

"Internationalizing the Social Sciences and Humanities"
by
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3rd International Transatlantic Degree Program Workshop,
Toronto, ON
September 28, 2007

Many thanks for inviting me to contribute to this important meeting and to share the session with Martha Crago, Robert Gosende and Ursula Lehmkuhl.

The challenges and opportunities afforded by the changing global environment for social sciences and humanities is at the heart of my work these days.

Indeed, I have just come from hosting a meeting of IFFA, the International Forum of Funding Agencies. IFFA gives senior officials of social science funding agencies a chance to discuss common policy issues in a substantive way, to compare approaches to these issues and even to identify opportunities to work together to address these issues.

As you know, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (or SSHRC for short) is an arm's-length federal agency that promotes and supports university-based research and training in the social sciences and humanities.

In 2006-2007, we were able to fund 3,600 new grants, scholarships and fellowships.

International collaboration has traditionally been a Canadian strength. In fact, in all fields of the social sciences and humanities, Canadians co-publish with foreign researchers more than the global average. In many of these fields, co-authored publications with foreign researchers have doubled over the past twenty years. Moreover, 31 percent of postdoctoral researchers and 21 percent of doctoral fellows take their fellowships abroad.

But in the context of the changing times, we are seeking to enable even greater international connections for many reasons.

By working with other countries, we have access to the global pool of knowledge; we can develop comparative perspectives on key social, cultural and economic issues; and we can pool knowledge and resources to address complex global issues. By taking part in research projects all over the planet, our researchers develop a Canadian perspective on the world and bring Canadian knowledge to countries around the globe.

We aim to develop graduates and scholars who are internationally knowledgeable, who are culturally flexible, and who take into account the increasingly interdependent nature of the world.

To do that, we agree completely with the European initiative to "internationalize" advanced training by creating new structures and programs to promote mobility, to internationalize curricula, and to build international partnerships.

I am convinced that granting agencies like SSHRC have a pivotal role to play in identifying and seizing opportunities to promote and position Canadian research internationally.

Part of that role is funding projects that meet the needs of our future researchers to expand their horizons. Let me talk about a few of our activities, starting with the International Opportunities Fund. The IOF is the perfect place to start, because it helps researchers develop, participate in, and lead diverse international collaborative research activities.

This program has been an enormous success. In its first year, we had 115 applications for a program meant for only about 15. Given the demand, the budget for IOF jumped from half a million dollars to \$1.25 million in 2006. That kind of take-up indicates the real appetite for international collaboration in Canada. I'm also impressed by the diversity of regions involved: there are projects all over the world.

Or consider our Strategic Research Clusters, which build connections, both among researchers, and between researchers and users of research, both within Canada and abroad. Two-thirds of the applications for that included foreign researchers, as did four of the seven clusters we ended up funding.

There are other projects, as well. BOREAS involves 13 circumpolar nations, which are working together to support social sciences and humanities research on the North. Six of the seven projects that BOREAS funded involved Canadian researchers.

We have also joined forces with the Europeans on a variety of projects. There is one that involves the societal aspects of genomics. And we're an associate member of NORFACE, in which European nations trade best practices and find ways to work together to support high-quality research.

In July, we signed an agreement with the International Development Research Centre, which helps developing countries use science and technology to find practical, long-term solutions to the social, economic and environmental problems they face.

Up to nine proposals will get as much as \$30,000 each in seed funding to develop a research alliance that involves researchers and community partners from both Canada and the developing world. SSHRC will fund the Canadian side of the project, while IDRC will fund the researchers and partners attached from the developing world.

But as successful as our programs are, we know that certain things are holding them back. For example, multinational projects require multinational funding commitments, which means tackling red tape in several countries at once. It can be hard enough getting universities and partners to work together within one country's borders. Getting them to work together across borders is harder still. We can also improve student mobility.

In response to the challenge, in 2005 we adopted our international policy. We had three goals.

- First, provide more opportunities for Canadian researchers to be part of international collaborative activities.
- Second, provide Canadian leadership on SSH research and policy, while promoting our contribution to major global issues and international research agendas.
- And third, provide more opportunities for research trainees to study and work internationally, facilitating mobility.

As I have emphasized, we have seen that strategy is already producing dividends for us.

But of course, the internationalization of research involves international cooperation among funding agencies.

In 2005, we worked with the National Science Foundation in the US and with the Economic and Social Research Council in the UK, as part of an effort that involved more than two dozen countries. This project recognized that international collaborative research will help us better understand the intensification of global societal processes.

One of the elements of the project involved exploring such new ideas as summer schools or training institutes. These schools and institutes could provide graduate students and postdoctoral scholars from different parts of the world with an opportunity to be trained in collaborative research methods, while they meet with other young scholars and future collaborators.

These summer projects would be a way to build knowledge and enhance research methods, while providing participants with international perspectives.

As you can see, we are taking the globalization of the social sciences and humanities very seriously.

Even so, we have only partially addressed the internationalization issue. For example, the European initiatives were designed so that two dozen countries could collaborate more effectively. But instead of having fences drawn throughout Europe, today the fence runs down from the North Sea and across the Mediterranean.

Does that mean that great ideas can't come from Canada or Japan or Australia? Of course not.

What we need to do is start thinking on a truly global scale. We need to ensure that the geopolitical boundaries around a researcher don't get in the way of developing talent, building understanding and advancing knowledge in a global context.

Before I turn things over to my colleagues today, I'd like to emphasize that theme of the 2008 Congress organized by the Canadian Federation of Humanities and Social Sciences and supported by SSHRC is "Thinking Beyond Borders: Global Ideas, Global Values."