

THE AGENDA

Thinking big in Ottawa

Each spring, Canada's leading scholars and researchers gather at the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences' annual Congress event. This year's event took place from May 30 to June 5 at the University of Ottawa, where

more than 8,000 academics, researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners came together "to share findings, refine ideas, and build partnerships that will help shape the Canada of tomorrow."

The Big Thinking lecture series was

an integral component featuring a lineup of a number of influential thinkers. They addressed important questions not only facing Canadians, but also influencing Canada's place on the world stage. See for yourself.



Stephen Toope

Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences president

Congress is a meeting of the minds. The PhDs and PhDs-in-training who attend are among our best and brightest, and Canada does not have too many. Frankly, we need more of them.

Canada's knowledge economy needs transformative power. Business, public, private and not-for-profit sectors all demand it. We require a labour force that includes many people with research-based skill sets who understand not just the science of things but the science of people, including their arts, languages, histories and ideas.

Today's PhDs in the social sciences and humanities are some of Canada's best assets. Some will become the professors who teach our children and grandchildren. Many others will work for enlightened employers in the private sector and in government, employers who recognize the vital role that PhDs with advanced knowledge and skills can play in grabbing hold of a future marked by rapid change.



Azar Nafisi

Iranian-American bestselling author

I believe that no freedom—political, economic or social—can be realized without the freedom of imagination and thought. It is this basic and most human form of freedom that both promises and safeguards all those other freedoms. Because of this, a democratic government is not only the guardian of people's political, social and economic rights, but also is the representative of the nation's intellectual, spiritual and scientific legacies.

Humanities remind us that imagination and thought, like human rights and freedom, transcend the boundaries of nationality, ethnicity, religion, race and gender, creating a common space where we celebrate and respect not just our differences, but our shared and common humanity. What more suitable representation of a people who came to this land from all parts of the world, bringing with them the customs and cultures of their countries of birth, hoping to create a home that can embody them all?



Jean Leclair

University of Montréal law professor

The legal and political notions of rights, sovereignty, social contract, nationalism, and cultural authenticity have the common feature of being in tension with pluralism and imposing more of a single narrow view of reality.

I have found that federalism, as a political concept that accepts the plurality of individual identities, rather than simply a form of "plural monoculturalism," and that stresses the nature of relations between people and groups rather than the essence of being one or the other, is a more appropriate concept than others for exploring aboriginal governance.

As a concept, federalism can better account not just for the malleable nature of personal identity, but for the reality of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canadian political life.

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Congress 2015: Big Thinking lecture series



Irene Bloemraad

University of California Canadian studies professor

& Thomas Faist

Bielefeld University sociology professor

Do symbolic politics matter for immigrant integration, or are they just empty words?

Take public talk on multiculturalism and diversity. In Canada, multiculturalism continues to be celebrated, even under a Conservative government. In Europe, public discourse demands that immigrants embrace a “thicker” notion of citizenship to combat concerns regarding excessive diversity and terrorism. In both cases, proponents claim that symbolic politics can lead to better immigrant integration.

Studies of employment seekers using identical résumés with different names suggest that visible minorities in Canada

and Europe face discrimination. In Germany, the children of immigrants are concentrated in the lowest educational tracks. In Canada, immigrants have a hard time catching up economically, even if they have high education. Multiculturalism, or the language of robust citizenship, seem to be empty words. Or worse, it may be a feel-good language policymakers use to avoid tackling social inequalities.

Still, words hold power. This is especially true when immigrants and their children can use those words to hold decision-makers and their fellow citizens accountable to ideals. The symbolic content of citizenship matters.

Monique Proulx

Québec screenwriter

What do Hasidic Jews from Rue Durocher on their way to synagogue, Marie Chouinard rehearsing a dance routine, and a crowd cheering a Canadiens goal have in common? Montréal. They have a passion, the drive to excel, and the search for transcendence that lies in the soil beneath us. I believe there is a mystical residue under our feet, infecting us and setting us ablaze, and that it is our greatest resource—much more so than shale gas.

I came to this belief while tracing the remarkable story of Montréal’s origins. It seems that in dying, Jeanne Mance left her heart to Montréalers. I believe this heart still beats under the city’s arteries, stirring our desire for the transcendent and our thirst for beauty.

AP reporter Gannon receives 2015 World Press Freedom Award



AP reporter Kathy Gannon won the Canadian Committee for World Press Freedom Award on April 30. The Timmins, Ont., native, was wounded last year in Afghanistan covering the national election. During her speech, Ms. Gannon said that press freedom is complicated. ‘Our freedoms are about the right to tell stories,’ she said. ‘We are there to do a job and our job is to question, to inform, to learn and understand about our subject, and to chronicle history accurately so that future generations will look back and they’ll have an understanding of events in an accurate way.’

P&I photograph by Andrew Meade