

International Canadian Studies post-2012: Assessing the field's current realities and needs

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With the support of a Partnership Development Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), we conducted a study in the fall of 2023 to assess the current state of international Canadian Studies. This project, entitled *(Re)Searching for Canadian Studies*, is especially important given the cancellation by the federal government of the Understanding Canada program in 2012, a program that was critical to many international Canadianists for the continuation of their work. We conducted a survey of international Canadianists, and we interviewed key persons supporting the work of international Canadianists, notably past and current executive members of national and regional associations of Canadian Studies abroad. The insights gained from our project provide a sense of the current state of the study of Canada from outside of the country, how international Canadianists have conducted their work since 2012, and what they require in terms of support.

THE STATE OF THE FIELD

The current field of international Canadian Studies is mostly composed of scholars in the arts, humanities, languages, and social sciences, all fields that have traditionally been associated with Canadian Studies. Notably, a strong concentration of international Canadianists is found in Europe, the continent with the majority of local associations of Canadian Studies. By our calculations, approximately 3,000 international Canadianists are affiliated with the network of the International Council for Canadian Studies (ICCS). It is no surprise that colleagues who identify as international Canadianists have varied trajectories, some having studied in Canada or having family links to the country. What is distinctive in their profile is the comparative or transnational nature of their scholarship, in which the study of Canada is only part of their expertise.

There are key themes of interest in their teaching and research about Canada. Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples seems to be the most significant theme, but other themes are strongly represented, notably multiculturalism and the environment. In many cases, our survey revealed that the themes identified as "most popular" with students are often the ones considered "harder to teach" and the ones for which "scholarship has changed significantly over the last 10 years." This is a good indicator of the vitality of international Canadian Studies as our international Canadianists have continued to actively teach and research about Canada despite the cancellation of the Understanding Canada program in 2012.

ADAPTATIONS SINCE 2012

Our survey results reveal that since the cancellation of the Understanding Canada program, the vast majority of international Canadianists have not been able to obtain alternative sources of funding from the Canadian government for their academic endeavours. While established scholars were able to replace this funding by turning to other sources such as the research-granting agencies in their countries, emerging scholars and graduate students were the most affected. One significant result of the cancellation of the program was the ending of student bursaries and faculty enrichment opportunities (for research or curricular development), which has greatly limited the ability to recruit and train the next generation of Canadianists abroad.

Moreover, the cancellation of the Understanding Canada program has had significant negative impacts on local associations of Canadian Studies, the main support infrastructure of international Canadian Studies. While most associations survived, there are increasing differences between those with means and those that depended on the program to plan their operations. Many associations have restructured along a membership fee budget model, reduced their operations to a minimum, and suffered a decline in their relationship with the local diplomatic corps—which also has an impact on any type of bottom-up cultural diplomacy involving Canada.

Our study reveals how international Canadianists considered the Understanding Canada program to be a form of cultural diplomacy, and how cancellation of the program is understood as a move away from cultural diplomacy, leading many scholars and students abroad to disengage with the study of Canada. Interestingly, since 2012, the Government of Québec has continued to support international Québec Studies, which has led to the field gaining relatively disproportionate importance in international Canadian Studies, notably as a result of the additional opportunities that such funding has brought to the field.

MOVING FORWARD

International Canadianists continue to study Canada, despite the end of the Understanding Canada program. They are adapting to new Canadian themes of interest in a context in which their endeavours are increasingly framed as part of North American Studies or through connected themes like Arctic Studies or Indigenous Studies. With a strong emphasis on comparative and transnational perspectives, international Canadianists recognize the importance of transcending a conventional, Cold War-inspired area studies approach to the study of Canada, to the benefit of one determined around key issues.

What international Canadianists need most are online tools and open-access sources for teaching and research purposes, including databases, journal subscriptions, and documentaries, as well as digital, audio, and visual archives. They require an online platform to access materials, and a variety of resources that can reach a broader audience, including primary and secondary school students, especially for the themes that are becoming popular but that remain difficult to teach or research unproblematically from a distance. In addition, compilations of already existing research opportunities and contacts in Canada for both teaching and research purposes, including a list of visiting fellowships and a database of experts available for research collaborations and online lectures, would support their work while also providing networking opportunities.

Another priority is to enable students and faculty to come to Canada for teaching and research purposes. This is notably the case for international Canadianists who study topics for which there is a lack of expertise abroad. Similarly, travel for curriculum development and undergraduate education is identified as key to establishing a sustained interest in the study of Canada. Finally, local associations of Canadian Studies would benefit from programming that goes beyond one's country or region—here, the role of a consortium like the ICCS is worth mentioning—as well as some small annual funding (in the range of \$2,000 to \$5,000) to help organize academic events locally. Many noted that

this funding should be used to reconnect and host joint initiatives with the local Canadian diplomatic corps.

At a time of geopolitical uncertainty, (re)building Canada's cultural diplomacy abroad is essential. The field of international Canadian Studies provides the country with a social infrastructure that can support the promotion of Canada and with a Canadian approach to solving issues abroad. Despite the termination of federal funding to the field in 2012, the concrete steps specified throughout this special issue can be taken to reinvigorate the scholarship and activities of international Canadianists. ■

REFERENCE

Montsion, J. M., & Formanowicz, D. (2023). *(Re)searching for Canadian Studies* (CanSearch) [Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Partnership Development Grant No. 890-2021-0076]. <https://www.yorku.ca/research/robarts/cansearch/>