

French at Columbia

Interest in France and the Francophone world has been a constant in Columbia University's 256-year-old history. The first Columbia professor of French literature was appointed in 1784. Columbia University enjoys a long history of research and teaching about France as well as a long-standing tradition of close ties with prominent universities and public officials in France. Columbia has sponsored, and the French government has supported, rich intellectual and cultural exchanges that have helped shape public opinion in the United States and France. And, at critical moments in the history of the sister republics, professors from various disciplines at Columbia have taken an active role in rallying American support for France. During WWI, for example, students at Columbia, at least one French professor, and even the then 50-year-old Chairman of the French Department, Raymond Weeks, volunteered to serve as ambulance drivers on France's battlefields with the American Field Service. At the height of WWII, the **Maison Française** showcased the Free French, and in 1946, Jean-Paul Sartre spoke at the opening of the Maison Française's exhibit on General de Gaulle and the Liberation. Interest in France continues to thrive at Columbia University. The **French Department, the Maison Française, and the Center for French and Francophone Studies**, as well as distinguished faculty in other departments (including **Professor Emeritus Robert Paxton** in History) and other important institutes and programs at the University, continue to strengthen French Studies at Columbia and attract the country's best students and professors.

The Department of French and Romance Philology at Columbia University, chaired by Philip Watts, is one of the oldest and most distinguished French departments in the United States. Established in 1929, it grew out of the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, founded in 1890. Throughout the Department's history, it has promoted faculty and student exchanges with France's elite institutions of higher education, including the Collège de France, the École Normale Supérieure, and the Université de Paris-Sorbonne (Paris IV). Today one of the Department's most distinguished faculty members, **Antoine Compagnon**, is also a professor at the Collège de France. In addition to the Department's traditional strengths in philology and literary theory, criticism, and history, in recent years, the Department has expanded its scope to include more interdisciplinary scholarship and teaching and has established itself as one of the leading centers of French and Francophone Studies in the world.

The Department of French has trained thousands of undergraduates. French is, after Spanish, the second most studied language at Columbia University. As many as 750 students enroll in French classes each semester at Columbia. The **Reid Hall program in Paris** attracts more students for study abroad than any of Columbia's other exchange programs. A growing number of students are studying Francophone Africa and spending one or two semesters in Dakar. Many Columbia students pursue a joint degree with the Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris or another university in France, preparing them for future careers in education, law, journalism and diplomacy.

With more than 50 students enrolled in the PhD program, the Department of French and Romance Philology is one of the biggest French graduate programs in the country and is consistently ranked among the top five in national surveys. **Distinguished alumni** of the doctoral program include **Paul LeClerc**, president of the New York Public Library and Chairman of the Advisory Board to the Maison Française and the Department of French as well as **Domna Stanton**, former president of the Modern Language Association of America.

Many students from France have also attended Columbia University over the course of its history. Some of the more illustrious French graduates include **former French Justice Minister Robert Badinter** and French chef **Jacques Pépin**.

The Maison Française of Columbia University is under the new directorship of Shanny Peer. Founded in 1913, it was the first French cultural center established on an American campus. Since its founding, the Maison Française has continued to play an important role in promoting scholarship about and interest in France and the French-speaking world. Its conferences, colloquia and exhibits have earned the active support of the French Embassy in Washington, DC, and the French Consulate General in New York. The Maison Française has hosted many distinguished visitors over its rich history, including Edith Piaf, Marcel Marceau, Eugene Ionesco, Simone de Beauvoir, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and Jacques Derrida. Recent speakers include Marc Fumaroli, Hubert Védrine, Jean-David Levitte, and Adam Gopnik. Working closely with the French Department and the Center for French and Francophone Studies, the Maison Française organizes a variety of events, showcases innovative scholarship, promotes interdisciplinary exchange, and encourages international and intercultural understanding. Under the leadership of **Paul LeClerc, the new chairman of a revitalized Advisory Board**, including eight new members since fall 2009, the Maison Française is starting an exciting new chapter in its history of French-American intellectual and cultural exchange.

Several on-campus student associations, such as the French-American Alliance, the French Cultural Society, the Haitian Students Association, and the French MBA Club, organize events and informal gatherings at the Maison Française.

The Center for French and Francophone Studies is directed by Emmanuelle Saada and steered by an interdisciplinary committee of scholars at Columbia. An important initiative of the Department of French, the Center was created in 1997 by the renowned Guadeloupe-born French-language author Maryse Condé. The Center's mission is to foster interdisciplinary research and teaching about France and the French-speaking world. Participating faculty include Souleymane Bachir Diagne (French and Philosophy), Mamadou Diouf (African Studies), Samuel Moyn (History) and Ousmane Kane (SIPA). The Center organizes its conferences, colloquia and other events in partnership with the Maison Française.

Several institutes at Columbia's **School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA)** make important contributions to the interdisciplinary study of France and the French-speaking world. The most active institutes include the **European Institute** and the **Institute of African Studies (IAS)**. Two more recent initiatives further enhance Columbia University's global presence and perspective in teaching, research and problem solving. The **Columbia-Paris Alliance Program** is a joint venture begun in 2002 between Columbia University and several prominent institutions in Paris: the École Polytechnique, the Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris, and the Université Paris I Panthéon—Sorbonne. The Alliance Program provides opportunities for academic cooperation and exchange among professors and students. As recently as March 2010, Columbia University launched its **Global Center/Europe in Paris**, as part of the growing network of international centers that Columbia University is developing to promote and facilitate new collaborations, research projects, academic programming and study abroad.

All of these departments, institutes, centers, and programs at Columbia University, often working in partnership with institutions in France, help Columbia students and faculty meet the interdisciplinary challenges of an increasingly global society. As Columbia University **President Lee C. Bollinger** said at the recent inauguration of the Global Center/Europe, "It is essential to a great university that our students and faculty know and understand more about our world and we are committed to providing new opportunities to deepen our engagement with scholars, ideas and challenges across the globe."