

Princeton University

Honors Faculty Members
Receiving Emeritus Status



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François P. Rigolot



François Rigolot, the Meredith Howland Pyne Professor of French Literature, is transferring to emeritus status after thirty-nine years on the Princeton faculty.

He was born in May 1939 in the beautiful Loire region of France. After a few errant years as a student of business and economics, he found his true vocation as a scholar of Renaissance literature and received his doctorate from the University of Wisconsin–Madison for a dissertation on François Rabelais. Following a first appointment as an assistant professor at the University of Michigan–Ann Arbor, he came to Princeton in 1974 and has been a faithful and dedicated Princetonian ever since.

François's scholarship is characterized by cornucopian productivity, sustained excellence, and enduring influence. To date, he has published nine monographs, an equal number of edited volumes, and more than 220 articles and book chapters. He has examined and re-examined all the great writers of sixteenth-century France, from Rabelais and Clément Marot to Michel de Montaigne and Louise Labé. His sweeping and groundbreaking studies of Renaissance textuality and poetics (*Poétique et onomastique* [1977]; *Le Texte de la Renaissance* [1982]; *L'Erreur de la Renaissance* [2002]; *Poésie et Renaissance* [2002]) are staples of reading lists and syllabi throughout the world, as are his authoritative critical editions of major texts. The impact of his work extends well beyond the field of French literature and was recognized in 2011 by the Renaissance Society of America, which honored him with the Paul Oskar Kristeller Lifetime Achievement Award for “a lifetime of uncompromising devotion to the highest standard of scholarship accompanied by outstanding achievement in Renaissance studies.”

This award was but the latest in a long line of accolades bestowed upon François by a wide array of French and American organizations,

from the cities of Bordeaux and Tours to the Alliance Française of Washington, D.C., and the Modern Language Association of America. In 1993, he received the Howard T. Behrman Award for Distinguished Achievement in the Humanities at Princeton; the same year, he was promoted to the rank of officer in the Ordre des Palmes Académiques. In 2002, he was knighted in the Ordre National du Mérite by the president of France.

Throughout his career, François has been an exemplary colleague, administrator, and leader. He served as department chair no fewer than six times, often in periods of transition or crisis when his steady yet delicate hand at the helm was most needed. As a chair, he was unfailingly selfless, conscientious, conciliatory, and respectful of all members of the department. With efficient leadership, he always strove to preserve Princeton's humanistic tradition and standards of excellence while adapting to changing times and new realities.

Humanism and scholarly rigor are also the hallmarks of François's teaching, which has touched, inspired, and challenged generations of students from a variety of backgrounds, not only here on campus but also in many summer programs in the United States and abroad. At the undergraduate level, he particularly has enjoyed participating in interdisciplinary ventures such as the humanities sequence and, most recently, an innovative course on Renaissance culture that he designed in cooperation with the Princeton University Art Museum. His graduate seminars always attracted numerous students from several departments, many of whom went on to become distinguished Renaissance scholars themselves. In 2008, fifteen of these former doctoral students collaborated on a Festschrift in honor of their adviser and mentor, paying homage to "his world-renowned publications, his generous willingness to share his prolific erudition, his celebrated pedagogical skills, his sincere and tireless support of students and colleagues in both the Princeton community and the international *sodalitas* of *seiziémistes*, his invigorating leadership throughout his many years as chair of two departments and as director of Renaissance studies at Princeton University, and perhaps most importantly, his inspirational and affable personality."

When François received the Kristeller Award, he commented half-jokingly to the *Daily Princetonian*: “I thought I was too young to get a lifetime achievement award.” Similarly, we might say today that he is too young to sail off into retirement. As a professor emeritus, he will surely remain a valued and active member of our community, alongside his wife Carol, executive director of Princeton’s Council of the Humanities.