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Oct. 16, 2003 | Administrative Affairs

Canadian Studies headed for change, increasing relevance

By **Steven Goldsmith**
News and Information

Like a sparring Hollywood tabloid couple, the squabbles are getting harder and harder to ignore.

Marijuana laws, same-sex marriage, the war in Iraq ... are the United States and Canada still even friends?

An increasingly blatant set of social and political differences along the world's longest undefended border is creating fresh material for study just as the UW's Canadian Studies Program undergoes dramatic changes of its own.

"There's a new kind of Canadian awareness of self, a coming of age," said Professor Doug Jackson, the UW program's founder who has just retired.

It was only 15 years ago that Jackson launched a center that has just pulled in a \$1 million, three-year federal grant, making it the top-funded Canadian Studies program in the United States.

Jackson's replacement as Canadian Studies director, Kim England, hopes to expand on what he and others have built.

"I'm very interested in having a stronger Canadian Studies presence on campus," said England, like Jackson a member of the geography faculty.

Already, some 4,000 UW students take approximately 100 courses with significant Canadian content, ranging from fish farming and sustainability, to trade policy, to the literature of Quebec. Most of the courses are cross-listed in both a "home" discipline and Canadian Studies, which is part of the Jackson School of International Studies.

Like other Jackson School area-studies centers, the Canadian Studies Center mixes its academic focus with a mission of community outreach. Nadine Fabbi, the center's assistant director for five years, trains K-12 teachers in Canadian history and puts on a stream of cultural and educational public events for Puget Sound residents with an interest or connection to Canada.

Academically, priorities for the near future include adding study opportunities in Canadian aboriginal languages, Fabbi said. Also paramount is nurturing the growing partnership with the University of British Columbia, which already has yielded a popular joint course on "Puget Sound/Georgia Basin: Managing an International Ecosystem" that sends students back and forth across the border to learn from scientists, policy-makers, businesspeople and tribal resource managers. Another key, Fabbi said, is maintaining the center's longtime partnership in a consortium with Western Washington University, which also participates in the cross-border course.

Increasingly at the forefront of Canadian Studies since 9/11 are the issues involving border security, which is the subject of the center's current lecture series that drew 550 people last week to see best-selling author Naomi Klein in Kane Hall.

Also becoming a higher priority is putting Canada in an international and interdisciplinary context rather than treating the topic in isolation. More than 60 UW graduate students conduct comparative research involving Canada. Overall, Fabbi said, Canadian Studies as an academic field is growing in strength and credibility.

"Even five years ago, the talk was all about the graying of the field and a lot of questions about even its survival in the United States," Fabbi said. "These days, I don't spend my time arguing about the importance of studying Canada."

Scholars offer thoughts on Canada at crossroads

When terrorists attacked America on Sept. 11, 2001, Douglas Jackson was delivering a historical lecture on a Lake Huron tour boat -- floating astride the border between the United States and Canada.

It turned out to be an illuminating place to be.

[enlarge](#) 

Photo by Mary Levin

Doug Jackson, retiring director of Canadian Studies, passes the Canadian mountie to incoming director Kim England. With them is Nadine Fabbi, assistant director.

Jackson, the founder of the UW's Canadian Studies program, spent the next few days talking to people in both nations, getting instant feedback and finding a subtle but real disparity in outlook between the United States and its neighbor to the north.

"I was suddenly aware of a divergence between Canadian and American thinking," Jackson said. "Of course there was sympathy and 'We're sorry for what happened in New York,' but there was also a genuine feeling that the U.S. administration's arrogance with the rest of the world was not right, either."

Jackson recently retired from the UW faculty, and will be honored Nov. 25 -- his 80th birthday -- at a reception at the Burke Museum, to which he has donated noteworthy examples of Canadian aboriginal art.

He, along with the Canadian Studies Center's director and assistant director, recently offered University Week some observations on Canada at a crossroads:

W. A. Douglas Jackson, professor emeritus of geography -- originally a Sovietologist -- and founder of the UW Canadian Studies Center. Native of Toronto, U.S. citizen since 1964.

"You have to remember that Canada didn't become literally independent until 1931, so Canada is in a sense coming of age...I trace much of the difference in outlooks to our histories, the 'social gospel' Methodist religious heritage in Ontario that emerges in Canada's socially conscious policies in health care, immigration and social security."

Nadine Fabbi, assistant director of the Canadian Studies Center. Native of British Columbia, holder of a master's in Canadian Studies from Carleton University in Ottawa.

"Canada provides an excellent point of comparison with the U.S. With our cultural similarities and parallel histories, students or educators can look at the structure of our two governments or issues such as gun control and see that the differences stem from values or national philosophies that are quite distinct from one another."

Kim England, new director of Canadian Studies. Native of Great Britain, became a Canadian citizen during 10 years of teaching at the University of Toronto. An associate professor of geography specializing in urban social geographies, feminist geographies and labor.

"The U.S. and Canada are more similar than has been implied lately. At the same time, there are increasing differences, but they're not necessarily the things that are in the headlines, such as same-sex marriage and marijuana... You also have to look at things like employment equity (similar to affirmative action), abortion rights and capital punishment."