

Tunica: Louisiana

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Long before Louisiana laid claim to Cajuns and Creoles, the indigenous Tunica called this state home. The tribe, which was once made up of prominent salt traders, lost much of its history when the last speaker of the Tunica language died 50 years ago. Today, written records and few oral traditions remain.



Judith Maxwell, professor of anthropology and director of the linguistics program at Tulane, is teaching a summer course about the nearly lost Tunica language of Louisiana. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Judith Maxwell, professor of anthropology and director of the linguistics program at Tulane University, has developed [Language Revitalization: The Case of Tunica \(LING 3000\)](#) to help preserve the culture. The intensive, two-week summer course will introduce students to a world of new experiences.

The first week of the course, June 2-6, will launch at Tulane's uptown campus. Students will learn about language death and revitalization, second-language teaching methods and basic Tunica.

The second week, June 9-13, will take place in Marksville, La., where students will be hosted by the Tunica tribe. At the only Tunica summer camp in the nation, they will assist with language lessons and camp activities. The groups will even play the

traditional game of stickball.

[Maxwell](#) and a team of Tulane students have been working with the tribe for the past four years to revitalize the language. “We have a Tunica language Tumblr,” she said. Tumblr is a microblogging platform and social networking website.

Once the children at the summer camp learn the language, they can become involved via Tumblr. “The idea is to make the language more real, more lived, more exciting,” said Maxwell. “We have plenty of material. Now we have to work on people learning the language.”

She encourages interested students to sign up to learn about the indigenous experience in the Americas and to make a difference in the community. “They would learn a language that's completely different,” she said. “Knowing a language opens your eyes and your mind to other ways of thinking.”

Jamie Logan is a first-year Newcomb-Tulane College student.