

FCS369Y0 The Culture of Touraine
Fables, Myths, and Legends of the Loire

Summer Abroad 2025 in Tours

June 30 (Monday) to July 24 (Thursday), 2025 (4 weeks)



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Course site
<https://q.utoronto.ca>

Description

The Loire Valley is celebrated as the “cradle of the French language”, and as the “garden of France”, recognized by UNESCO as an “outstanding cultural landscape”. The unique history of the Touraine cultivated extraordinary legends, myths, folk tales, and many well-known fairy tales. Artists through time and space draw their inspiration from these fabulous and extraordinary stories. This course aims to introduce long and rich cultural history of the Touraine with some of its famous, and sometimes infamous, historical, or fictional figures. We will explore stories of literary giants such as Ronsard and Balzac, as well as historical superhumans such as Da Vinci and Jacques Coeur. We will learn about saints whose life stories influence various art forms in French patrimonial history. How about the story of Aurore, that you might know as Sleeping Beauty, not only its Disney variation in 1959 animated film, but also her somber and more intriguing origins? Where does the French-Canadian legend of flying canoe find its akin version? From saints to giants, from witches to princesses, from fantastic creatures to haunted animals, the course delves into stories that continue to stimulate artistic and literary imagination in our modern narratives. We will also adopt a comparative approach and active learning strategies to help students examine similar narratives and symbolism in tales from their own culture.

Field trips will allow us to imagine the stories that we study in their original settings, for instance, Musée Balzac in Saché, le château d'Ussé that inspired Perrault to write "the Sleeping beauty", le château de Chenonceau with its forest where kings and queens walked around.

Classes are Monday-Thursday 9am-12 noon.

Field trips are carefully selected and integrated throughout the course, allowing students to experience first-hand a variety of important sites in the Loire region.

Prerequisite

Completion of 4.0 course credits in any subject.

Breadth Requirements Creative and Cultural Representations (1)

Not eligible for CR/NCR option. No placement test is required.

Program

This is a Humanities course.

FCS369Y is taught in English with readings and written assignments in English (no knowledge of French is required). However, students can count this course towards a program in a French Major or Specialist with prior approval if they submit all written works in French. These students must, **before the first week of class**, inform the instructor of their intent to do so.

**Students who choose to complete assignments in French may consult with the French department about having the course fulfill program requirements.*

Office hours

By appointment – send me an email to make an appointment. Usually, we will meet immediately after class.

Field Trip Sites*

This course includes visits to the region's famous castles, beautiful gardens, historical sites, churches, and museums. *The selection below is subject to change due to the local conditions. The sites include:

1. July 3 – Walking Tour in Tours: la Basilique St. Martin de Tours (with la crypte) and la Cathédrale Saint Gatien and Cloître de la Psalette



2. July 7 – Let's go see if the rose : Le Prieuré Saint-Cosme



3. July 16 - On the steps of legendary giants: le Musée Balzac and le château d'Ussé



4. July 22 – Looking for mystical figures: Le château de Chenonceau



Assessments

- ◇ Pre-course activity (10 %): - in June (date to be determined)
- ◇ In-class presentation (20%) — July 21
- ◇ Mid-term test (15%) – July 15
- ◇ Final Research Paper (35% for all) — July 25
 - abstract (150 words - submitted on July 17 – 5%)
 - annotated bibliography of minimum 3 academic papers (5%)
 - research paper (1200-1500 words)
- ◇ Portfolio – weekly reports on field trips and personal reflection in various media (video, journal, album, book, photo journal, etc.) (10%) – July 24
- ◇ Ongoing contribution to, active participation in class activities & discussions, progress (10%)

Program*

- This program is subject to modification

Week	Activities	Assessments
June	Pre-course discussion	<i>Reading assignment</i>
Week 1	<i>Founding Saints</i>	
June 30	Course presentation and introduction activity Literary genres - fable, fairy tales, myths, and legends, why study them and how they relate to the present era	
July 1	Founding Saints (1): Stories of Saint Martin and Sainte Jeanne d'Arc	
July 2	Field Trip Walking Tour in Tours – la Basilique St. Martin de Tours (with la crypte) and la Cathédrale Saint Gatien and Cloître de la Psalette	
July 3	Founding Saints (2): Stories of Saint Martin and Sainte Jeanne d'Arc	<i>Report 1</i>
Week 2	<i>Literary Giants</i>	
July 7	Field Trip – Le Prieuré Saint-Cosme	
July 8	Literary Giants (1): Rablais, Ronsard, and Balzac	
July 9	Literary Giants (2): Rablais, Ronsard, and Balzac	
July 10	Witches and fairies (1): Fabulous Stories of Aurore, the original Sleeping Beauty - Aurore's journey – evolution and transformation	<i>Report 2</i>
Week 3	<i>Fabulous Figures</i>	
July 14	Le 14 juillet – la fête nationale*: No class	
July 15	Witches and fairies (2): Tales of la Touraine Mid-Term Test	<i>Test</i>
July 16	Field Trip – Le Musée Balzac and Le château d'Ussé	
July 17	Witches and fairies (3): Tales of la Touraine Guest Speaker* - Professor Emeritus Jean-Louis Backès*	<i>Paper abstract</i>
July 18*	*Make-up class Traveling tales (1): « la Chasse-galerie » in Québec Discussion on presentations	<i>Report 3</i>
Week 4	<i>Mystical Wonders</i>	
July 21	In-class presentations	<i>Presentation</i>
July 22	Field Trip – le château de Chenonceau	
July 23	Traveling tales (2): « la Chasse » Discussion on final papers and portfolio	
July 24	Exposé of Portfolios Conclusion and end of the class celebration	<i>Portfolio Final Paper</i>

- Prof. Backès is professor emeritus of comparative literature at l'Université de Paris IV and l'Université de Tours, Director of the research group "Littérature and Musique"