



RESEARCH CAPACITY FOR CANADIAN POLICY TOWARD LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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CERLAC, York University

CERLAC Report

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Abstract:

This document was prepared for the Department of External Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), Canada. The request came from the Norman Peterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University which arranged this “exercise” for DFAIT. The purpose was to survey existing research capacity concerning Canadian foreign affairs and to make appropriate recommendations for future governmental priorities in this regard. The format and subheadings for the requested document were quite rigid, thus, we had very little flexibility in terms of the structure and length of the document.

April 10, 1996

RESEARCH CAPACITY FOR CANADIAN POLICY TOWARD LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Ricardo Grinspun, Louis Lefebvre, Liisa North, Yasmine Shamsie

Goal of this document:

To identify current research directions and the major gaps of Canadian policy research on Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).

Empirical base:

Draws heavily on the CALACS/ACELAC Directory of Canadian Scholars Interested in Latin American and Caribbean Studies data base (1993). In addition, a number of research centres and institutes were contacted from across the country, as well as funding agencies and government ministries. Consultations were also conducted with a number of faculty.¹

Definition of research:

The "process of investigation, writing and publication of original work designed to advance knowledge and action." Government agencies, such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), include under the category "research" various activities such as network building, conferences, and workshops as well as graduate training. The focus here will include all these activities.

The focus of this paper:

Research activities are carried out by university faculty, non-profit organizations and private sector agencies that explore issues concerning relations with LAC. There are differing views about the areas of research that are most relevant to foreign policy. The links between foreign policy and social science subjects, such as economics, political science, environmental studies, and business administration are clear. At the same time, universities and private sector organizations, including consulting companies and research divisions within corporations, may conduct research in areas such as science and technology which are relevant to foreign policy goals such as enhancing the trading performance of Canadian industries. For successful foreign policy conduct, even though less recognized, but equally important, is the support to the humanities, in particular the study of the varied histories and cultures of the region. While we recognize that certain areas of the humanities and of science and technology are pertinent to Canadian-LAC relations, this brief report will focus on widely recognized social science topics related to foreign policy.

Definition of the region:

For the purposes of this paper, we include in the LAC area all the countries located on the continent of South America, as well as the countries of Central America, the entire Caribbean, and Mexico.

Limitations:

Given the budgetary and time constraints, only a limited amount of consultation with individuals and organizations were feasible. The survey of existing capacity should, therefore, be considered indicative and not exhaustive; the assessment and recommendations are also meant to be indicative.

¹ The following faculty members from various universities were consulted: Max Cameron, Ed Dosman, Luin Goldring, Ted Hewitt, Fred Judson, John Kirk, Sam Lanfranco, Marie Lapointe, Jorge Nef, Ronald Newton, Gerardo Otero, and Patrick Taylor. Their contribution is gratefully acknowledged. However, the authors take full responsibility for the views provided herein.

EXISTING RESEARCH CAPACITY

Below are various associations, networks and research centres which focus on LAC:

CALACS/ACELAC is the national association of scholars and researchers focusing on LAC. According to the CALACS/ACELAC data base there are 473 scholars who focus on subjects related to the region. These include areas as diverse as geography, sociology, political science, history, anthropology, physiology, engineering science, management and economics, human ecology and education. The CALACS/ACELAC list includes university faculty, private consultants, and organizations. The Association organizes annual and other conferences which result in publications. It also publishes a newsletter and a journal dedicated exclusively to the region entitled the Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies. The Canadian Society for International Development (CASID) has a distinct LAC component, including significant cross-membership with CALACS. It publishes the Canadian Journal of Development Studies.

There are only a few Canadian university research groups which focus exclusively on LAC. The Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC) at York University is the largest and oldest established network working on the region, with affiliated fellows from many universities. In Québec are the Groupe de Recherche et d'Etudes Latino-Américaines et Caraïbes (GRELAC) at Université de Laval and the Groupe de Recherche sur L'Amérique Latine (GRAL) at Université de Montréal, which also bring together recognized regional specialists. All these centres specialize in multi-disciplinary research. Identifiable groups of researchers doing continuous research on LAC can also be found in the Dalhousie University/Saint Mary's University area; at the University of Calgary; and at Simon Fraser University's Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies, which has the only master program in LAC studies in Canada (nonetheless, it seems that this department is to be downsized to a program).

The Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL) is an independent non-profit organization that works exclusively on LAC. It does not have in house research facilities, but does engage heavily in research-related activities such as the establishment of research networks, publications, and the organization of conferences, seminars, and workshops. The Inter-American Organization for Higher Education (IOHE), based in Quebec City, is an international university association that fosters the development of higher education in the Americas. It engages in research-related activities such as the fostering of institutional linkages between universities, university associations, research centres

and institutes of technology. The Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America (ICCHRLA), Latin America Working Group (LAWG), and Canada-Americas Policy Alternatives (CAPA) are non-governmental organizations focusing on human rights and social and economic conditions in the region. They engage in policy related activities such as conferences and workshops, publication of policy position papers, and solidarity work.

The Ontario Cooperative Programme in Latin American and Caribbean Studies (OCPLACS) is a consortium of Ontario Universities linking scholars of Latin American and Caribbean studies. Its mandate is to organize conferences, promote teaching and research, and to acquire research materials within and among the several Ontario Universities participating in OCPLACS. The Canadian Association for Mexican Studies, based at the University of Calgary, is proof of the increased Canadian academic interest in Mexico. Its principal objective is to support research and study programs about Mexico in Canadian institutions. In addition, it promotes conferences and exchanges between Canadian and Mexican faculties. A Brazilian Research Working Group has been recently formed in Ontario (and a study of Canadian research on Brazil was published in the 1995 Latin American Research Review).

Research, both scholarly and policy-oriented, takes place at centres and within organizations across the country. They are divided here into four categories (in alphabetical order):

1. *University-based research centres and programmes concentrating on LAC.* Université de Laval (Groupe de Recherche et d'Etudes Latino-Américaines et Caraïbes, GRELAC); Université de Montréal (Groupe de Recherche sur L'Amérique Latine, GRAL); Simon Fraser University (Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies); York University (Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean, CERLAC).

2. *University-based research institutes which are not exclusively LAC focused but which undertake some LAC-related research.* University of Calgary (International Centre); Carleton University (Norman Paterson School of International Affairs; Centre for Development Research and Training; Centre for Trade Policy and Law); Dalhousie University (Lester B. Pearson Institute for International Development); University of Guelph (International Development Programme and B.A. programme in Latin American Studies); McGill University (Centre for Developing Areas Studies, Institute of Comparative Law); McMaster University (Centre for Peace Studies); University of Ottawa (Human Rights Research and Education Centre, Institute for International Development and Co-operation); Ryerson University (Ryerson International); University of Toronto (Centre for International Studies, International Development Studies Programme); University of Windsor (Institute for International and Development Studies); York University (Centre for International and Strategic Studies; Centre for Refugee Studies; Faculty of Environmental Studies).

3. *Private, non-profit organizations which are not university based and which undertake programs related to LAC:* Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC);

Canada-Americas Policy Alternatives (CAPA); Canadian Association for the Study of International Development (CASID); Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE); Canadian Centre for Global Security; Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA); Canadian Council for the Americas (CCA); Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC); Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL); Common Frontiers; Conference Board of Canada; CUSO; Development Education Centre (DEC); Development and Peace; Ecumenical Coalition for Economic Justice (ECEJ); Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America (ICCHRLA); Interchurch Fund for International Development (ICFID); International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development; International Council of Canadian Studies (ICCS); Inter-Health; Interpares; Latin American Working Group (LAWG); MATCH International Centre; North-South Institute; Oxfam Canada; Société de Développement International Desjardins; various church-based Programs (ex: Anglican Church Primates Fund); the Canada-Cuba Interagency Project of about two dozen Canadian NGOs under the lead agency of Oxfam.

4. *Government-funded organizations and government departments which support and/or fund research and which also may have in house research capacity.* Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA); Department of Agriculture (DA); Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT); Department of Industry (DI); Department of National Defence (DND); International Development Research Centre (IDRC); Medical Research Council (MRC); Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC); Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC); North American Commission on Environmental Cooperation (trilateral organization based in Montreal).

An important new element in building research and policy capacity is the emergence of hemispheric (and global) electronic networks. The networks are an efficient tool for communications, and increasingly useful for sharing information between researchers and policy makers. The networks are also a consultative and collaborative venue, an electronic work space in which stakeholders are learning to work and take up residence. Listservs relating to Latin America and the Caribbean are maintained by CALACS/ACELAC (canalc@yorku.ca), the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) (canala-l@cunews.carleton.ca), York University (carecon@yorku.ca) and CERLAC (lacyork@yorku.ca).

Also, Canadian institutions maintain services for Latin American counterparts. The CREAD hemispheric distance education consortium listserv is (cread@yorku.ca). The Caribbean NGO network (cangonet@yorku.ca) and Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo en REpublica DOminicana list (madredo@yorku.ca) are run to support specific research, policy and program initiatives. The tri-national North American Commission on Environmental Cooperation maintains a tri-lingual internet WEB site for resources on environmental law at <http://www.cec.org/>. Bellanet (at IDRC). Charged with developing this area in support of global development, it is working with global biodiversity projects (such as Iwokrama, in South America) to enlist this electronic territory into the service of research, policy and administration.

FUNDING SOURCES

Canadian funding for policy oriented research on LAC comes overwhelmingly from the federal government. It is provided through a number of ministries, departments and agencies. For instance, SSHRC funds research on the region. It has totaled \$719,000 for 10 projects in 1995/96; \$1.5 million for 29 projects in 1994/95; \$1 million for 19 projects in 1993/94; and \$1.1 million for 23 projects in 1992/93. The Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) and the Medical Research Council (MRC) have also been sources of funding. The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is also a principal funding agency for research on the region. Disbursements in LAC totaled \$14.7 million in 1994/5; \$16.7 million in 1993/4; \$17.6 million in 1992-3; \$21.6 million in 1991/2; and \$16.8 million in 1990/1.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) as well as the Department of National Defense also fund research on the region through contracts and consultants. This research is commissioned by particular divisions within these departments. For instance, the political, trade, and academic affairs divisions of DFAIT have contracted out research to Canadian faculty and consultants depending on their respective needs.

CIDA is another government agency which provides important sources of funding for activities that frequently require academic research and research-related activities on LAC. For instance, CIDA's Partnership branch disbursed close to \$13.5 million between 1994 and 1996 on the region, while the Bilateral projects branch provided more than \$112 million to projects (that may have a research component) in LAC.

Small amounts of funding have been provided by other ministries such as Agriculture and Industry for research related to trade and marketing towards the region. Industry Canada (IC) commissions research on LAC with the goal of enhancing the trading performance of Canadian industry. For example, IC provided \$27 million over three years to the "Access North America" project which funded research market assessments of key sectors in which Mexican needs are expected to correspond with Canadian strengths. It is not uncommon for sectoral branches within IC to commission exploratory studies of individual Latin American countries' capacities in their particular fields of interest.

A few Canadian private foundations have funded research on the region, particularly since the advent of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). These include the Bronfman Foundation, the Donner Foundation and the Gordon Foundation. Private sector funding has traditionally been scarce but anecdotal information suggests that it is growing. For instance, Northern Telecom recently funded an endowment for a Chair in Hispanic Studies at the University of Toronto, and an exchange programme between the Catholic University in Chile and Simon Fraser University was funded in part by the private sector. In addition, since Canada signed the NAFTA there has been increased interest from the private sector in very particular areas -- research on telecommunications, mining, industry, and other areas related specifically to business, management, and trade.

Canadian faculty also receive funding from U.S. private foundations such as the Ford, MacArthur and Rockefeller Foundations as well as from international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. Trilateral (Canada-Mexico-United States) Programs -- such as those sponsored by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) -- the Colegio de México, and the North American Mobility Program have also been sources of funding.

Finally, the International Council of Canadian Studies (ICCS) has also supported research related activities on the region. For instance, it contributed resources towards the creation of the Mexican Association for Canadian Studies.

RESEARCH TOPICS

Because the vast majority of research funding available to scholars comes from the federal government, the topics which receive attention tend to be those which are of interest to the Canadian state. The traditional research agenda has included: trade, investment, development and conflict management. More recently, the government has highlighted a number of new topics on which it plans to focus (gender, the environment, conditions for good

governance, human rights, democracy, and civil society), yet only minimal resources have been actually channeled to them.

Certain topics, such as narco-traffic, are well funded and require little additional support. There is little attention, however, focused on broader issues areas such as Canadian foreign policy making in general, the inter-American system, and new subregional blocs such as MERCOSUR. Other areas which require increased attention include: agriculture and rural transformation; urbanization; national and international migration, especially given the Canadian experience; gender and entrepreneurship; and multinational mechanisms for controlling resource use and depletion (for instance work on the Amazon region would be crucial here). Joint work is absolutely critical on issues such as water management, emissions control, acid rain, as well as other areas which would fall into the category of sustainable development. Finally, we need to encourage more baseline studies of Canada-LAC relations as well as more work in the area of culture.

As for existing strengths and weaknesses in terms of sub-regions, Mexico and Central America have attracted most of the attention from Canadian researchers in the past and in the case of Mexico, interest continues to grow. Research on Chile has also been strong among Canadian academics. There is insufficient research, however, on the Southern Cone in general, and on Argentina and Paraguay in particular. Research on Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela is also sparse. There is a certain amount but not sufficient research on the Commonwealth Caribbean; much less on the Dutch Caribbean or the Dominican Republic. Research on the French Caribbean is almost exclusively done in Quebec. Work on Cuba remains relatively low despite the major process of transformation in that country, and its role in a U.S.-Canada policy conflict. Nonetheless, there is evidence of growing interest.

RESEARCH COMMUNITY

Canadian research on LAC that relates to foreign policy issues is taking place within what could be delineated as three overlapping spheres. Each is driven by distinct research agendas and questions and each privileges particular actors. The first sphere of research is that of university-based area and development studies. The research agenda here tends to emerge from events and circumstances in the region itself and from the frequent interaction among Canadian and LAC faculty and students. The agenda of the second sphere of research -- cross sectoral -- is one which focuses on partnerships and consortia building with actors from different sectors such as government, the private sector and universities. Research topics here tend to be more functional in nature (science and technology, agriculture, communications). The third sphere of research is one which views LAC from a global perspective. Economists working on international trade and its implications for the countries of the region would be included here.

It is evident that the Canadian research community on LAC is both expanding and diversifying and that all three spheres are important and relevant to policy. While the search for innovative and cross-sectoral approaches to applied knowledge for sustainable development is crucial and deserves to be supported, the first sphere of research remains by far the most important. It is inside the universities that accumulated knowledge and expertise exists and where the critical tasks of teaching and training of future generations of researchers takes place. Despite this, university programs on LAC have been historically under funded and are now threatened by cutbacks in provincial education budgets.

In this connection it should be noted that Canadian universities and their faculties have extensive institutional linkages with their LAC counterparts. Due to space limitations, it is not possible to list the considerable number of universities and institutes in the region with which Canadian faculty and researchers are connected. However, the fact that CERLAC alone has ongoing long-term relationships with 30 institutions in the region is an indication of the extent to which partnerships are already taking place. But it is imperative that such partnerships should be further extended to include faculty and student exchanges, institution-building and other such activities which have important policy and research implications themselves.

Last, but not least, a concerted effort will have to be made to involve the Canadian and LAC communities in the creation of the necessary institutions for fostering the evolution of civil societies. This requires more than academic and/or institutional research: it requires community participation so that a mutually educational exchange of ideas can take place. Thus, the challenge is not only a question of funding, but also, importantly, the development of a

coherent programme that outlines the relevant objectives and strategies.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

1. Funding

It is clear that funding from current sources is becoming increasingly scarce. The most efficient and useful way of using resources is, therefore, to ensure that support is targeted towards already existing academic research facilities and networks, which need to be recognized and built upon, rather than towards the creation of new ones. There is already some concern that the thinning out of resources will bring about serious weakening of capacities. In this connection it should be noted that much of the on-going research effort is already done by unfunded, voluntary participation in LAC related work, which cannot be maintained in the long run without some relief from other, non-LAC related academic obligations. Retrenchment by SSHRC and other funding sources further aggravates the problem. In the downsizing of university offerings the language programmes are already threatened, and the limited amounts of free time given by university administrations for research are in danger of termination. Thus, entirely new institutional capacity should be created only when a clear need arises (such as an enhanced ability to provide policy advice in governance of health care systems). Furthermore, research funding should be targeted towards those most directly involved in research on the region (research faculty and research projects) rather than towards activities and processes which bring together individuals outside actual research activities. A high priority must be given to the provision of facilities and funds to Canadian university students to live, work, and study in LAC, e.g., as interns in Canadian diplomatic missions in the area. Granting, fellowship, and scholarship programs should be adjudicated by open and transparent competition. A modest but very promising program is the new Canada-Latin America Research Links Program, a joint IDRC-AUCC initiative.

Organizations such as FOCAL, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), and the International Organization for Higher Education (IOHE) can play important supportive roles in sustaining and strengthening university based research and encouraging certain consortia or networking efforts. For example, FOCAL has been very effective by supporting particular Québec interests in developing Latin American, in particular Cuban, linkages for small and medium size businesses. This is the kind of effort in which FOCAL could be most effective, as well as in providing increased support for academic (teacher, student and researcher) exchanges and exchange programmes. Nonetheless, it should be emphasized that primary funding support should be provided directly to the research institutions and organizations, as discussed in the previous paragraph.

Recommendations:

- The government should direct funds towards the creation of more university research and teaching positions at institutions that already have strong established programmes in LAC studies. The government should also direct funds towards the creation of faculty positions, for example, through funding endowed chairs.
- Funding for LAC research, faculty and student exchanges, institution building and other such activities that have important policy implications, must be brought up to the level of funding available to other priority areas, such as Asia Pacific.
- Funding should be directed toward supporting graduate students' training and research. Funding should support region and language oriented studies, as well as field research in the region.

2. Agenda

Recommendations:

- There must be greater support for multi disciplinary research. Integrated approaches to the study of social, cultural, political and economic phenomena relevant to the understanding of the societies of the region and their relationship to Canada, and Canada's to them, are essential.

- Research linkages should be fostered between those units and sectors of the Canadian society and economy that can most effectively enhance Canada's capacity to participate in, and contribute to, the strengthening of the institutions of civil society, grassroots participation in policy formulation, and human and sustainable development in the region. These might include systems of health and medical services, transportation and communications, among others.
- Electronic networks should be supported and recognized as key venues where knowledge and expertise are shared, across research, policy and education agendas, and where policy debates occur.

3. Government - Academic Relations

Recommendations:

- Canadian universities must strive to maintain objectivity, that is, to preserve the disinterested quality of research.
- The importance of establishing concrete inter-institutional linkages and programs among Canadian universities, faculty, and students and those of the region cannot be overstated.
- The bulk of Canadian research on the region must continue to take place within a university environment (as opposed to private research institutions). Only in universities can research be linked to the important responsibilities of graduate training and teaching.