

FORUM

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A New Face, a New House, New Energies: Changes in the International Council for Canadian Studies (ICCS) under German Presidency

Knowledge about and from a nation are its best ambassadors. ICCS understands knowledge and science as one pillar in building understanding and capacity to meet global challenges so that diplomacy via knowledge and science become essential aspects of cultural diplomacy. The study of Canada internationally works towards promoting, recalibrating, and diversifying Canada's image globally, creating an environment that is beneficial to Canada's international standing, interests, and values.

This is an excerpt from an unpublished strategy paper I submitted to Senator Dr. Peter Boehm on ICCS's capacity to build knowledge diplomacy, when I was invited, together with our treasurer John Maher, for a brief talk on the state of international Canadian Studies into the Senate building in Ottawa in October 2021. This statement was repeated in a hearing of The Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade to be mentioned later. Fighting for the reinstatement of Canadian funds for international Canadian studies and revising ICCS administrative structures and procedures were my main tasks as ICCS president from June 2021 through June 2023.

Since 1981, ICCS, through its member associations in 28 countries, has established strong scholarship and has been the hub of producing and disseminating knowledge on Canada. These endeavours received longstanding support from the Canadian government and its "Understanding Canada" program, which offered doctoral and postdoctoral scholarships, research travel bursaries for established scholars, association support, guest professorship and internship programs, and many more. This program was discontinued in 2012 under a conservative government in Ottawa. Ten

years of missing funds mean extremely downsized knowledge building activities in ICCS member associations, fewer students and faculty researching on Canada-related projects, and much less potential in younger faculty to engage in the study of Canada. In the absence of support, some large and robust Canadian Studies associations like the ones from Brazil, Spain, Mexico, Australia and New Zealand have basically become defunct or frozen their activities. Missing Canadian funds in mutual funding structures means that local and national funding agencies have pulled out funding for study of Canada projects. One example happened recently in Ireland: the Ireland Canada University Foundation (ICUF) was originally financed through a mutual funding scheme through the Canadian and Ireland governments. It started to operate in 1995 and engaged in such activities as supporting, on an annual basis, the Craig Dobbin Chair in Canadian Studies at University College Dublin, a highly competitive guest professorship. ICUF initiated the Clár Gaeilge (Irish language programme), which is funded by the Irish government (Gaeltacht funding) and brought the Irish language and culture to Canadian university students across the nation; it further bestowed many awards and research bursaries to Canadian and Irish scholars from over 95 universities, colleges and educational institutions; and during Covid-times it established the Beacon Scholarship programme, an online fellowship program. After solely financing ICUF's activities for almost ten years, the Irish government cut the programme in 2021. Many universities and Canadian Studies Centers now rely on limited funds from the Canadian embassies for their very reduced activities, or on Quebec funding bodies. For example, the Délégation générale du Québec à Munich and the Association internationale des études québécoises (AIEC) co-financed this year's Writer-in-Residence, Marie Célie Agnant, at the University of Bremen.

As a reaction to the missing funds, many member associations have reprofiled their structures and reduced their activities. ICCS has done so as well. We have moved office in 2021 upon invitation of the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies at York University, brought forward by Dr. Colin Coates and Dr. Jean-Michel Montsion. We now have a nice and small office within the Robarts Centre facilities on the 7th floor of the Kaneff Tower on York University's Keele Campus, which houses many other research centers of York University as well. We hold our annual ICCS member meetings in June in this building and build synergies with the Robarts Centre, for example together hosting the annual Robarts Keynote lecture before our Grants and Awards ceremony on the AGM day. We have drastically reduced personnel expenditures as our new coordinator Eileen Wong now very efficiently manages our affairs on a part-time contract basis. Hence, we revised our administrative processes and have established a new transparent Awards and Grants committee, and we have completely overhauled our website. As well, Eileen generates a monthly newsletter with information on conferences, workshops, and other events in our member associations, new publications, job opportunities and many more.

A greater proportion of our funds now goes to graduate and post-doc student support; this basic approach will continue until Canadian government funding will allow

more comprehensive support of graduate, post-doc and faculty research as well as international networking, knowledge exchange and capacity-building activities. We still hope that our efforts combined with the Advancing Canada coalition will eventually convince the Canadian government to reestablish funds for international Canadian Studies. When our international Canadian Studies program is running again, albeit with a few changes in funding schemes, it will create snowball effects of knowledge building on Canada and attract international students to Canadian universities.

Recently, diplomacy via cultural institutions, arts, literature, and education has again been on the agenda of the Canadian government, as a report of the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade in 2019 entitled “Cultural Diplomacy at the Front Stage of Canada’s Foreign Policy” suggests. It focusses on cultural diplomacy as one pillar of Canada’s foreign policy and recommends “the creation of a modernized Canadian studies program that would contribute to knowledge about Canada in the world” (Standing Senate Committee 2019, n.p.). ICCS with our Canadian partners will use this hopeful atmosphere in Ottawa and continue fighting for the reinstatement of funds for international Canadian Studies. These efforts include Nik Nanos, head of the Advancing Canada coalition, Munroe Eagles (then past president), and myself (now past president) participating as witnesses in a hearing of the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade in April 2023, which looked at the role that Canadian Studies programs as well as culture and the arts can play in advancing Canada’s interests around the world. The Standing Senate Committee is headed by our staunch supporter Senator Peter Boehm, former Ambassador to Germany. In this hearing we strongly made our case and tried to convince the committee that cultural and knowledge diplomacy made possible through connections and global understanding generated and sustained among others through research and teaching Canadian Studies greatly serve the larger economic and political interests of Canada. As support of our oral statements, we have collected a number of support letters from Canadian personalities and presidents of international Canadian Studies associations, which were also submitted to the Standing Senate Committee.

In our strong efforts to sustain and reinvigorate international Canadian Studies, ICCS, together with five other Canadian Studies centers throughout Canada (The Robarts Centre, York; the Frost Centre, Trent; the Centre for Canadian Studies, Mount Allison; Glendon College, York; and the Université Saint-Boniface), is now part of a SSHRC-funded Partnership Development Grant project titled “(Re)Searching for Canadian Studies” (PI Jean-Michel Montsion) in order to enhance scholarship and networks in Canadian Studies. ICCS will be responsible for the integration of international Canadian Studies associations and their members into the project. All Canadian Studies associations, including GKS members, have received an invitation to participate in an online survey to assess the changes in international Canadian studies since the “Understanding Canada” Program was ended in 2012. The project leaders

will also organize an international Canadian Studies summit in Toronto and Peterborough in June 2024, with a substantial participation of emerging scholars. The project will further create teaching support materials to be distributed among ICCS members, and it will conduct research in the research focus areas: colonialism and transformative reconciliation, environmental justice and the climate crisis, language activism and revitalization, racial equity and knowledge democracy.

Some good developments for the support of emerging scholars have transpired. The Network for Emerging Scholars in Canadian Studies (RIJEC/INES-Canada) was established upon the initiative by the Emerging Scholars Forum (NWF) of the GKS in 2021. It will be instrumental in the Canadian Studies Summit as well as in the larger SSHRC project. As well, ICCS will put out modest conference support for emerging scholars participating in inter/national Canadian Studies conferences for which national associations can apply. ICCS is also trying to ever increase cultural diversity among its member associations. We have thus accompanied the founding of an Africa Network for Canadian Studies, located at the University of Benin in Nigeria. It has established itself with constitution, leadership, and plans for activities, and we look forward to hearing and reading more in the future from our colleagues in Nigeria.

Furthermore, ICCS strives to harness new digital technology to facilitate innovative ways of using such technology in furtherance of teaching, learning, and researching in the study of Canada. As an important stake holder in the internationalization of the Canadian Studies community ICCS is determined to nurture and sustain understanding, knowledge and capacity with respect to Canada and its values. Strong scholarship in ICCS member associations has always generated such knowledge and will continue to do so – with a new face and new house ICCS will continue this scholarly tradition with new energies.