University seeking new Center for Louisiana Studies Director

The Center for Louisiana Studies is located on the third floor of the Edith Garland Dupre Library.

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The University of Louisiana at Lafayette’s Center for Louisiana Studies is searching for a new director to oversee the community’s largest scholarly investigation into the area’s history.

After six years as head of the center, which houses hours of recordings dictating stories, songs and more in Cajun French and thousands of images, Michael Martin, Ph.D., will return to the UL Lafayette history department this fall. Martin “spent many years as a much-beloved teacher and member of the faculty and advised a tremendous number of graduate students,” said Jordan Kellman, Ph.D., dean of the College of Liberal Arts. Kellman said Martin’s return is “great news for history students.”

“I really miss being in the classroom,” Martin said. “I miss interacting with students on a more regular basis. I miss my colleagues in the history department. After a while, I kind of reached a point where I had to decide whether I was going to do this until I retire, or go back to teaching full time.”

As a Louisiana historian spending part of his childhood in Lafayette and the rest in New Orleans, Martin said he will remain personally involved with the center’s activities. He said he plans to continue his own individual research and create collections to be added to the center’s archives. He added he might also pitch the next book he writes to the UL Press.

Martin said his favorite thing about his time as director was being able to interact with the public a lot; he also enjoyed the center’s publication process.

“We can, from start to finish, take a manuscript and then turn it into a book that we then sell through catalogs,” he explained. “I can actually hold something that we’ve produced in-house. We do the same thing with music. That sort of tangible creation...as much as I love teaching and writing, I’m not involved in the actual putting together of those sort of things (as a teacher). That was very rewarding to me.”

The CLS began in 1973 and consists of three divisions: research, press and programming and special projects. Kellman called the center, which houses volumes of archival collections on Cajun and Creole folklore, “the premier research and dissemination organization for knowledge of Louisiana history, culture, music and folk life.” The center is also home to various publications from the UL Press.

Both graduate and undergraduate students are able to use the center to augment their research. The local community use the center for genealogical research, as well as preservation and identification of various artifacts and documents. The center has also been of use to musicians, including Grammy-winner Michael Doucet and Grammy-nominated fiddler David Greely.

Martin was hesitant to discuss his views on what the future of the center should be, saying it was “not for him to say.”

“I certainly think about it some,” he said. “I’ll be happy to offer my input to whoever they hire. In reality, it’s up to the committee making that hire and the dean to provide guidance. And then it’s really up to (the next director).”

Kellman said the university is looking for a director who can both “maintain the incredible tradition that the center has established...but also envision growth and new roles for the center.” He emphasized the importance of continuing to “digitize” the collections at the center, improving the accessibility of the content it offers to people from all over the world.

“The center has been expanding its public profile, and we’re hoping to have somebody who will continue that trajectory...expanding the visibility of the center in-town and beyond,” Kellman said.

At this point, there are no leading candidates for the position; Kellman said the search is still “very much open and early.”

The center’s new director would oversee the ongoing process of fundraising to renovate the J. Arthur Roy House, located on the corner of Johnston Street and University Avenue. Upon completion of the renovation, the center’s headquarters will move from the third floor of the Edith Garland Dupre Library to the Roy House.

Kellman said he appreciates the advantages that the library offered, but believes the center should move to allow easier interaction with the public and give the center a more “prominent” position.

“The library has been a great location in many ways,” Kellman said. “It’s allowed them to build their archives. It’s also allowed fruitful interactions with other...