

School of Linguistics & Language Studies

FIRST YEAR SEMINAR

FYSM 1612: Language, Identity, and Canadian Nation Building (Fall/Winter 2011-2012)

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Course Description:

According to opinion polls, a majority of Canadians today believe that bilingualism is a defining feature of Canadian identity. Yet, this consensus is relatively recent in Canadian history and even today, bilingualism remains a controversial issue: Does it mean that all Canadians should be bilingual? Does it mean English and French? What about Aboriginal languages and immigrants' heritage languages, many of which are dying or endangered? These questions raise even more fundamental questions, such as: What is language and how does it evolve into different languages people identify with? What is identity? What is nationhood? How does language contribute to the making of Canadian identity?

This course will examine the role of language and language policies in the negotiation of national identity among Canada's cultural and ethnolinguistic groups. We will first investigate how humans can define who they are through the languages they speak, and why languages can become powerful symbols of collective identities. To this end, we will examine theories of language, identity, nation building, and language planning.

Then we will try to apply these theories to understand the role of French, English, and other languages in Canadian nation building both historically and in today's increasingly globalized world. Last, we will examine the impact of globalization on the Canadian language landscape and the maintenance of minority languages. What we are hoping to achieve overall is a better understanding of the role of bilingualism and multilingualism in what it means to be Canadian in today's rapidly changing world.

Classes will be organized in seminar and workshop format to encourage the sharing of information, experiences, and ideas. To facilitate your transition from high school to university, we will also learn about the Library and other University resources such as Career Development and Co-operative Education, the Student Academic Success Centre, and other Student Support Services. Last but not least, taught by an expert in the learning and teaching of writing, this seminar will guide you through the steps involved in the process of writing an academic research paper and will help you develop the writing skills you will need at university and in the professional workplace.