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Laurentian University professor to help create a Virtual Hub for Francophone municipalities in Canada

Sudbury (Ontario) - Luc Lagrandeur, a professor at the Faculty of Management of Laurentian University, is part of a Canada-wide team of researchers working to help Francophone and bilingual municipalities integrate information technology. Coordinated by the University of Sherbrooke in Quebec, this joint project named *Carrefour virtuel des municipalités francophones et bilingues du Canada* (**Virtual hub for Francophone and bilingual municipalities in Canada**) will draw on the resources from both municipal and university circles in four provinces.

According to recent studies, small and medium-size Francophone communities in Canada remain for the most part on the margin of the Internet phenomenon and are not taking full advantage of the opportunities created by the Web to foster community development. This digital divide is a major concern for the *Association francophone des municipalités du Nouveau-Brunswick*, the *Fédération québécoise des municipalités*, the *Association française des municipalités de l'Ontario* and the *Association des municipalités bilingues du Manitoba*. To halt this trend and help their municipalities fully enter the digital age, these associations have agreed to collaborate with university institutions.

Known by the acronym GRECUS (*Groupe de recherche sur les collectivités en ligne de l'Université de Sherbrooke*) and linked to the Faculty of Administration, this group will lead a research project that will include Laurentian University (Sudbury, Ontario), the Canadian Institute for Research on Public Policy and Administration (Moncton, New-Brunswick) and the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface (Winnipeg, Manitoba).

This research group will work with Francophone communities to identify the factors that encourage or inhibit the move towards the Internet or prevent the deployment of Internet services within various municipalities. The results of this research will provide municipal partner associations with a clear picture of Web access and usage in Francophone municipalities and enable them to develop strategies or action plans conducive to a greater uptake in Internet-based services.

The project also has a leadership/networking component that will provide municipal associations and their members with a Web platform. The content created by the four-province research teams and associations will enhance the resource centre available on the Internet. The Virtual Hub portal will be launched in February 2008.

This project, which is financed by Industry Canada to the tune \$249,800 under the program called *Francommunautés virtuelles*, also enjoys an in-service contribution worth \$280,200 from the University of Sherbrooke and partner universities, the four municipal associations, Jean-Yves Beaudoin, a consultant in Bromont, and @venue de Montréal, an organization that will design the

interactive Web platform for the Virtual Hub.

Luc Lagrandeur is a professor at the Faculty of Management of Laurentian University and a marketing specialist. He has ten years of practical experience having worked as strategic account manager, marketing director and customer relations director for one of the major Canadian IT externalization or outsourcing companies in Montreal. Among his research interests, he has studied the differences and similarities between Mexican, American and Canadian consumers as well as e-commerce for businesses and communities. Currently, he is pursuing his doctoral studies in e-commerce at the University of Sherbrooke and is focussing on e-government for Francophone and bilingual municipalities in Ontario.

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