

# Restore the 'Understanding Canada' program

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## MUNROE EAGLES

The swearing-in of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his new Liberal government suggests that Canada has genuinely turned a new page in its political life.

The whole world seemed to be watching with enthusiasm and satisfaction as a diverse cabinet filled with talent and promise was installed. With a promise to restore cabinet government and the introduction of a cabinet that looks "like Canada," Justin Trudeau has given Canadians and the country's supporters around the world ample reason to anticipate a restoration of Canada's respected place on the world stage.

Of the many important symbols that were showcased in the swearing-in ceremonies for the new cabinet, especially prominent was the respect shown for experience, knowledge and talent. In particular, the Canadian Studies community outside Canada is thrilled with the appointment of Stéphane Dion as minister of Foreign Affairs, himself a respected academic before entering federal politics in the 1990s. We see in this appointment concrete evidence that Prime Minister Trudeau's new government will once again value partnerships in the achievement of its foreign policy objectives.

Like our diplomats and government scientists, Canadian Studies specialists abroad had been devalued by the previous government of Stephen Harper. Despite evidence that the modest funding that went to support "Understanding Canada" programs abroad resulted in a net financial return to Canada worth many times the initial investment—and that these funds were effective in helping spread the Canadian story to audiences worldwide—the former prime minister decided to abruptly terminate these funds in May 2012.

The decision was conveyed to us by means of a terse statement on the Department of Foreign Affairs' website. We suspect that Prime Minister Harper's decision was political in nature and believe that it does not reflect any devaluation of our contributions on the part of Canada's career diplomats.

If Stephen Harper believed that his government's decision to sever Canada's ties with foreign-based academics would spell the death of Canadian Studies internationally, he was badly mistaken. An instance of the continued vitality of the Canadian Studies community abroad can be taken from my own academic organization, the Association for Canadian Studies in the United States.

Founded at Duke University in 1971, ACSUS has recently held its 33rd biennial conference, a meeting that attracted approximately 250 dedicated Canadian academic specialists and graduate students from as far away as Australia, Pakistan, Ireland and the United Kingdom. While the government of Quebec was a valued presence at the meeting, for the first time since our founding there was no financial support, nor were there any representatives participating from the government of Canada.

This was, of course, a major topic of conversation at the meeting. Our general conference theme, "New Direction in Canadian Studies," encouraged our partici-



Awards banquet of the 23rd Biennial Conference of the Association of Canadian Studies in the United States in Las Vegas, Oct. 16. ACSUS Photo

pants to envision a future for our field in a world without the support of the country we study. As part of this discussion, a panel of distinguished academics was devoted to the "State of Canadian Studies After the Cuts." This panel featured presentations from the current and past presidents of a number of prominent Canadian Studies organizations from around the world (including the US, Ireland, Britain, Canada and Australia).

Panelists expressed their deep sense of shock upon hearing of the termination of government support for their activities. Our panel discussion was held just two days before the Liberals' election sweep on Oct. 19 and while we all expressed hope for a change in government, nothing seemed certain to us at that time. Equally, however, all panelists were united in their resolve to protect the core programs and functions of the organizations that they have worked so hard to sustain. Rather than being downhearted, the panel focused instead on identifying "best practices" that would be useful in our efforts to survive.

In the case of my own academic association, the sudden and unexpected loss of Canadian government support has forced a significant organizational transformation. We have closed our office in Washington and laid off our long-serving executive director. We have taken up our new home in an office made available at my home university, the University at Buffalo-SUNY, where we continue to undertake significant activities in support of Canadian Studies. As a result, ACSUS core programs have been protected and our flagship journal, *The American Review of Canadian Studies*, continues to thrive and has even grown in stature with the dedicated and tireless work of our editorial staff at Western Washington University.

Watching the ceremonies in Ottawa, our hopes are buoyed that the evident return to more conventional modes and values of government will extend to Canada's academic partners abroad by means of a resumption of financial support for our work. We applaud the new government's recognition of the important role that Canada's diplomatic

corps play in the country's foreign relations. Working with them, we believe that our community of scholars has a significant role to play in helping restore Canada's standing in the international community. We are eager to take up this partnership once again.

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## Education in Canada THE NUMBERS

### In 2011/12:

**1,996,200**—Total number of students enrolled in Canadian universities and colleges.

**Proportion of qualifications received by graduates in 2011 that were in:**

**22 per cent**—Business, management and public administration

**15 per cent**—Social and behavioural sciences and law

**14 per cent**—Health, parks, recreation and fitness

**In 2011:**

**64 per cent**—The proportion of adults 25-64 who had postsecondary qualifications in Canada

**Apprenticeship training:**

**444,672**—Number of registrations in apprenticeship training across Canada, 2012.

**Teachers and professors:**

**756,900**—Number of teachers and professors in Canada as of June 2014.

**32 per cent**—Number of those who were men

**68 per cent**—Number of those who were women

**81 per cent**—Teachers and professors who worked full time

### Tuition fees in 2013/14:

**85,772**—Average paid in tuition fees by Canadian full-time undergraduate students

**86,053**—Average paid in tuition fees by Canadian full-time graduate students

### Household spending on education, 2012:

**\$1,386**—Average expenditure on education by all households in Canada

**Learning limitations:**

**622,260**

—Approximate number of Canadians 15 and older in Canada who reported having a learning disability, 2012

**121,060**—Approximate number of Canadians 5-14 in Canada in 2006 who reported having a learning limitation

### Earnings:

**\$68,563**—Overall average annual wage of young male bachelor's degree graduates, 2012

**\$50,506**—Overall average annual wage of young female bachelor's degree graduates, 2012

**\$85,759**—Overall average annual wage of young male college graduates, 2012