

Canadian Studies: A Summary of the case for restored funding
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A nation confronting unprecedented trade and foreign policy challenges can be expected to deploy the most effective negotiating and public diplomacy skills available to it. Does Canada meet that test? On many fronts the answer is yes. In public diplomacy there is a surprising and needless gap - the result of the Conservative government's cancellation of the Understanding Canada program and the reluctance of the present government to restore that program. Established in the mid 70s this program rapidly became one of Foreign Affairs' most cost-effective small scale instruments –in a 40 year span it produced a network of approximately 7000 scholars in 55 countries, comprising 28 national associations and 5 multilateral associations. The network was based on the development of Canadian content that exposed students and university teachers around the world to the Canadian experience. It has been cost effective (\$5.5 million approx in 2012) because most expenses are willingly borne by foreign universities. The system works like a hybrid engine: foreign universities, sometimes with help from their governments and the private sector, keep the batteries charged, but a modest supply of gas (Canadian Federal funding) is essential.

While it has not been a tool of Canadian government messaging, the global network of academic Canadianists has developed relationships and access to media and to political incumbents at all levels. In many situations they can help to clarify issues and shape local views. The system has played a successful and important role in Canada's public/cultural diplomacy.

Cultural diplomacy, defined as actions designed to facilitate the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, can strengthen relationships by nurturing understanding, trust, and resilience in bilateral relations.

The value to Canada, to our profile, to the flow of foreign students, and to the enrichment of our universities and scientific establishments through steady cross fertilization is incalculable. Much of the network survives. However, the failure of the Canadian government to restore funding lowers motivation and discourages the recruitment of potential Canadianists. Inevitably, attrition is taking a toll. If action is taken quickly, the damage should not be irreversible. The victim of present and further neglect is Canada's self-interest.