

Canadian Cultural Identities: An Interdisciplinary Colloquium
Grant Project I funded by the UW System Institute for Global Studies
The College of Letters and Science Dean's International Forum
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
October 3, 2000

While Americans seldom, if ever, think about Canada, Canadians constantly think about the US. Both nations emerged from a shared language, although Canada's diverse culture springs from French and Aboriginal origins as well; both nations share history and common cultural traditions. Media images of American culture dominate international consciousness, and nations hear, see and read about the world's superpower acting often unilaterally. In the United States we think of and call ourselves Americans, yet Canadians and other peoples of the Americas think of themselves as Americans too. South of the border we have no national self-concept such as United States. The term itself sounds absurd, because it would have focused identity in the federal concept of the Constitution. Therefore we adopted the continent as our identity, overlooking our northern neighbor's presence on the continent.

A central question of the forum was: How are Canada and the U.S. distinct?

Open to the university community and the general public the Dean's International Forum promoted understanding of the historical and cultural relationships between two nations, and the campus visit of four faculty members from the University of New Brunswick established links between two university faculties committed to Canada-US Studies.

Three 20-minute presentations commented on characteristics of Canadian identities.

Dr. Jennifer Andrews, Department of English, Canadian Literature, presented:
"Humoring the Border at the end of the Millennium: Constructing an English-Canadian Humor Tradition for the 20th Century and Beyond."

Dr. Gail Campbell, Department of History, the History of Canada, presented:
"Through Canadian Eyes: What Do Letters Home Reveal about Canadian Culture of the Mid- and Late Nineteenth Century?"

Dr. Richard Sigurdson, Department Political Science, Canadian Politics and Institutions, presented: "Multicultural Identities: Canada's Political Cultures."

Dr. Peter Kent, Department of History, Director of International Relations Fredericton Campus, and a co-founder of the student exchange program between the University of New Brunswick and the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, accompanied his colleagues

and visited with central administrators, deans, chairs, faculty and students to develop links between the universities.

On October 2 and 3 the Canadians met with classes, students interested in studying at the University of New Brunswick and colleagues who wished to learn about Canada and establish connections with colleagues at UNB.

The forum was part of the “Model Study Abroad” project funded by the UW System Institute for Global Studies in order to support curriculum development of Canada-US Studies and the College of Letters and Science student exchange program with the Arts Faculty of the University of New Brunswick. Dr. William Baurecht, English Department, Director of the University Honors Program, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, coordinated the forum and campus visit.