

University signs five-year collaborative agreement with Université des Antilles



The Université des Antilles campus in Guadeloupe signs agreement with UNO.

Photo by Richard Speaker

BY CHLOE GAGNON
News Editor

UNO has recently signed a five-year collaborative agreement with the Université des Antilles (UA), a French university which has subsets of the school in Martinique and Guadeloupe.

Richard Speaker, chair of curriculum and instruction, and Juliana Starr, chair of foreign languages, initiated the collaboration between

the two universities.

"We were looking for opportunities to do research in France, to do things with French emersion here and with English emersion in France," Speaker said. "We were connected through the consulate of France in New Orleans and the cultural attaché there said, 'I can get you a contact with the university in France.'"

After going to that university six or so times, "The cultural attaché at

the consulate changed and the new one said, 'Why don't we try some things with Martinique and Guadeloupe?'" and Speaker agreed.

Martinique and Guadeloupe are two small islands between the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean. "It's about two and a half hours [to fly to Martinique]. It's much closer than France [and] it's on the same time zone as the east coast," Speaker said. Guadeloupe is an additional 45 minute flight.

"This opportunity came up under the French consulate to send a delegation from Louisiana to Martinique and Guadeloupe at the Université des Antilles and see what's there and what the possibilities are."

Speaker said that: "We wanted to talk about the range of possibilities of collaborative projects. We didn't go with a big agenda, we were exploring. There were people from a whole variety of universities in Louisiana. LSU sent about six people. Xavier sent two. The head of CODOFIL [Council for the Development of French in Louisiana] went."

When the group arrived, they had many scheduled events including a welcoming ceremony, a tour of the campus, observed instructions of French and Creole classes, a meeting with the deputy mayor, a trip to a museum and a reception with the rector of the university (which is like the president of the university system).

"There was [also] this grand reception with signing of the collaborative agreement. Then we flew to Guadeloupe...where there was another signing of the agreement," Speaker said.

"The University of the Antilles is a French public university. It's part of the French university systems that are governed in Paris. It's not what you'd call one of the top tier prestigious...but it does do a full range of programs...There are actually two campuses on Guade-

loupe. St. Claude campus is up on the mountain. It's on the side of the [active] volcano."

Martinique and Guadeloupe are tropical islands with a French culture. "It really looks French except for all of the tropical vegetation," Speaker said.

"In December, we signed a letter of agreement with dignitaries who came from the University of Antilles to further our collaborative relationship," Speaker said. "It's basically an agreement that states: 'Yes we're going to agree to collaborate, talk to each other and see what we can then build.' But each piece will have to have another agreement to make it work. We're still in this initial phase of what can we do."

There are six goals the program wishes to achieve, such as building French and Spanish immersion programs, building French, Spanish and English immersion teaching certification programs and building B.A., M. A. and other degree programs through collaboration of students and faculties at UNO and at UA.

On Feb. 24, the first visit from UA will be the President of the Memorial Acte (a project for preserving the history and of those in the slave trade) in Guadeloupe, Jacques Martial, who will come to UNO and meet students, faculty, and conclude with a reception.

There will also be a group coming from the Caribbean in April for an event.

Urban Studies professor uses on-site visits to refresh classes, aid community organization



Dr. Michelle M. Thompson is associate professor for the Department of Planning and Urban Studies at UNO.

Photo by Grant Campbell

BY SANJIV PRADHANANG
Driftwood Contributor

Dr. Michelle M. Thompson, associate professor for the Department of Planning and Urban Studies at UNO, has a distinctive way of teaching her classes—field trips.

"I'm from Bridgewater, New York. I didn't even grow up in the cities," Thompson said. Her passion of planning out urban structures gradually changed to community service as she went on to research in Boston, where she analyzed data regarding prices of housing and overtaxing visitors in the neighborhood.

After graduating from Syracuse University in New York, she received a master's degree and a doctorate in Regional Planning from Cornell University. She is highly experienced in teaching classes on Neighborhood Planning, History, Urban Studies, Research Design, Public Finance, Community Development and the New Orleans region.

Today, she focuses more on the

lower 9th Ward area of the New Orleans region. Her course on the New Orleans region is comprised of frequent visits with students to various places around the city so that the significance of a historical or cultural site in the modern society can be understood.

"Look at how much greener the region has become," Thompson said as she explained the map of the lower 9th Ward on the wall of her office. Furthermore, she emphasized that it is not the planning of construction in new areas that helps them, but rather the intention to re-invest or clear the area which has lost its significance.

By request of students from her classes like history and philosophy, she began to incorporate site visits into these courses. She mentioned that practical involvement is an essential part of any urban studies course because a little bit of everything is embedded in it.

When it comes to selecting the venues of the visits, she's concerned about how significantly locations have changed over the years. She focuses on illustrating to the students the change in the essence of the locations to affirm why a place should now be renovated or torn down.

"Students need to know stuff like why Jackson Square is where it is," Thompson said.

Overall, she clarified that she always looks for a way to help people through her work. "I think about how I can enhance the student's experience and how I can help the organization I am working with," Thompson said.

But the one thing that sets her apart is that she brings real puppies to her class during the week of midterms when students are usually expected to be reviewing the course content.

"It is a good way to relieve stress

off students by letting them interact with the puppies and just forget about the tests for a while," Thompson said. "This way, you can also expect students to understand that they need to be focused on their studies throughout the semester and not just around the week of midterms."

Through this activity, she has been able to encourage students to volunteer at the Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Louisiana SPCA). The puppies from the SPCA event can go on to aid the organization in other activities to help eliminate animal suffering and abuse.

She has provided help to people in Kenya and Tanzania with cattle rearing, agriculture and test preparation for students through Cross World Africa Inc.