

CANADIAN STUDIES IN BRITAIN 1970–2010

**An assessment in the context of
a changing world**

**A Sustained Studies Programme project
by the
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**An assessment in the context of
a changing world**

by

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Tim Rooth

SUMMARY

Defining the agenda

The Sustained Studies Programme project undertaken by the British Association for Canadian Studies (BACS) evaluates thirty years of formally constituted Canadian Studies in the United Kingdom, and assesses priorities for future development. Although the Sustained Studies project was originally conceived as an overall review of Canadian Studies programmes throughout the United Kingdom, it became evident during preliminary consultations that a full history of Canadian Studies would be too large a project to be undertaken in this form. The project therefore concentrates upon one aspect of those activities, BACS and its specialist subject groupings.

The Canadian Studies partnership in the United Kingdom

The study of Canada has long been a feature of the British academic scene, but the pattern of teaching and research was fragmented until the 1970s when Canadian Studies became a recognised field of academic study in Britain. Several developments in the 1970s led to Canadian Studies being formally established in the UK. During a colloquium held in 1971 to discuss Canada-UK relations, the idea was mooted that a Chair in Canadian Studies be founded at a British university. The then Canadian High Commissioner in London, the Hon. Jake Warren, took the initiative to establish a Foundation for Canadian Studies in the UK to raise funds to support this. In 1975 in a separate but linked initiative, a group of academics with Canadian interests founded the British Association for Canadian Studies, an academic network for individuals interested in Canada. Finally, the Government of Canada began to support Canadian Studies abroad, and the position of Academic Relations Officer at the Canadian High Commission in London was established in 1977.

Thus was set in place a partnership between the two funders of Canadian Studies in the UK – the Government of Canada and the Foundation for Canadian Studies – and the academic association which is the subject of this study, which has continued for over 30 years. Canadian Studies in the UK is today among the strongest in the world, and arguably is the programme with the most depth and diversity in Europe.

The Government of Canada currently spends \$250,000 a year to support teaching and research principally through Centres of Canadian Studies and the British Association for Canadian Studies and its specialist groups, as well as conferences, postgraduate travel, and collaboration between British and Canadian universities. The Foundation for Canadian Studies similarly dispenses around \$250,000 annually. The two funding partners work in close collaboration to ensure continuity and cohesiveness. It is estimated that the funding provided by the Government of Canada and the Foundation for Canadian Studies leverages nine times that amount in terms of university overheads, salaries, and the personal time committed by the more than 300 British academics who teach and research Canada and organise conferences, field trips to Canada, student and staff exchanges, and collaboration with Canadian counterparts.

Context: BACS and Higher Education in the UK

Teaching and research in Canadian Studies during the lifetime of BACS has been carried out in the context of profound changes in British higher education. Not only has there been a more than threefold growth in the student population but also major institutional developments in the growth and merger of higher education institutions, changes in status, and frequent internal re-structuring to create larger and commonly more multi-disciplinary working units. The expansion of the student population has been accompanied by relentless pressure on unit costs. The growth in both undergraduate and postgraduate student numbers has been accompanied by major

shifts in the popularity and uptake of subjects. Some subjects that have traditionally included Canadian Studies at undergraduate level, such as geography and history, have not shared in the expansion of higher education to the same extent as psychology and business studies, and Area Studies as a whole has not been particularly dynamic. It is clear from data on current student numbers and student preferences that Canadian Studies as a complete degree programme or degree scheme would probably not recruit many students. Within the framework of broad-based modular programmes involving English, Sociology and History there remains a potential for recruitment of viable student numbers on modules with at least fifty per cent Canadian content. It is probably within the context of specialised degrees in English and also in French that the greatest student numbers are recruited for courses with a Canadian content. There is also considerable potential for Canadian elements within undergraduate modules in other subjects. These might include media and film studies and aspects of social psychology that cover themes of identity in multi-ethnic contexts.

The History of BACS

Chapter 1 charts the growth and evolution of BACS from 1975 to the present day. While during the first decade the foundations were laid, an administrative structure created, an annual conference launched and a regular publication first produced, it was the second decade from around 1985 that witnessed the consolidation and maturation of Canadian Studies in Britain. Four major achievements of BACS are identified in this report: the growing sophistication of its annual conference, the upgrading of its publications, the development of its specialist subject groupings and, above all, the establishment of its National Office. The scale of operations had been substantially expanded during this phase. The third, 'long decade', from 1993 to the present, was notable less for innovation than for consolidation of activities and particularly for the continued rise in the quality of scholarly activity within BACS and growing international recognition. These achievements are elaborated on below.

Groups

The specialist groups of the British Association for Canadian Studies have extended and enriched its programme of activities. Since the formation of the first group in 1981, the Library and Resources Group, several other groups have been formed, whose membership includes university academic staff, postgraduate students, architects, lawyers, school teachers, policy makers and people active in business sectors of the economy. Currently active groups include the Aboriginal Studies Circle, the Canadian Business and Economic Studies Group, the Canada/UK Architecture Group, le Groupe de recherches et d'études sur le Canada francophone, the History Group, the Literature Group and the UK/Canadian Legal Studies Group. The groups reach multiple publics and provide a range of activities during the year that complement the annual conference of the British Association for Canadian Studies. Newsletters, journal articles, books, conferences, exhibitions and other events have resulted from the work of the groups. The activities of the groups provide timely responses to cultural, professional, economic and political developments in Canada. This report makes recommendations to enhance the links between the Association and its groups.

Achievements

During the past thirty years BACS and its members have recorded some significant achievements. Canadian Studies is thriving, a wide range of courses reach a substantial number of students and at the last count they were taught at more than 90 institutions in British higher education. An extensive programme of conferences and seminars reflect an active research community. Those held in 2005–06 are summarised in Appendix 2. BACS has an active publication programme with the prestigious *British Journal of Canadian Studies* at the centre. Most BACS members are active researchers, and the range of output of British-based Canadianists is indicated in Appendices 6 and 10. This also lists an impressive number of recent monographs. A testament to the high calibre of work is the remarkable achievement of those five BACS members who have won the ICCS Pierre Savard Award (given for the outstanding monograph in English or French by Canadianists outside Canada) in every year since its inception.

Challenges

All of this represents a major achievement and a record of which BACS can be proud. The challenge we now face is to maintain the calibre of academic work, to expand membership and to increase the number of undergraduates and postgraduates studying Canada. Canadian Studies in the UK faces a number of challenges. Not the least of these is that, as elsewhere in Western Europe, many of those involved in Canadian Studies have recently retired or are close to retirement. While this will leave in place many highly able Canadianists at the peak of their powers, together with a cadre of younger scholars, their replenishment with a new generation of academics must be of the highest priority. It will have to be achieved, moreover, in an academic environment that is not wholly favourable to Canadian Studies nor indeed to Area Studies in general. Area Studies as a whole has been losing its share of the student market, so although Canada is taught on an impressive range of courses the number of students has not kept pace with the expansion of higher education. Canadian Studies often occupies a minority status within departments and faculties. While there are a number of specialist courses, Canadian Studies is more often taught on a comparative basis or as an illustration on a discipline-based course. To counteract this, it is of paramount importance that strategic alliances are forged with colleagues in cognate areas of work and that Canadian material is integrated into broader courses. It is worth stressing that there are fast expanding areas, notably in media and film studies, in urban studies and psychology, which should provide good opportunities for teaching about Canada.

Action

We identify a number of elements that we consider will help to secure a solid platform for Canadian Studies in the UK and will enable Canadian teaching and research to continue to flourish. In part this is a matter of ensuring that strong institutions and practices already in place survive, and in part initiating changes to facilitate the continued health and strength of Canadian Studies.

- 1. Continued support for Canadian Studies from Canada.** It would be difficult to overstate the importance for Canadian Studies in the UK of the superb support it has had from the Canadian government and from the High Commission in London. Canadian Studies has been particularly blessed by having such excellent Academic Relations personnel in the High Commission. Without this and the financial support from the Foundation for Canadian Studies it is inconceivable that Canadian Studies could have become so well established. The energy, enthusiasm and expertise of the Academic Relations Unit in the provision of advice and contacts and in developing new initiatives have been of immeasurable importance, and there is no question but that the maintenance of this is fundamental to the future of Canadian Studies in Britain. The Faculty Research Program, the Faculty Enrichment Program and the Institutional Research Program, together with other assistance, have been vital in attracting new people to Canadian Studies, in encouraging new courses and in supporting research.
- 2. An information infrastructure.** The relative isolation of many of those engaged in Canadian Studies has an important bearing on the work of the individuals concerned. BACS and its groupings go a long way to alleviating this. But for the future a further method of reducing this isolation is to build an information infrastructure. Whatever the uncertainties, it is clear that electronic resources will be of central importance for the future of Canadian Studies, for students at pre-university, undergraduate and graduate levels and for staff in teaching and research. We have taken major initiatives to create a much better information infrastructure for Canadian Studies in the UK, and these are among the principal outcomes of Phase Two of this Sustained Studies project.
 - *Access Canada.* Since IT networks are one of the key media for the storage and dissemination of information the creation of a web gateway to resources for Canadian Studies was regarded as vital. The Library and Resources Group (LARG) of BACS has created such a gateway, *Access Canada*, which went live in September 2004. This constituted a major outcome of Phase 2 of this project.
 - *Canadian Studies in the UK and Ireland: A Guide to Resources.* Canadianists have benefited in the past from a series of Guides to library and archive sources on Canada. Plans are now in progress for a new updated

edition which will be published electronically. The Guide will cover libraries, archives and other resource centres with significant textual holdings. Electronic publication will facilitate use and expansion and is in line with the intention to create an electronic information infrastructure. This will also enable subsequent updating to be made incrementally. The preparation and production of the new Guide is being undertaken under supervision of the LARG, and the Guide text will be hosted via the BACS/*Access Canada* website.

- *Canadian Studies in the UK: A Directory of Canadianist, Courses and Research*. The third element of the developing information infrastructure will be an electronic database of Canadian Studies in the UK. This will bring together detailed information about teaching and research, revealing the full range of undergraduate and postgraduate course being taught on Canada, and give details of research interests and recent publications of UK-based Canadianists. The major work of updating an earlier print version is now underway and it will be produced in an electronic format in 2007. It will be a companion piece to the *Guide to Resources*, and it too will be hosted via the BACS/*Access Canada* website. An electronic format should make access easy and should facilitate contact not only between UK-based scholars but also those working elsewhere in the world. It will also be easy to update.

- *BACS Website*. The fourth element is the BACS website itself. The central importance of a good website for BACS can not be overestimated. Information on the whole range of activities, conferences and seminars, publications, grants/financial support as well as links to other websites is of huge value to BACS members and others interested in Canada and Canadian Studies. For many it will be first port of call to the *Guide* and the *Directory*. The BACS website has recently been overhauled and its appearance, ease of use, and the range of information provided has been greatly improved. Priority is being given to keeping it up-to-date.

3. **Other action.** The preparation of this report has acted as a catalyst to several initiatives. Building the information infrastructure has been the most important single group of these, but several other changes have or are being undertaken, some arising directly out of the project, others independently.

- *National Office*. This returned from Edinburgh to London in September 2006, usefully bringing the BACS Administrator back into proximity with the Academic Relations Section of the High Commission. Siting of the office in the Institute for the Study of the Americas in the University of London provides further helpful synergies and the central London location is a valuable contact point for visiting academics and others.

- *British Journal of Canadian Studies*. Continued publication of the *BJCS* is of the highest importance to BACS. Up until now the journal has been published in-house. This has imposed a considerable burden on the Administrator, and the cost implications of outsourcing production to a commercial press have been carefully examined. In future the publication of the journal will be undertaken by Liverpool University Press (LUP), who will manage its production, distribution, institutional subscription collection and marketing. It is hoped that greater publicity for the journal through abstract services and other means will result. BACS will jointly own the copyright to the journal title and contents. The first official issue to be published by LUP will be in April 2007.

- *Groups and recruitment*. An important objective is to expand membership. A sub-committee is producing a programme of action. It will explore any ideas and opportunities that emerge from the US CONNECT team's report, and among other ideas it is investigating an online MA, possibly linked with a European-wide postgraduate initiative. One of the objectives in creating a good information infrastructure is to raise the visibility of Canadian Studies in the UK and thereby to stimulate recruitment. Much of the vitality of BACS lies in the activity of its component subject groupings, and the importance of maintaining flourishing groups is paramount: new groups have been and are in the process of being formed.

- *Other miscellaneous activities* include an updating of the BACS constitution and the initiation of a new lecture series, the Eccles Centre Plenary Lecture in association with the Eccles Centre for American Studies at the British Library.

Conclusion

At the time of writing Federal Government commitment to Canadian Studies programmes is under threat, although we have recently heard the budget has been extended for a further year. Future withdrawal of this funding would be a grievous blow to Canadian Studies in this country, and beyond, and would jeopardise much that has been achieved by decades of investment.

The recommendations contained in Part 2 of this report are none the less based on the assumption that these programmes will substantially continue. Most of these recommendations centre on the necessity for an infrastructure for Canadian Studies in the UK. We believe these measures will help to secure a sound future for Canadian Studies in the United Kingdom and sustain a flourishing organisation during the next decade and beyond. In doing so it will maintain and develop a dynamic community of Canadianists in this country who can continue to inspire and inform students, academic colleagues and the wider UK public by providing and promoting a broad-based knowledge and understanding of all the varied aspects of Canada.

