



Research Reporter

Scholarly, research and creative activity

Brock University

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Transforming SSHRC

Marc Renaud, President of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, has launched a national consultation with scholars, scholarly associations, and the public to advise the SSHRC Council on the proposed transformation of SSHRC from a granting council to a "Knowledge Council."

For more than 25 years, SSHRC has funded scholar-initiated research, supported the publication of scholarly, peer-reviewed journals and books, conferences, and learned societies. In addition, SSHRC has supported targeted and large scale research through the MCRI, Strategic Grants, and INE programs.

All national granting councils need substantial increases to their funding base to support the range of research and student support programs they offer and the increasing number of university, college and other scholars who apply for support from these agencies. SSHRC's base funding has not increased as rapidly as the other national granting agencies.

Recent consultations and strategic plans/blueprints published by CIHR and NSERC identify a clear direction for those agencies and the ways in which they intend to support the broad range of natural and physical sciences, health science, and engineering related research and address national innovation priorities.

You will receive a pack from the Steering Committee inviting you to participate in this consultation. It is essential that you do as this consultation will set the direction for SSHRC for at least a decade. Your voice will be heard by the Brock Steering Committee and SSHRC. Dr. Marc Renaud will be at Brock University on April 7th, as part of the consultation process.

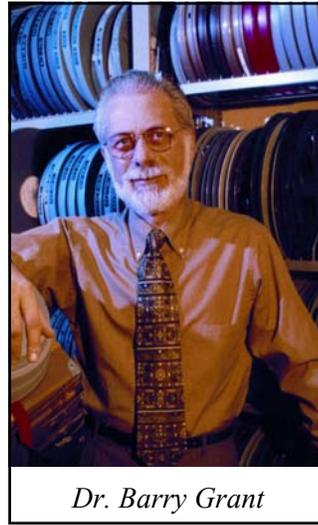


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Chancellor's Chair Award Offers Opportunities

In *The Searchers* (1956), John Wayne roams for five years amid the sandstone rock formations of Monument Valley looking for his nieces. "Monument Valley is only about 1,500 square miles, which makes John Wayne's search quite odd," explains Barry Grant, professor of Brock's Department of Communications, Popular Culture and Film and Director of the Master's Program in Popular Culture. "Real locations like Monument Valley are mediated through film, which transforms them into mythic places. The Chancellor's Chair Award will allow me to get a comprehensive look at my subject by supporting first hand research of artefacts and spaces to see how they are represented in culture." Since Westerns and Western imagery encompass a broad range of media in popular culture, Grant will be engaged in detailed readings of eight important Western films, conducting first-hand research at sites such as Monument Valley, and investigating popular music, literature, cultural mythology and Western art. Grant edits film books for two university presses and is an internationally recognized expert on popular cinema. He is an active researcher who has published extensively on popular cinema, with an emphasis on genre and documentary, as well as on topics of popular music, science fiction and the fantastic in literature and film. With the support of his Chancellor's Chair award, Grant is undertaking a number of projects including a critical overview of the American Western, editing the *Schirmer*

Encyclopaedia of Film, and transcriptions of prolific American filmmaker Frederick Wiseman's work. Wiseman, who is known worldwide for his thirty-eight documentaries that explore American institutions, has been a subject of Grant's before. His book *Voyages of Discovery: The Cinema of Frederick Wiseman* is the only work about Wiseman's films that



Dr. Barry Grant

had the full cooperation of the filmmaker. It was Wiseman who requested that Grant take on this current project. Called *Five Films of Frederick Wiseman*, the book will feature transcriptions of the films *High School*, *High School II*, *Titicut Follies*, *Public Housing* and *Welfare*, as well as a critical introduction dealing with

Wiseman's work and the challenges inherent in transcription. Explains Grant, "Wiseman's films allow for considerable interpretive play on the part of viewers. There are no voice-overs, insert titles or superimposed text explaining who people are or providing contextual information. Part of my challenge is being descriptive about shots without being selective, which is inherently interpretive. In *Five Films of Frederick Wiseman*, I attempt to provide a transcription of the films as texts without slipping into my own interpretation. However, at the same time I am aware that deciding what is or is not interpretive is itself an interpretation. Ultimately, my choices are determined by what is

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in the service of the film.”

Editing *The Schirmer Encyclopaedia of Film*, which involves 100 contributors from a dozen countries, is another of Grant’s initiatives. One of its unique qualities is that it does not feature any bibliographic entries; instead, they are all longer essay-style, original contributions on the subject.

“While this is what distinguishes the *Schirmer Encyclopaedia* from other works, it also creates some interesting challenges,” says Grant. “Often, authors of the entries will disagree on the subject matter. In one case, the writer of the comedy entry did not agree that slapstick comedy, another entry, should even be considered a genre.”

In addition to establishing the table of contents and diffusing these debates, Grant’s duties as editor include producing guidelines for the authors, designing and selecting sidebar features, and choosing the copious illustrations, and writing the scope descriptions. “The text for this Encyclopaedia will span four volumes and amount to one million words. I will read it, make suggestions to the authors

and then read the revisions,” says Grant.

When asked how being honoured with the Chancellor’s Chair impacts his research, Grant explained that it provides funds for the hiring of a graduate student to assist with transcriptions of films and to keep data organized. Continues Grant, “Often, timing is important in research. The award gives active researchers the opportunity to accomplish multiple projects. The Chancellor’s Chair award will give me an opportunity to complete a number of projects in a timely and more efficient way.”

Popular Culture Niagara is a collaborative research project in which Grant is also involved. Along with Nick Baxter-Moore, Marian Bredin, Terrance Cox, Joan Nicks, Russell Johnson, Jeannette Sloniowski, all of Communications, Popular Culture and Film, and Michael Ripmeester of Geography, the group is researching aspects of popular culture in Niagara including popular music, film exhibition, theatres, heritage and popular memory.

~ Kimberley Lee

Visions of Canada

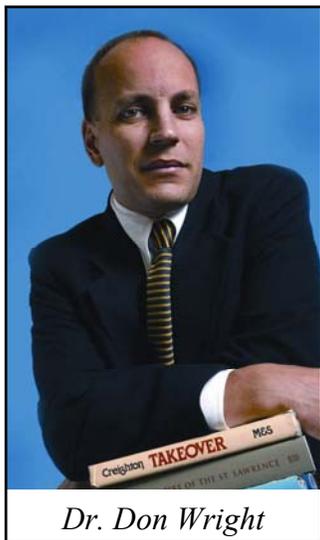
At an early age, Don Wright’s interest in Canada and history intersected. As winner of a national essay contest in high school, Wright was flown to Ottawa to share a power breakfast with Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

That experience and the career of the politician inspired Wright, Assistant Professor of History and Canadian Studies, to create a collection of over 600 letters to the editor, some supportive and others critical of Trudeau from 16 newspapers across the country. Explaining the public reaction to Trudeau’s death, Wright says, “Trudeau was more than a policy maker, he was one of the people who helped Canadians to articulate their identity. When he died, there was a tremendous outpouring that other prime ministers have not received.”

In Wright’s view, Trudeau’s vision of Canada, as a country that supports bilingualism and multiculturalism, is shared by the majority of Canadians. Subsequent prime ministers have strengthened this vision, but have not equalled it. “Trudeau was an important prime minister because he was asked to bear the meaning of Canada,” he says. Wright intends to turn these letters into an article, “Remembering Pierre: Letters to the Editor on the Occasion of Mr.

Trudeau’s Death.”

Beyond this project, which he describes as “fun and interesting”, Wright is engaged in two SSHRC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council) supported projects involving famed Canadian



Dr. Don Wright

historian Donald Creighton. As the leading historian in English Canada from 1920s to the 1970s, Creighton wrote many articles and books, most notably a two-volume biography on John A. Macdonald, his great contribution in the 1950s. “It is widely considered the greatest biography in Canadian historical writing and is responsible for earning Creighton the title of Mr. Canada,” Wright explains.

“Creighton was a tour de force. His writing is brilliant, alive and energetic -- a departure from a subject which is usually associated with prose that is turgid, boring and dry.”

Among Wright’s projects is a full-biography of Creighton, called “Donald Creighton: A Life in History.” The work examines every aspect of his life, including the influence of his father, a Methodist minister, his interpretation of Canadian history,

his career at University of Toronto, and his involvement as an expert in several government commissions.

“Creighton’s story is an interesting one,” explains Wright, “because in the 1960s, his world collapsed. He did not understand Quebec nationalism and unfortunately, he did not accept it gracefully. As a result, he was dismissed as a reactionary, a crank, and a Francophobic curmudgeon. The story is the rise and fall of the great mind of Donald Creighton.”

In the course of his research, Wright discovered correspondence between Donald Creighton and Eugene Forsey, a Canadian intellectual and an authority on constitutional matters. “In their correspondence, you can see the different philosophies of these two great minds on Quebec nationalism, American imperialism, Pierre Trudeau, and constitutional reform. Forsey was more open and tolerant, while Creighton was more conservative and more set in his opinions,” says Wright.

The tentative title for the book is, “Dear Donald, Dear Eugene: The letters of Donald Creighton and Eugene Forsey.” The book will be published with Wright’s scholarly introduction that will explain the context of the letters, such as the issues and themes that they address.

~ Kimberley Lee