# INTRODUCTION: TEACHING (IN) THE CANADIAN NORTH

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This year, the Association for Canadian Studies celebrated its 40th anniversary. Our main publication, *Canadian Issues*, is almost as old as us, its first issue released in 1975. Throughout these past decades, *Canadian Issues* has covered a plethora of topics pertaining to Canada and its history. We covered everything from regionalism, immigration, international relations, urbanity, to food studies, hockey and mental health.

As we approach the end of this anniversary year, we noticed one particular area we had never ventured in before: the Canadian North. We thus decided to devote the last issue of 2013 to the North, both as a geographical area and an academic field, with a particular focus on how best to teach this multidisciplinary and rapidly changing field, so central to the Canadian identity, yet often times marginalized in the teaching of Canadian history. And as you will be able to see, all our contributors have demonstrated in their own way that understanding the North is crucial to our understanding of Canada.

P. Whitney Lackenbauer opens this special edition with a strong piece about how historical knowledge shapes our understanding of the Canadian North, especially when it comes to questions of sovereignty and security. As Lackenbauer argues, history helps us move away from a "narrow fixation on sovereignty loss" to consider instead how Canada has actually benefitted in many ways from "a longstanding, responsible strategy that affords us as strong a sovereignty position as international law allows and also maintains constructive relations with our Arctic neighbours." For Lackenbauer, debates over sovereignty losses, over the alarming rate at which the North is changing, what he calls this 'crisis mentality', should not keep us from using the past for guidance, as we face the many challenges that have arisen and will continue to arise in Canada's Arctic.

From a general reflection on history and the Canadian North, we move to Julia Christensen's call for a more people-focused teaching of the North. As Christensen suggests, educators have to ensure that the North they teach about is not "separate from its people." Living and working in the Northwest Territories for most of her life, she wants to "dispel the national myth of a vast but empty North," a myth she has encountered on many occasions. Not only do we need to make northern Indigenous peoples part of our understanding of the North, says Christensen, but we also need to look at "the many ways in which northern people have …influenced the course of northern history…and Canadian history."

Both Brendan Griebel and Sue Heffernan agree with Christensen: when teaching (in) the Canadian North, one must ensure that its peoples are an integral part of the entire narrative. Doing so requires shaping the knowledge and the methods used to both produce it and disseminate it to the realities of the North and to take into account the necessarily multidisciplinary nature of that knowledge. Griebel's piece is a reflection on his fascinating *parcours* as he developed, and then revisited, a course on archeology adapted to the community of Cambridge Bay, Nunavut. As he realized during his stay in the community, knowledge acquisition in the North differed greatly from what he had been used to and trained for. Griebel indeed found that he needed to "de-emphasiz[e] the pedagogic value of material artifacts… [and] incorporate local understandings of how and why historical learning takes place." In her Geography of Northern Canada course, Sue Heffernan also tries to impress on her students that understanding the North entails more than just learning about the region's geographical characteristics. Because most people studying the North will never step foot there, it is crucial, for Heffernan, that knowledge about the North be multidisciplinary and that learning about the North be an occasion to "both examine past images of the North, and to imagine what 'North' means" to each one of us.

Teaching the Canadian North, then, requires that we integrate the many disciplines necessary to fully understand what the North is, and what is represents, both for those living in the North and those learning about it. Amanda Graham's piece looks at the capacity of northern institutions to effectively teach northern studies, with a particular focus on Yukon College, where Graham has been working for many years. As she argues, the field of northern studies has considerably evolved in the last few decades, becoming more broadly circumpolar and considerably more diverse, and northern institutions have had to adapt to this evolution as well. Technological developments and government investments have helped these institutions develop a capacity for knowledge production and dissemination, allowing them to both learn and teach about their own culture and potential.

After this examination of northern institutions, we then focus on the North in the context of classrooms more specifically, with Heather E. McGregor discussing Nunavut's school curriculum and David R. Gray talking about his work on the Canadian Arctic expedition. In her compelling piece on the teaching of history in and of the North, McGregor suggests that we continue, still today, to conceptualize the North through an essentially colonial frame. She calls instead for approaches that "are culturally responsive, locally relevant, and supportive of community-driven visions for school change." David R. Gray has done some tremendous work on the history of the North and talks here more specifically about the Canadian Arctic Expedition of 1913-1918. Gray points to the rich repository of sources about the Expedition, "photos, film footage, personal diaries and scientific reports," all readily available to teach and learn about this key event in both northern and Canadian history. As Gray states, "The Canadian Arctic Expedition is a hidden jewel in Canada's buried history treasure chest, just waiting to be unearthed and shared within the country and with the very interested world."