available in their communities.

"We've had a lot of enthusiasm in the Faculty and lots of support from the administration," says Dagenais. She loves the way the program is built upon SFU's expertise in cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. Learn more at the website: www.sfu.ca/educfr/en/Doctoral-Degree. ■