

Cross-Disciplinary Learning and Teaching Initiative

Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives on Canada -- workshop conducted summer 2011

coordinator: Jack Iverson

Practical matters.

Participants were, in alphabetical order: Sharon Alker, Bob Carson, Denise Hazlett, Jack Iverson, Rogers Miles, Suzanne Morrissey, Dean Snider.

Our workshop on Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives on Canada was conducted during the summer months, June-August 2011, in a series of 8 meetings. The workshop was supported by a CLEo site that we used for exchanging materials. After an initial meeting with a general focus, 6 meetings were organized around the individual interests of the participants. The eighth meeting was held over lunch, as an opportunity to synthesize our proceedings and think about future directions for Canadian Studies.

Scheduling was a challenge, and the workshop coordinator would have done well to take this matter in hand much earlier. As things worked out, we did just manage to schedule a full set of sessions; on three occasions, workshop members participated via Skype, listening and contributing to discussion remarkably well despite the virtual distance. In any case, recommendation #1 is for workshop coordinators to schedule things early on! Summer scheduling is not easy.

Otherwise, the workshop worked remarkably well on the logistical level. With the exception of the first and last sessions, leadership was assumed by the individual members of the workshop, assigning preparation and leading discussion. Sessions included:

6/15 -- basic orientation: We completed some common readings on Canada and did individual explorations in *Canadian History for Dummies* -- an excellent resource for rapid access to basic information. We also used this session to share personal perspectives on interest in Canada and to firm up the agenda for subsequent sessions.

6/29 -- Sharon, English-language literature: Sharon assigned to us a novel that she is currently teaching in her senior seminar, *Soucouyant* by David Chariandy, in anticipation of the author's campus visit (Sept. 11-12, 2011, sponsored by the Canadian Studies Association and organized by Sharon). This session focused on aspects of Canadian multiculturalism, both in the novel itself and in Canadian federal policy. *Soucouyant* is an excellent novel that led to wide-ranging discussion, both literary and socio-political.

7/14 -- Denise, Canadian monetary policy and regulatory practice: As the primary material for this session, Denise transcribed portions of a lecture by Nicholas Le Pan comparing the economic crisis in Canada and the United States, specifically from the perspective of regulatory policy. Since most of

the workshop participants had a relatively low level of familiarity with many of the basic terms of economic policy, Denise provided extensive background, responding to questions that had arise from the reading. At a more general level, and germane to other topics covered in the workshop, we also talked about the origins and causes of differences in national attitudes towards something like economic regulatory policy.

7/26 -- Jack, Québec: As the organizer of the only session focusing on the French-speaking province, I wanted to cover a number of topics, ranging from history to cultural policy and recent controversies focused on ethnic and cultural diversity. The group discussion spontaneously directed itself toward the assigned excerpts from the report generated by a recent provincial commission examining policies accommodating religious and cultural differences, reinforcing the theme of multiculturalism and anticipating our following session on Church-State relations. We also watched 2 excerpts from a recent Québécois sit-com and discussed the importance of French-English relations as an element of recent commemorative celebrations.

7/28 -- Rogers, Church-State relations: Rogers selected a scholarly article focusing on the constitutional status of religion in Canada and the U.S. that attempted to account for much higher rates of secularization north of the border. This reading led to a broad-ranging discussion of religious institutions and the idea of the separation between Church and State, which is expressed much differently in Canada than in the U.S. We also learned a great deal about the surprising (to some of us) breadth of religious studies as an academic field and the important links between social and institutional factors in shaping a national culture.

8/9 -- Dean, Canadian sport policy; Suzanne, alternative medical practices: These two topics were combined in one session somewhat by chance but turned out to complement one another extremely well. In both cases, we explored issues in Canada today that are linked to social well-being and the importance of policy in contributing to individual welfare. In Dean's case, we read several documents generated by national policy groups for sport development. These documents outlined the steps that have been taken to raise awareness of sport policy in Canada with the dual goals of developing more elite athletes but also increasing physical activity across the whole population. Suzanne introduced us to the domain of alternative medical practices and some of the basic questions researchers ask to study individual practices in this field, including questions about who chooses alternative treatments and their reasons for doing so. In many cases, attitudes differ significant across different demographics. In this area--opposed to our top-down perspective on sport policy--we were looking much more at factors in individual decision-making processes.

8/16 -- Bob, Canadian geography and geology: For this session, Bob led us on a tour of the Canadian provinces. Supported by a reading from one of our assigned books, we looked both at the primary regional features of each area and particular environmental issues that have arisen in recent decades. As a country that depends heavily on natural resources for economic vitality, Canada is particularly closely linked to the land, often leading to discussion (and disagreement) about appropriate use of resources. This session usefully reminded us of the vast expanse of the Canadian territory and the permanence of the environment as an element of Canadian identity.

8/23 -- wrap-up lunch: We took this opportunity to support the Canadian economy by consuming a small sample of Canadian beverage at a local eating establishment. In addition, we tried to process our workshop, both in terms of individual impacts and with respect to planning for future Canadian events on campus. Generally, I believe the feeling was that we were excited and happy to have had the opportunity to explore and expand upon our knowledge of Canada in the company of six colleagues. On the other hand, beyond our own individual courses, the question remains of what will grow from our shared experience this summer.

Reflections

As coordinator, I will attempt to characterize the attitudes of the group, but I must add a note of caution that these are my individual thoughts.

Since most of the participants had previously invested some energy in working to sustain a Canadian Studies initiative on the Whitman College campus over the past several years, it was particularly gratifying to have the opportunity to spend a substantial amount of time together thinking collectively about various aspects of our interests in Canadian matters. Collectively, we felt it was wonderful to do so with institutional support and incentive, and we feel fortunate to have benefitted from the Cross-Disciplinary initiative.

With respect to the subject matter of our workshop, the strengths and weaknesses are rather apparent. On the one hand, it was easy to address the individual interests of all workshop participants, and all of us learned a great deal about the approaches and methods used in a variety of fields across campus. On the other hand, it seems to me that we were often in the position of relying on one "expert" to guide our discussions, with the rest of us in the position of learners on most days. In a repeat manifestation of this workshop, given the shared base knowledge we now have, it might be possible to define a theme more narrowly, but I am not sure whether that would be hugely beneficial. Given that ours was a concrete subject (rather than a theory-based one), it seemed advantageous to allow individual participants the freedom to pursue their own interests and curiosity.

Almost unavoidably, comparative perspectives were prominent throughout our discussions. As our close neighbor, frequent trading partner, and political ally, Canada readily invites us to reflect on parallel matters as we experience them in the U.S. What constitutes significant difference? where do differences originate? what can we learn by

considering similar issues in a country that is in many respects much like ours? This line of questioning suggests that there is inherent value for our students in focusing on Canadian issues, as a way of creating fresh perspectives on questions that may otherwise seem too familiar to warrant close inspection. This was perhaps the most valuable lesson we could draw from our explorations collectively.

For our group, the question of possible outcomes seemed to be an unresolved one in our final session. It seems clear that each of us will be able to incorporate some Canadian material in our courses, and our commitment to doing so was generally strengthened by the workshop. Several members have very specific plans about the way in which this will happen. (Please see the individual reports.)

But it seems more difficult to incorporate the full range of material from the workshop. Optimally, a course on Canadian Studies would be a multi-faceted affair that would involve representative of several disciplines. This could, indeed, be an exciting prospect that would bring multiple disciplinary approaches to the analysis of issues of common interest. As a sort of minimum compromise, the group is considering the idea of proposing a one-credit course that would feature sessions presented by a series of individual faculty members, highlighting different aspects of Canada. We hope that such a course would stimulate student interest in Canada that might subsequently carry over into other courses. At the same time, the course would provide a small introduction to the kinds of work done in different departments on campus. Obviously, it would be difficult to account for such a course as a part of anyone's teaching standard assignment and will probably be proposed as a small overload, supported, we hope, by cash incentives.

Other ideas to arise from the workshop include:

- members of the workshop have agreed to contribute small presentations to Sharon's current senior seminar on Canadian literature, a way of providing broader background for her students
- the possibility of bringing Canadians to campus as O'Donnell fellows
- the prospect of an alumni trip to Canada
- the desirability of working with library staff to promote Canadian questions as a possible focus for senior thesis projects in various departments
- a continued investment in the Canadian Studies Association to promote Canadian interest on campus

Sharon Alker:

The summer 2011 workshop on multidisciplinary perspectives on Canada and Canadian Studies was invaluable to me. First, since I am teaching a course on Multicultural Literature in Canada in the Fall, 2011 semester, I will be able to use the wide interdisciplinary information I learned to enhance the knowledge of the class. This includes topics that I knew little or nothing about prior to the course, including Canadian sports, medicine, geology, economics, medicine, religion, and the history and current state of Quebec. I am able to enter the classroom far more informed about the culture I will be grappling with. Second, each of my colleagues have agreed to give up their valuable time to visit my class and provide background on their area of expertise. This means my class gains a directly interdisciplinary aspect that it did not have before. In particular, my students get to meet professors from a variety of disciplines and all three divisions and get a sense of how these different approaches formulate questions and investigate important topics regarding Canada. In relation to our mandate to do follow up with the library, I am on the library committee this Fall and will be continuing to work with Dalia to develop increasingly successful ways to showcase Canadian studies. Our group has also started to talk about the possibility of teaching a multidisciplinary course on Canada, so the workshop opened up a space for increased brainstorming about multidisciplinaryity.

Bob Carson:

Having travelled in every province (and one territory) of Canada, I chose to present on the country's geography. I leaned quite a lot preparing a PowerPoint dealing with each province and territory, with some focus on energy resources.

I also learned a tremendous amount reading the texts and shorter items provided by my colleagues. Particularly interesting to me are Canadian history in general, and French-speaking Quebec in particular. I'm also interested in Canadian vs. USA policies and practices on the environment and energy.

In Introduction to Environmental Studies I already talk about Canadian pipelines and the tar sands. I'd like to include more about HydroQuebec. In Geomorphology I already use numerous Canadian examples of glacial and periglacial landforms.

I am interested in taking a student and/or alumni trip to Canada. My earlier trip to the Queen Charlotte Islands with students and alums was, I believe, quite successful. Future possibilities include the Canadian Rockies and the Maritime provinces. I would be willing to participate in a team-taught course on Canada.

To me, the most valuable part of our workshop was discussing with, learning from, and getting to know better six colleagues.

Denise Hazlett:

Participation in the 2011 summer Canadian Cross-disciplinary faculty group inspired me to explore how Canada managed to weather the global financial crisis of 2007-2009 so well compared to the United States. I had a vague notion that U.S. policy-makers had much to learn from Canada's experience. In looking for an article that our group could discuss, I found a video of a speech given at Duke University, North Carolina in February 11, 2011 by the person who had been Canada's head financial services regulator from 2001-2006. It was during this period that financial excesses occurred in many developed countries, leading to the global financial crisis. Somehow Canada did not engage in those same excesses, and I was curious why. I transcribed the speech and wrote a set of discussion questions for our group. We had a discussion I found helpful as I considered how to use this material in my classes. It turns out there is a lot the U.S. can learn from Canada's financial system, and this speech was exactly to those points! Members of our group also remarked on how this discussion helped us start talking about how to conduct a cross-disciplinary discussion.

In preparing to teach my Monetary Theory and Policy (Econ 407) course for this fall, I revised my questions and handed them out on the first day of class, making them the basis for a class discussion of the speech. Just as my faculty colleagues had done, my students listened to Nicholas Le Pan's speech "Lessons from the Financial Crisis: Canada in Comparative Perspective," <http://ondemand.duke.edu/video/26206/lessons-from-the-financial-cri>, read my transcript of the speech, and answered preparatory discussion questions. Then, in our next two class meetings (September 2 and 5) we discussed Mr. Le Pan's speech. Comparing and contrasting U.S. and Canadian economic policies (and their results) from the perspective of the most prominent Canadian financial regulator was a great way to start the semester.

I am appending below the discussion questions I gave my students to help them prepare.

Discussion Questions for Econ 407, Fall 2011

1. What two reasons does Mr. Le Pan give for a country to regulate the safety and soundness of its financial system?
2. What big contrasts between U.S. and Canadian macroeconomic, housing, and tax policy does Mr. Le Pan highlight early in his speech?
3. If a society chooses to operate on the "risky end of the risk-and-innovation versus stability tradeoff," what obligation does Mr. Le Pan believe that society has? Why would society have this obligation?
4. What has made the Canadian banking system diversified and concentrated? How did the result help Canada weather the 2007-2009 global financial crisis?
5. How did the refusal by the Canadian government over the past dozen years to permit bank mergers help Canada weather the financial crisis?
6. On page 5, Mr. Le Pan says "It's better to do deals, you get paid for that." What does he mean?
7. What improvements in Canadian corporate governance does Mr. Le Pan describe?
8. According to Mr. Le Pan, why is it important for Canadian policy makers not to just pat themselves on the back about their success in weathering the crisis?
9. What core principle of banking regulation does Mr. Le Pan find most important? Why is it so important?

10. According to Mr. le Pan, we have known about vulnerabilities in the financial system for many years, and had “international meetings about this stuff 15 years ago.” In his opinion, why weren’t these vulnerabilities fixed?

11. What advantages came from having a single financial regulatory authority in Canada? What disadvantages did the U.S. suffer from having four separate regulatory authorities?

12. According to Mr. le Pan, what are the important regulatory issues to think about going forward?

Jack Iverson:

At our workshop concludes, I must say I am torn by very ambivalent feelings. It has been a wonderful experience to share with 6 colleagues a learning experience of this type, in an area I feel quite strongly about. Indeed, in the course of our summer explorations, I was pushed to engage with fields quite far from areas of training and even, to some extent, quite foreign to my personal interests. In particular, the sessions we devoted to economic regulatory policy and sport policy were completely outside the scope of anything I would normally think about. The sessions dealing with alternative medicine and the relationship between Church and State also lie well beyond matters that cross my path with any regularity. In this respect, I learned a tremendous amount, not only about Canada, but also about the disciplines represented on our campus and the tools of analysis that characterize them. In all of these respects, I feel greatly enriched. I should add, as well, that I really enjoyed the opportunity to be in the position of a learner in a classroom and to see the joy this experience brought to the other workshop participants.

So, my misgivings are attached only to the absence of an obvious next step. Directly, but in a rather limited way, I will be incorporating some of the material in my own teaching. This will be true—but this is already standard practice in language teaching—in advanced language courses, and it will also be the case in a revised version of my eighteenth-century course that I will teach this Spring under the title, "France and New France." In this latter setting, I will be talking about Canada in the colonial context, not incorporating the workshop's focus on contemporary issues.

Concerning possible future developments, I hope we will succeed in putting together an introductory course that might help to stimulate student interest in Canada. Obviously, the question in this case is where the course might fit in the curriculum, and how it might be staffed. As a working idea, we have come up with the notion of a one-credit course that could take the form of a series of lectures by various members of the faculty, including (but not limited to) the participants in the workshop. I am absolutely convinced that the students on our campus would benefit greatly from a broader and deeper exposure to Canadian issues as part of their liberal arts education.

Rogers Miles:

As a long-time member of Whitman’s First-Year Program, I am used to collaborating with colleagues from other disciplines on a set of common texts, but the cross-disciplinary seminar on Canada presented a number of novel challenges. Each of us in

the seminar had to draw from our respective fields of study to address some aspect of Canadiana, and we had to do so in a manner that would be comprehensible to other members in the seminar without our expertise. I hope others would agree with me that we were largely successful. I was stimulated by what I learned about alternative medicine in Toronto from Suzanne Morrissey, the FUNdamentals of Canada's integrative sport policy from Dean Snider, multiculturalism and its impact upon Canadian literature from Sharon Alker, the worldview of the Quebecois from Jack Iverson, the topological diversity of Canada's provinces from Bob Carson, and Canada's innovative approach to navigating the financial crisis from Denise Hazlett.

I chose to present on Church and State in Canada since I teach a Church and State course focused solely on the United States, and I intend to globalize the course in the very near future. I was surprised to learn that there is no establishment clause in the Canadian Constitution and that Canadians unlike Americans are nonplussed about government support for religious education. I found myself digging into the history of Canadian religion in search of answers and concluded from my reading that it would be exciting to expand my historical survey of religion in America and make it comparative by including Canada. If the members of the seminar ever want to sponsor an introduction to Canadian Studies as a course at Whitman, I will be willing to lecture on religion in Canada.

Suzanne Morrissey:

I want to begin by thanking Jack Iverson for organizing a truly cross-disciplinary workshop that, while neatly organized around one (albeit broad) topic, gave breadth and depth to group members' understanding of various facets of Canadian culture, economy, politics, and environment. Although we were oriented as a group around one key text – *Canadian Studies in the New Millennium* – the range of topics, which reflected personal and disciplinary interests, were covered in thorough and provocative detail.

Before we began the workshop, I did not anticipate the instant connection that I felt with material on First Nations Peoples in Canada. But, as soon as we began reading, I was able to draw from early works in the history of anthropology done among indigenous peoples of Canada, especially with the Kwakiutl of Prince Rupert Island and the Iroquois and Cree in Quebec and Ontario. Immediately, I realized that I should not limit presentations of North American Indians (particularly in the Introduction to Cultural Anthropology in sections on kinship and exchange systems) to the U.S. but rather, can expand coverage – with readings and lectures – to north of the 49th parallel. I enjoyed talking to the group about the works of Alfred Kroeber, Lewis Henry Morgan and Franz Boas among Native North Americans.

Certain themes were salient in our discussions regardless of disciplinary and topical interest, including multiculturalism (as ideology *and* policy in Canada), Canadian identity (as distinct from the U.S.), social and financial regulatory structures. These themes helped frame my presentation of research that I did in Fall 2010 in Toronto. As I consider how to 1) integrate my work among Naturopathic Doctors and Chiropractors in

Ontario in my classes, and 2) prepare articles for publication, it was helpful to present to the group, receive feedback, and locate my work in the most current literature on Canadian culture and society. In particular, considering how people with chronic illness from various backgrounds (ethnic minorities and refugees, First Nations peoples, white native-born Canadian, etc.) integrate medical systems in the context of government health services and policy, is vital to my legitimacy as a scholar doing research in Canada. Participation in the group pushed me to evaluate the context in which to frame my work.

During our discussion led by Denise Hazlett on fundamental differences between Canadian and U.S. banking and regulatory systems (which are related in part to the different outcomes each country has experienced in the current recession), as other members made remarks about the “culture” of economic education, I began to see parallels in healthcare. Is it possible that just as PhD’s and MBA’s in the U.S. are pushed toward specialization in their education while Canadians are more likely to consider generalizing, the same can hold true for medical students in both countries? It has prompted me to look into the idea for my current research. In fact, certain threads of conversation and reading (e.g., a report by a government commission on Canadian practices of accommodation for cultural differences in Quebec), have left me with new angles from which to consider the analysis of my data from Toronto.

Dean Snider:

Having been born and raised in Canada, and currently living with the guilt that commonly is associated in being an expatriate, I was very pleased to participate in the summer multidisciplinary group on Canada and Canadian Studies. I found the opportunity to learn about my beloved country (of which I am still a citizen) from experts in literature, religion, language, geology, anthropology and economics to be highly informative, capturing my interest and even intrigue. I would go so far as to call it life enhancing.

My area of expertise is that of Sport. However the bulk of my professional activity in sport has taken place in the United States – here at Whitman College and at Western Washington University. To investigate and present on the Canadian sport context broadened my own knowledge base and provided insights that will inform my own efforts to build the Whitman College athletic program. By way of simple example, I found that Sport Canada and the NCAA III share common principles in that 1. The purpose of sport is to serve and enhance the participant whether in elite competitive or recreational sport or in simple activity and that 2. Sport should be integrated into, and serve to enhance, the larger community. From this insight I have gained new language and strategies that serve to promote these ends.

The summer study has potential of bringing several results back to campus. First, I have already agreed (as have my colleagues in the group) to participate in Sharon Alker’s Multicultural Literature course that she is teaching this fall. I will present one area of the Canadian context that will be considered along side the weekly reading. Additionally, we

have had conversations about offering a joint seminar course in Canadian studies that may follow the model of the environmental studies seminar offered at lunch on Tuesdays.

Finally, this summer study granted an opportunity for colleagues to learn from each other and gain a better understanding of each other's interests, expertise and passions. Valuable bridges were built between colleagues. This fact alone is of tremendous value to the college community and the students we serve.