



A reflection on Mobilizing Inuit Cultural Heritage

BY CHRISTOPHER HENDERSHOT

Christopher Hendershot has 15 years of experience working in a variety of research grant administration, research facilitation, project management, and coordination roles. He completed a PhD at York University in the interdisciplinary field of critical security studies.

The Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies fostered some of the most pivotal, positive, and unexpected experiences and professional trajectories for me. My most direct connection to Robarts was through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)-funded partnership grant, Mobilizing Inuit Cultural Heritage (MICH), led by Dr. Anna Hudson. Based at the Centre (I believe I used five different offices during my time there), I worked for MICH first as a part-time research assistant and then as a full-time research associate between 2014 and 2019. Before joining MICH and affiliating with Robarts, I was working toward the completion of a PhD in critical security studies. I had been doing research and administrative support work for various research centres at York University. In retrospect, when joining Anna and the MICH team, I could not have imagined the import and impact of the people, places, and perspectives that I would engage with and be connected to.

As a research-creation project, MICH sought to support the lived experience and real-time resistance, resilience, possibilities, and creative flourishing of Inuit artists, performers, designers, and curators. In my role, this manifested as overlapping exercises/experiences in project listening, planning, budgeting, imagining, managing, doing, and enjoying. Excel sheets and email were a constant; but—surprisingly and invigoratingly—so was time in galleries, archives, and vaults as well as on the land, water, and ice. I will always hold the memories and experiences with the people who shared their time and expertise as we hunted and ate duck and seal. The scope and scale of creative expression, ambition, and actualization also required forays into logistics, procurement, and production assistance. Transporting a frozen seal from the Ottawa airport to the Art Gallery of Ontario for the opening celebration of the Tunirrusiangit exhibition was the best example of an activity I could not have ever foreseen undertaking.

As a SSHRC-funded partnership grant, such diverse project activities and efforts also required regular engagement with and navigation through the myriad of offices and departments that are involved in the day-to-day operations of the research enterprise at universities. Understanding, appreciating, being frustrated by, and challenging the finance, human resources, and grant funds management process and procedures have proven invaluable to my professional trajectory. This immersion in the research enterprise was not only a learning and skill enhancement opportunity but, equally, a camaraderie building and commiseration experience, for which I must specifically acknowledge and thank Anna Hudson and Laura Taman.

As the MICH project was winding down, I pivoted to take on project support roles for two other SSHRC partnership grants and ad hoc work for other research centres at York. In 2019, I translated this diverse set of skills and experiences into increasingly central roles in research support and administration at universities. Immediately following my time with MICH/Robarts, I took on the role of

grant development specialist for the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies (LA&PS) at York. Among my support for all LA&PS-based researchers, I had the pleasure of supporting Robarts-affiliated researchers with strategizing and developing grant proposals, primarily for the suite of SSHRC-funded opportunities. In 2023, I left York to join the Office of the Vice-President, Research & Innovation at Toronto Metropolitan University as a grants/contracts officer for the social sciences and humanities. This absence from York and the Robarts Centre did not last long, however, as I have recently joined Anna Hudson's SSHRC-funded partnership grant, Curating Indigenous Circumpolar Cultural Sovereignty, as a part-time research associate.

In sum, my time at the Robarts Centre is directly responsible both for my present employment and for expanding my understanding of the possibilities and impacts of university-based research. And indeed, I look forward to maintaining my connections to the Robarts Centre, wherever my career may take me. ■