

Projecting Geography in the Public Domain in Canada

Canadian Association of Geographers Annual Meeting
University of Western Ontario, London, June 2-3, 2005

Projecting Geography in the Public Domain in Canada

Thursday, June 2 8:30 a.m. SS2028

Chair: Stuart Semple (Mount Allison University, Sackville NB)
Presenter: Bob Sharpe (Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo ON)
Presenter: Chris Sharpe (CAG Memorial University, St. John's NL)

This session opens a symposium on ways to project geography more effectively in the public domain in Canada. The opening session will be followed by five topics that form the core sessions for the symposium: universities, politics and government, business and industry, schools, and the media. Each session will involve the presentation of a position paper, a response, and an opportunity for focussed discussion by a selected group of participants on issues and possibilities arising from the presentations.

Geography, Universities, and Colleges

Thursday, June 2 10:30 a.m. Social Science Centre Room 2028

Presenter: Margaret North (University of British Columbia BC)
Respondent: Andre Roy (Université de Montréal, Montréal QC)
Chair: Lew French (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto ON)
Rapporteur: Peter Lasmanis (University of Western Ontario, London ON)

The place of geography in post-secondary education is central to any discussion of its relevance, acceptance, and survival in Canada. However the presence, reputation and healthy enrolments of Geography Departments across the country suggests that the problems of projection of our discipline do not primarily lie at the post-secondary level. However this prosperity is tenuous because it depends upon the recruitment of students from school systems where the position of geography in the curricula is under constant threat. The link between post-secondary and school geography is vital to our discipline.

School geography can be adversely affected by changes resulting from pressures of economics, political will, and group advocacy. These developments prompt important questions. Can geography be sustained in schools in face of these challenges? Are there ways in which academic, professional, and school geographers might work more effectively in promoting an understanding of the value of geography and encouraging post-secondary enrolments in the discipline?

Geography, Politics, and Government

Thursday, June 2 1:00 p.m. Social Science Centre Room 2028

Presenter: Peter Harrison (National Research Council, Ottawa ON)
Respondent: Barbara Veale (Grand River Conservation Authority, Cambridge ON)
Chair: Ethel Johnston (Toronto District School Board, Toronto ON)
Rapporteur: Michael Ball (Ontario Ministry of Education, Toronto ON)

From basic survey to the National Atlas of Canada, the work of Statistics Canada, and now the widespread adoption of GIS, the geographer's skills have been widely employed by governmental agencies. But a geographer's potential contribution can go beyond skills to involve conceptual understandings that are basic to the making of policy.

How wide-ranging are the present opportunities for geographers in governmental agencies? How well are politicians acquainted with the potential contribution of geography to Canadians' understanding of their country? Are new opportunities starting to emerge for geographers in this regard?

How can opportunities for geographers in the field of government be best communicated to universities and schools? How can geographers, both academic and professional, best acquaint government with new

concepts and techniques that are now emerging within the discipline and which might be of value to governmental agencies?

Geography, Business, and Industry

Thursday, June 2 2:45 p.m. Social Science Centre Room 2028

Presenter: David Bond (Chair, BC Wine Institute, Kelowna BC)
Respondent: Susan Laskin (Ryerson University, Toronto ON)
Chair: Paul VanZant (OAGEE, Brampton ON)
Rapporteur: Mark Lowry (Toronto District School Board, Toronto ON)

Among the geographer's skills, those most widely sought by business and industry appear to be mapping and GIS. The latter, in particular, has greatly assisted the development of targeted research and marketing, as well as the locating of resources and the movement of commodities.

Beyond skills, however, to what extent can business and industry make use of geographers' conceptual understandings that may range from the physical to the human and across all levels of scale? From the recent IGU Congress in Glasgow, it is reported that Microsoft's business operations have been adversely affected by the geographic ignorance of some of the company's representatives. Accordingly, Microsoft has hired a geographer to develop programs designed to acquaint Microsoft employees with the basic geography (especially human and cultural) of the regions in which they serve.

In an era of globalization there appears to be growing demand for a workforce that is geographically literate, especially in terms of human, cultural, and regional geography.

Geography and Schools

Friday, June 3 8:30 a.m. Social Science Centre Room 2028

Presenter: Dick Mansfield (Queen's University, Kingston ON)
Respondent: Beth Dye (CCGE, Kamloops BC)
Chair: Kim Earle (OAGEE, Richmond Hill ON)
Rapporteur: Wayne Andrew (CCGE, Lakefield ON)

The idea of globalization is increasingly used as a rationale in education for curriculum development, the production of textbooks, and even course selection. This often presents geographers with a paradox; namely, that while globalization has become an everyday word, our subject – the only one named explicitly for its study of the global surface – is often marginalized in school curricula that stress mathematics and science. It is also adversely affected by curriculum decisions that transfer its physical component to earth science or environmental systems.

Yet there remains a need for young Canadians to understand Canada as a place and their role in it. What part should geography play in developing this understanding of Canada, and indeed the world, and why? How can geography be projected more effectively in the public domain in order to do so? What contributions can school, academic, and professional geographers make to this end?

Geography and the Media

Friday, June 3 10:30 a.m. Social Science Centre Room 2028

Presenter: Barry Wellar (University of Ottawa, Ottawa ON)
Respondent: Peter Desbarats (Journalist, London ON)
Chair: Mary-Lou Byrne (Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo ON)
Rapporteur: Joe Maurice (OAGEE, Sault Ste. Marie ON)

The use and portrayal of geography by the media is an integral part of any discussion of the subject's image in the public domain. It is seen most clearly at times of natural disaster like the Montreal icestorm, the firestorm in Kelowna and Kamloops, the Peterborough flood, the Vancouver mudslide, and most recently the tsunami in the Indian Ocean. Not to be overlooked, however, are the portraits of places that the media provide viewers and listeners, either as background to news or as feature programs.

Do the media know where to turn in the geographic community for sources of reliable and current knowledge that go beyond the descriptive? How does the geographic community see its work being used and its image projected in the public domain? Has it done as much as it might to project its work in the public domain? What would the media expect from an organization that was seeking to do so? How can the media and geographic community inform each other? How could geographers be helped to deal more effectively with events like the Montreal ice storm that are seared in the public mind as experiences and yet beg wider understanding?

Geography and Its Future in Canada

Friday, June 3 1:00 p.m. Social Science Centre Room 2028

Chair: Gisèle Jacob (RCGS President, Ottawa ON)

Coordinator: Louise Maffett (RCGS Executive Director, Ottawa ON)

Participants: Session Rapporteurs and Chairs

This Session closes the symposium on Projecting Geography in the Public Domain in Canada. It provides an opportunity to review the presentations and subsequent discussions, and to identify reasonable, realistic, and practical measures that might be taken to strengthen the way in which geography is projected in the public domain in Canada