

 [E-mail this page](#)

[enlarge](#) 



Gustaf Andreassen

Several members of the UW Arctic Sovereignty Task Force talk after a meeting with Giovanni Di Girolami, a representative of the European Commission. Left to right: Jamie Stroble, Nadine Fabbri, April Nishimura, Di Girolami.

Feb. 12, 2009

Whose Arctic is it? Students investigate the question in Canada

By Catherine O'Donnell
News and Information

Whose Arctic is it anyhow? Or how can competing international claims be resolved? With the polar ice cap melting, significant oil and gas reserves may soon be accessible, and the Northwest Passage shipping route could become far more navigable.

Those are only a few items on a growing list of Arctic concerns. There's money and territory involved, and nations are sitting up and taking notice.

Thirteen UW students and two professors recently spent a week in Ottawa investigating half a dozen issues moving to center stage as the Arctic, for better or worse, becomes more interesting to the rest of the world.

The UW trip was part of Arctic Sovereignty, a five-credit Task Force course at the Jackson School of International Studies. Before graduating, each International Studies major must complete a Task Force course, which applies classroom learning to real-world situations. This quarter, 102 students are enrolled in seven Task Force courses.

Nadine Fabbri, associate director of the Canadian Studies Center, and Vincent Gallucci, a professor of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences, took their students to Ottawa because Canada has become a leading voice in international discussions about the Arctic. Canada led the founding of the Arctic Council, which includes the eight circumpolar nations and representatives of six aboriginal groups, including the Inuit Circumpolar Council.

[enlarge](#) 



Gustaf Andreassen

Members of the UW Arctic Sovereignty Task Force meet with Siridur Anna Thordardottir, the Iceland ambassador to Canada. Standing (left to right): Nadine Fabbri, Kristen Olson, Gustaf Andreassen, Julia Troutt, Naama Sheffer, Thordardottir, Stephen Printz, Jamie Stroble, Patrick Lennon, Ruben Shimonov, Andrew Schwartz. Kneeling (left to right): April Nishimura, Alison McKay, Marta Schwendeman, Emily Epsten.

[enlarge](#) 

"Canada is without a doubt one of the leaders in the world discussion. It's right at the top of the country's foreign affairs agenda because of sovereignty concerns about the Arctic archipelago," Fabbi said.

Arctic Sovereignty students were required to complete significant reading assignments and other research before leaving for Ottawa so they could "hit the ground running," said Patrick Lennon, one of the students.

In five days, Fabbi, Gallucci and their students visited Canadian government agencies, various Inuit agencies, embassies for circumpolar nations, the European Commission and independent researchers, including legal experts at the University of Ottawa. One of the agencies, Foreign Affairs Canada, paid most of the \$24,000 cost of the trip; students contributed \$500 apiece for air fare.

"It was exhausting but so interesting," Lennon said of the trip. "I think people at the agencies were surprised we had prepared so much, and could question them about the nitty-gritty."

Fabbi said she was surprised by the amount of discussion regarding roles of the Inuit in the Arctic, but that it's none too surprising, given that they are becoming more organized and more vocal. "Clearly the Inuit have had a marked impact on northern strategies both in Canada and internationally."

Circumpolar nations have begun issuing Arctic policies, a signal of growing interest in the region, but apparently, said Lennon, there's not much research that considers all the Inuit groups and the circumpolar nations. It's added impetus to the work of the task force.

At the end of each Task Force course, members present their policy brief -- with recommendations, it can run 300 pages -- to authorities in the field. Rob Huebert, associate director of the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies at the University of Calgary, will review the Arctic Sovereignty report, then question task force members.

The Arctic Sovereignty course is part of an effort to broaden and deepen Task Force courses. In 2008, Professor Angelina Godoy took her Task Force students to Guatemala, where they investigated worker conditions in factories producing university sportswear. In 2010, there may be a Task Force trip to Colombia, said Tamara Leonard, associate director of the Center for Global Studies.

Fabbi would like to see Arctic Sovereignty offered through the University of the Arctic, a cooperative network of 116 universities, colleges and other organizations that the UW joined in June.

For more information on Arctic Sovereignty, visit the [course Web site](#).



UT Perry-Castaneda Library

The red line on the map indicates the boundary of the Arctic region as determined by the area in which the average temperature for the warmest month is 10 degrees Celsius or less.