

Donors help to preserve Louisiana French heritage

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In the 21 years Tom Klingler has taught at Tulane University, the associate professor has interviewed more than 200 Creole and Louisiana French speakers and literally written the book on the Creole language.



Tom Klingler, associate professor of French, has been named the Richard V. and Seola Arnaud Edwards Professor in French. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Klingler, who chairs the [Department of French and Italian](#), recently was named the Richard V. and Seola Arnaud Edwards Professor in French, a distinction he takes to heart.

[Seola "CeCe" Arnaud Edwards'](#) ancestors hail from Arnaudville, La., in St. Landry Parish, just north of Lafayette, La. During the spring semester, Klingler will take his Field Research on French in Louisiana class to conduct interviews in the small town, where nearly four in 10 people speak French at home.

"The field interviews provide students with a rare opportunity for direct contact with Louisiana's unique francophone populations, while helping to document and preserve the endangered language varieties they speak," Klingler says.

“CeCe” Edwards, 79, grew up speaking French at home and didn't learn English until she started first grade.

When they travel to Cajun country next semester, Klingler and his students plan to interview Edwards' former neighbors and perhaps some of her classmates.

Edwards says she and her husband decided to create the professorship in French to help preserve the Louisiana French heritage.

“The culture, the language, the color, the spirit of Louisiana is very important to us,” she says.

Klingler has co-authored the *Dictionary of Louisiana Creole* and authored *If I Could Turn My Tongue Like That: The Creole Language of Pointe Coupee Parish, La.* He says many interesting things are happening in Arnaudville to revive and promote local Louisiana culture.

“I hope that my students and I can contribute to those efforts through our work focusing on language,” he says.

Mary Sparacello is a writer in the Office of Development.