

2024 International Canadian Studies Summit: A view from the field and from Canadianists

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Inspired by the opening remarks from Senator Yuen Pau Woo and the proposal of Nik Nanos, approximately 40 Canadianists, most from North America and Europe, met on June 11–12, 2024 to discuss the state of international Canadian Studies and to identify the resources and strategies needed to support the field. Online discussions, in English and French, were facilitated by Dr. Jane Koustas, president of the International Council for Canadian Studies (ICCS); Dr. Dan Malleck, director of the Centre for Canadian Studies at Brock University; Dr. Paul Morris, director of the Master in Canadian and Intercultural Studies at the Université de Saint-Boniface; Dr. Chantal Richard, president of the Canadian Studies Network; and Dr. Kevin Spooner, director of the Laurier Centre for the Study of Canada.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY

The success of the federal government's Understanding Canada program, and confusion over why the program was cancelled in 2012, were shared starting points for many participants. Many expressed an interest in understanding the reasons why the federal government ended the program, and argued for the importance of a new approach to convincing government stakeholders to support international Canadian Studies in the future. Participants agreed that financial support from the federal government would not likely be as central as it was in the past. They suggested a multi-pronged approach to financial support and advocacy, which should include funding from different governments, philanthropy, and academic projects.

The proposal by Nik Nanos was lauded as a great way to reopen the dialogue with the federal government, even if the focus on Canadian trade with three regions (Asia, Europe, and North America) would only be a starting point for a broader approach to supporting international Canadian Studies. Regions like the Arctic and Africa would need to be added to the initial framework, as would an exhaustive student training and exchange strategy. Moreover, it would be essential to match the current expertise in the field of international Canadian Studies, mostly grounded in the humanities, with trade interests.

More broadly, this proposal sparked discussions on the need to reframe support of international Canadian Studies through a more generic support for the study of Canada. By focusing on interdisciplinary themes and topics of interest, such support could relate to both government priorities and the need for students and emerging scholars to develop the skills and expertise that are essential to their careers.

NEEDS AND CONCERNS

In this context, bottom-up initiatives offered the most promise for thinking through current supports of international Canadian Studies. Initiatives that do not require large sums of funding include better information-sharing practices, online events and initiatives, and proactive recruitment of colleagues into the network, notably colleagues who do not consider themselves Canadianists. Such initiatives seem crucial, given concerns raised by many international Canadianists of a coming wave of retirements in the field, the lack of succession within specific countries, and the merging of Canadian Studies with larger institutional units such as North American Studies.

Participants argued that ongoing initiatives and annual events should be better promoted as unique opportunities. Focusing on the promotion and visibility of current programming would help highlight the unique contributions of international Canadianists to the study of Canada, including the translation of key texts into languages other than English and French. As an interdisciplinary network, international Canadian Studies has a unique responsibility to support the visibility of connected fields abroad, such as Indigenous Studies and Arctic Studies, and it could do so by fostering collaborations and providing access to pedagogical materials well beyond the traditional canon of Canadian Studies.

Fostering partnerships between domestic and international Canadianists can involve conventional academic research means such as partnering in applying for Tri-Council funding,¹ for which international Canadianists are not eligible without a principal investigator from Canada. Moreover, promoting student exchanges and academic opportunities in Canada for international Canadianists as career-relevant opportunities can help train the next generation of international Canadianists.

STRATEGIES AND SUGGESTIONS

Many successful strategies and initiatives currently supporting the field exist, notably through regional or identity-based fields, such as Acadian Studies, Arctic Studies, Black Canadian Studies, and British Columbia Studies. Government support could be channelled through such fields, such as the current Government of Québec program in support of international Québec Studies. Aside from conventional academic endeavours, local associations of Canadian Studies and Canadian Studies centres abroad could play a unique role. They should be promoted as entry points to the study of Canada in various national contexts through which Canada's experiences can be shared with foreign bureaucracies, private sector actors, and the Canadian diplomatic corps.

A key suggestion from participants is to broaden the existing networks by reaching out to colleagues who study Canada from a variety of disciplines and fields. For the ICCS and local associations of Canadian Studies, this also means working with diasporic organizations, Canadians living abroad, and temporary migrants to or from Canada (such as student migrants). This will require the development and maintenance of good relationships with like-minded public figures, including senators and philanthropists.

Crucial for the continuity of the field, student training and mentoring strategies as well as sustained advocacy for student exchange programs to Canada are priorities. For instance, any support for developing and strengthening Canadian course content, so that it is accessible for use in various courses abroad, would be very helpful. This is in line with requests for a variety of online resources to support the field, including a database of experts and potential research collaborators, list of opportunities in Canada, and so forth.

CULTURAL AND SCIENTIFIC DIPLOMACY

Promoting the study of Canada abroad is a form of cultural and scientific diplomacy that can be very helpful to government, private, and academic sectors. While there are many examples that Canada could emulate, including the Erasmus+ program and the Fulbright program, many participants indicated that the Canadian government seems to misunderstand the benefits of such types of diplomacy.

Through the promotion of the study of Canada as a form of cultural diplomacy, as was previously suggested in a 2019 Senate report entitled *Cultural Diplomacy at the Front Stage of Canada's Foreign Policy*, a broader public engagement strategy could be imagined, one that builds on an already existing network of international Canadian Studies and expands to many non-academic supporters of Canada in other countries, including Canadians living abroad and diasporic communities. ■

NOTE

1. The Tri-Council consists of three federal research agencies: the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

REFERENCE

Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade. (2019, June). *Cultural diplomacy at the front stage of Canada's foreign policy*. Senate of Canada.
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