

ICCS Forum May 2007

As BACS members may know, the ICCS is planning a Forum on the nature and future of Canadian Studies, to be held in Edmonton in May. The idea of the Forum, which was prompted by the perceived need to understand where Canadian Studies are heading and where they should be heading, actually predates the Treasury Board decision that caused so much concern last year. However, that decision – even if since revoked - has had the effect of lending a new urgency to the whole debate and challenges us to reflect on what we, as Canadianists, are doing and what we might want to do.

In fact, as individuals or collectively, we face many challenges. If some – such as the issue of Canadian Government funding – are shared, others are specific to certain areas, countries, institutions. There is much talk at present, for example, about the effect of the Bologna Process on the teaching of Canadian Studies in Europe. In the UK, ironically, the Research Assessment Exercise can actually have the effect of frustrating research on Canada. And not a few of us will know of institutions where support and resources for Canadian Studies have been cut or withdrawn altogether. A Forum such as the one proposed can hardly seek to come up with answers to all the challenges – and all their complex, concomitant issues – that we confront. But it surely can, and ought to help with certain key questions. There is, for example, the question of how to ensure that sufficient numbers of new, young Canadianists are coming through ‘pour assurer la relève’. What strategies can be devised, in a fast changing global scene, to attract and retain new talent? It would be useful to examine how best to realize the potential of e-learning or distance learning. Outreach, too, is an issue of major significance. A major task of the Forum will be to re-examine the role of the ICCS (and the national associations) vis-à-vis the explicit and implicit exigencies of DFAIT. To what extent can we, without imperilling cherished ideals such as academic freedom, pursue a realpolitik that will mean, in effect, a widening of the definition of Canadian Studies? In fact, if properly managed, the possibilities are invigorating and exciting, and there is every reason to be positive about them. It is very much in our own interest to consider new paths, new strategies, new perspectives, and, more particularly, to engage with concrete, realistic proposals. Planning for the Forum – and the absolute need to allow the active participation of all those who attend - is currently under way. Certain points still need to be resolved. Not least, for example, how best to effect that active participation? What questions should be discussed? Since the Forum is of importance to us all, the organizers would greatly welcome your input. What are the concerns that you would like to see addressed? Which questions, in your view, are of most significance? Do you have any suggestions regarding the shape of the Forum? Do get in touch with your ideas and suggestions: they will be invaluable in helping us make the Forum as representative and as pertinent as possible.

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