

**HIGHLY QUALIFIED PERSONNEL:
THE IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION
OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES
AND HUMANITIES IN CANADA**

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Title: ***Highly Qualified Personnel: The Important Contribution of the Social Sciences and Humanities in Canada***

ISBN #: 1896538738

This paper was prepared for the Scientific Affairs Committee of the Canadian Psychological Association by Dr. John Service, Executive Director, and Dr. Patrick O'Neill, Chair, Scientific Affairs.

HIGHLY QUALIFIED PERSONNEL: THE IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES IN CANADA

THE PRODUCT OF CANADA'S UNIVERSITIES

Graduates of Canadian universities in the social sciences and humanities have an impressive array of knowledge and skills which are important in the workplace, family and community. These skills are acquired at a basic level in undergraduate programs and honed to higher levels of acuity in graduate school.

Social sciences and humanities graduates are highly valued. This is demonstrated by their success in gaining and keeping employment, their rapid advancement once hired, and the positive evaluations by employers of all types (public service, private business and industry, not-for-profit sector, etc.).

It is vital to understand the human factors involved in economic and social processes in order to be successful. The development of new patents and products is absolutely vital to Canada's economic and social future. It must never be forgotten, however, that they are developed, manufactured, sold and used by people. Many a good company or a good idea has failed by not understanding and effectively taking into consideration human behaviour.

Canada is a vibrant and stable society. It is one of the most tolerant and progressive countries in the world. It is vital to study and understand Canadian society in all its diversity and complexity as one means for ensuring our future. **Peace, democracy, good government and a productive economy are keys to tomorrow.**

The majority of Canadians continue to choose the social sciences and humanities in the competitive marketplace of the ever-increasing number of programs available to them at Canada's universities. This trend continues today in spite of the powerful lure of the natural and health sciences. This speaks strongly of the importance of the social sciences and humanities for Canadians. It demonstrates that understanding human behaviour and the human condition is the most interesting and important body of knowledge for most people.

THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF RESEARCH

The Canadian university model has always been based on the solid foundation of the duality of teaching and research. Students learn more effectively from those who are actively engaged in the production of new knowledge and in situations where they can actually be involved in science and research. This is true for undergraduate as well as graduate students.

In the undergraduate area, knowledge and skills transmission is more effectively accomplished by a professoriate that is conducting cutting edge investigations and research. This brings a freshness and vitality to the educational process that would not otherwise be present. It also brings the most up-to-date knowledge to the classroom and laboratory. The active pushing of the limits of knowledge and the questioning of reality in an evidence-based manner inculcate skills and values that are indispensable in later life. Students in their third and fourth years often become actively involved in the knowledge generation process, increasing their skills and their appreciation of the scientific method.

The graduate school experience builds on this solid undergraduate foundation. Graduate students are directly involved in the research and knowledge generation process, not only learning as they conduct research and experiments, but also expanding the body of knowledge with their theses and dissertations. Graduate students are more fully enculturated in the fundamental processes of information retrieval, evidence-based decision making, the application of the scientific method as a problem solving and planning tool and the understanding of human behaviour.

THE SKILLS

The skills acquired by social science and humanities graduates are varied and essential. The list below is not an exhaustive list. The skills list is in part based upon JM Consulting (June 2002) *Arts and Humanities Research Infrastructure Report to the Higher Education Funding Council for England Standing Conference of Principals, Universities, U.K.*, and Dr. Nicky Hayes (June 1996), *The Distinctive Skills of a Psychology Graduate*, *European Psychologist*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 130-34.

Content-Related Skills

- a specific and advanced knowledge base and its application
- a high level of literacy: the knowledge of advanced theories
- the ability to work with very complicated written material
- research methods (quantitative and/or qualitative) and advanced problem-solving skills

Thinking Skills

- critical thinking and analysis based on evidence
- ability to base understanding on difficult and often fragmentary evidence
- risk taking (and) the tolerance of ambiguity
- creative thinking
- high order evaluation skills
- information retrieval, distillation and synthesizing skills
- demonstrated ability to be self-motivated and independent on the job and in terms of life-long learning

Contextual Skills

- a solid understanding of values and ethics and their utility
- socio-cultural and international awareness and sensitivity
- a deeper understanding of “where we come from” in terms of culture and behaviour

Generic Career Skills

- the highest levels of communication skills (written, oral, public communication)
- information and technology literacy
- numeracy
- interpersonal and networking skills
- demonstrated ability for a self-motivated and independent work style

CONCLUSION

The Canadian Government has increased investments in the natural sciences, engineering, technology, and the health of its citizens. It now needs to complete the job by increasing investment in Canada’s peoples, cultures and society. It is people who develop new ideas and invent new products, who work in companies that manufacture Canada’s goods and provide Canada’s services and who buy and use these products and services. It is people who live together in families and communities in a tolerant and safe society. It is people who generate wealth.

It is time to invest in Canada’s people through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. This will balance the job of investing in Canada’s research infrastructure across the three major research councils.