

Attachment 1: General Objectives

Proposed Research Program

Our proposed research program, “Cultural Change: Contexts and Contests,” reflects both the challenges and the invigorating possibilities invoked in any scholarly discussion of culture. Understandings of what is meant by this central term vary widely, both within and across disciplines; the fraught and complex nature of the debate is reflected in the provocative titles of those publications addressing it: J.D. Hunter’s *Culture Wars*, Morris Fiorina’s *Culture War?*, Gerald Graff’s *Beyond the Culture Wars*, and Bender and Druckrey’s *Culture on the Brink* all suggest, in their martial metaphors, the urgency of the debate. What defined culture was once clearly and magisterially articulated by the judges and proponents of that culture, who agreed that it stood apart from history as, in the words of Hans-Georg Gadamer, a “consciousness of something enduring, of a significance that cannot be lost and is independent of all the circumstances of time.” In this view, culture and its best expressions are timeless and eternal; like the best art, culture is itself “a mode of historical being,” a historical category not influenced by anything apart from itself. (*Truth and Method*, 255-6)

However, through debates arising over the past decades in the arts, social sciences, and humanities, notions of the universality and a-temporality of culture have come under considerable attack, through questions about the value-laden processes of the creation of cultural artifacts and institutions, about the relationship of nationhood to culture and the exclusion of certain groups from a homogeneous definition of culture, and about the narratives, both public and private, through which we legitimate or dismiss certain cultural expressions. Discussions about culture as a shared, readily-understood, and foundational concept have thus given way to debates about the usefulness and legitimacy of any such foundationalist discourses; shared notions of the “good” and the “eternal” have given way to conflicting and conflicted ideas of the culturally specific and the culturally contingent. While this represents a challenge, in that it complicates any scholarship on culture before that scholarship is even undertaken, we believe it is also an opportunity for the stimulation and expansion of our scholarship.

Research across the disciplines at Mount Allison—perhaps influenced by its own geographically marginal position—shares an acute alertness to questions of the construction of cultural identity and change; to the relationships of cultural expressions and their conditions of production; and to the complex contexts out of which we create, identify, and respond to cultural patterns as they exist across time, across regional, local, or global borders, across lines of gender, race, and ethnicity, and across the shifting and embattled boundaries between “high” and “low” culture. If the notion of culture is itself hotly contested, then we would argue that the site of this contest is uniquely valuable, indeed essential, to current research in the Social Sciences and the Humanities. Mount Allison’s undergraduate students, tomorrow’s scholars and researchers, no longer encounter only at the post-graduate level the subtleties of the culture debates, but instead experience and even participate in them as a necessary part of their undergraduate education. Mount Allison faculty bring to both their research and teaching a need to, in Graff’s phrase, “teach the conflicts”; our scholarly work is energized and animated by our investigations into this rich landscape of contestation. (*Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education*)

“Cultural Change”: Current Research at Mount Allison

As a small, undergraduate, liberal arts university, Mount Allison is particularly well suited to exploring debates of context and contestation in cultural change, especially since its size allows for considerable communication and cross-fertilization of ideas across fields and faculties: our most rapidly-growing programs are interdisciplinary in nature, and this cross-fertilization enriches both faculty and student research opportunities. Through programs such as our interdisciplinary Works in Progress series and our Social Sciences Seminar Series, faculty and students are already able to engage in dialogue about their current research interests with colleagues beyond their own disciplines. Our ASUP funded programs of 1995 (Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Political, Economic and Cultural Change) and 1998 (Blood and Belonging: Citizenship, Communities and Change) furthered research, publication and dissemination into areas related to cultural change

Our ability to carry out interdisciplinary research will be further strengthened by the nomination of a Canada Research Chair in the area of Critical Theory in the Interpretation of Culture (September, 2005). This appointment will complement and enhance existing faculty strengths, which currently include **popular culture** (film studies, representations of minorities in popular culture, impact of popular culture on national identity formation, and archaeological research into material culture), **women’s studies** (literature for and by women, contemporary and historical representations of women in culture, gendered religious cultures, women in music and women in politics) and **culture and the global economy** (consumer behaviour, monopoly media and cultural imperialism, cultural marginalization and resistance, urban and rural culture change). Mount Allison also has a vibrant fine and performing arts faculty which expresses the tensions of cultural change through creative activity.

While a large base of existent research falls under the broad theme of cultural change, an ASUP-funded program would help to further develop and strengthen research clusters in these areas. We envision scholars of different disciplines coming together to hone their methodological expertise and capitalize on interdisciplinary convergences. For example, a recently completed SSHRC-funded project studying Women’s (Life) Writing in Acadie has theoretical and methodological implications which radiate into many disciplines. Scholars concerned with similar concepts from History, Classics, English and other disciplines could come together through a conference or workshop to examine common themes and build strategic research alliances.

Mount Allison University has actively sought out additional funding for this program from the Marjorie Young Bell Foundation and should this application meet with success, **matching funds are committed for the duration of the grant** (up to \$30,000 each year for three years). Combined, these funds will greatly enhance Mount Allison’s research into cultural change.

General Objectives

- 1. To support basic research:** The umbrella theme of the ASUP proposal will allow faculty across the humanities and social sciences to apply for internally vetted funds for travel to conduct research, for library loans and for research equipment. The small and somewhat isolated environment of Mount Allison poses challenges to accessing primary research materials and to major scholarly gatherings.

Despite this challenge, however, Mount Allison's faculty members in the humanities and social sciences have demonstrated a continuing commitment to research by winning numerous competitive awards and producing a variety of important articles, books and artistic works. We will continue to provide funds for our faculty which facilitate research.

2. To enhance opportunities for training and scholarly events: Research assistantships serve the dual purpose of enhancing faculty research and providing research experience for future scholars. Mount Allison's undergraduate researchers have a proven record of carrying out successful research projects under the Mount Allison summer research award program. ASUP funding will increase the number of student research assistants able to work with faculty each year. Further, ASUP funding will allow our faculty and students to keep current with and contribute to rapidly changing theories and methodologies. We envision conferences, summer institutes, visiting speakers, seminar series: activities that will support a dynamic research environment thereby supporting the continuing intellectual development of our faculty members and students. With ASUP funding, we will bring outside expertise into the Mount Allison community and will, simultaneously, open the Mount Allison community to the public to ensure that the social relevance of the research undertaken is communicated through conferences and summer arts festivals that will engage a wide public audience.

3. To disseminate research results: This ASUP grant will make funds available for faculty to travel to conferences to present papers and engage with colleagues. Funds will also be made available to develop a web presence through a website that will house conference proceedings, papers and streaming audio and video for use by Mount Allison and as teaching and research tools for the broader academic community.

4. To effectively launch Mount Allison's Centre for the Study of Culture: Our capstone objective is to establish a centre for the study of culture that would sustain diverse research interests and continue to build and support research clusters around the theme of cultural change. This centre will be launched to the university community, the local community and the broader public near the end of our ASUP-funded program. Mount Allison's Centre for the Study of Culture will house and maintain a website showcasing faculty research. We anticipate that a coordinator, through time provided by course-release and funded by our matching funds, will organize conferences and speakers series, facilitate further knowledge-sharing opportunities and publicize Mount Allison's research around the evolving theme of "Cultural Change." This coordinator will also engage with popular media to disseminate Mount Allison's research to the public through, for example, a series of lectures for CBC's program *Ideas* or a selection of essays in *The Walrus*.

As Mount Allison continues to strengthen its ability to carry out research into culture, funding to sustain the "Centre for the Study of Culture," including website maintenance and course release for a coordinator will be developed through collaboration between the Research Development Office and the Office of the Vice-President, Academic and Research.