



THE USB,

CORNERSTONE OF THE EXPANSION

OF THE FRANCOPHONE SPACE

A microcosm of Manitoba's Francophonie, the Université de Saint-Boniface (USB) welcomes all the faces of the Francophonie within its walls.

BY CAMILLE HARPER

Peter Dorrington, Vice-President of Education and Research, says that “education has always been the cornerstone of Francophone space expansion. We need a French-language educational continuum from early childhood to post-secondary education.”

The USB is working tirelessly to strengthen this continuum so that French is the logical answer for all Francophones. “We are working more and more closely with the DSFM. For the past two years, we have also been working to develop a French-as-a-second-language continuum with school divisions that have immersion programs.”

At the other end of the continuum, USB also launched a \$6.15 million project in 2019 to build a learning and childcare centre on its campus.

Further, the USB gained additional credibility as a pillar of the community in 2011 when it became a university, confirmed by *The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act* of 2016. Sophie Bouffard, President: “USB is the only French-language university in Western Canada. There is a status, a weight, a legitimacy that comes with that.”

“Today, we are negotiating as equals with the University of Manitoba and we are responsible for designing our own programs. It is from here that many Francophone leaders come from, in



photo: Dan Harper

all fields. We have an avant-garde role to play in anticipating needs.”

Microcosm Of the Community

As Peter Dorrington points out, “The USB is one of the only spaces where all the elements of the Francophonie come together in significant numbers every day: Franco-Manitoban, Franco-Métis and Anglophone students, permanent residents and international students, we have all the components of a great Francophonie.”

Indeed, the student population of the USB is distributed as follows: 33% DSFM graduates, 36% immersion graduates, 9% permanent residents and 21% international students. In addition, of this group, 11% of students are of Métis or Aboriginal origin.

“It’s important to give them the opportunity to make connections and to stimulate their interest in being and working together. This is the best opportunity to achieve that ideal,” adds Peter Dorrington.

And, for several years now, more than half of the USB’s international graduate students have applied for permanent residence in Manitoba. According to the province, Manitoba’s skilled worker class - which includes students with study permits - currently shows a retention rate of more than 85%.

An immersion graduate, Jordyn White is in her third year of a Bachelor of Arts degree. “Thanks to my experience at the USB, I feel more integrated into the Francophone community because I have been invited to participate in French events, I have Franco- phone friends, and I have opportunities to practise my French. I have made many friends at the USB who have accepted me with my French as it is.”

For his part, Cabrel Brémault, in his first year in the Business Administration program, is a native of La Broquerie and a graduate of the DSFM. He appreciates the Francophone diversity at the USB: “Most of the students in my class are from international backgrounds and we get along very well. I’ve made strong friendships. It reinforces my Francophone pride. I’m sure I’ll keep these ties after USB.”

Impact On Spaces

The influx of students from all parts of the French-speaking world can be seen in the evolution of the spaces at USB since the 2000s. Christian Perron, Director of Recruitment and Student Services, lists them: “In 2002, we created the Centre étudiant Étienne-Gaboury, so that students would have a place to meet and relax, but it is also a gathering place for the community. As well, our Martial-Caron theatre has become a true cultural space for the Francophone community.

“The USB also purchased student residences in 2005 to house its international students. And in 2008, we created the International Office to better welcome and support them.”

In addition, the presence of dynamic sports teams, the Rouges, contributes to the expansion of the Francophone space because “being able to practise your sport in French is a key element in choosing the USB.”

Impact On Programs

Programs have also multiplied since 2000. Christine Mahé-Napastiuk, Registrar, explains that “this evolution has been largely driven by local market and community demand.”

This market and community reflect the expansion of the Francophone space. For



photo: Marta Guerrero

The students at the USB represent all of Manitoba's Francophone community.
In the photo, from left to right: Cabrel Brémault, Vicky Tshibas, Alex Gagon, Nikita Dornez and Jordyn White.

example, with the arrival of many Francophone newcomers who speak little or no English, as well as the aging of the population, the need for health services in French has become increasingly pressing.

In 2011, the USB therefore built the Marcel-A.-Desautels Pavilion, which houses the Nursing and Health Sciences programs, where students can obtain rigorous, quality training in nursing, health care assistance or social work. That same year, it welcomed its first cohort to the Bachelor of Nursing degree and, in 2012, its first cohort to the Practical Nursing diploma.

Peter Dorrington: “These graduates are making a very real difference in the field. Enabling Francophones to receive care in French is a key issue.”

Since 2013, the USB also offers the Early Childhood Education Diploma - Workplace Component, to ensure the

training of competent staff in Francophone daycares. Christine Mahé-Napastiuk explains: “This program allows people who work in daycare centres to obtain their Level II while holding a full-time position in a daycare centre. It responds to a significant need for trained Francophone staff in Manitoba and contributes to the continuum of early childhood French-language education.”

Also noteworthy is the creation of the Tourism Management program in 2000 to support the tourism industry in Francophone Manitoba, or the addition in 2011 of the Major in International Studies as part of the Bachelor of Arts program, which provides a greater openness to the world and attracts many international students. ▽



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