

# Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences



With its origins dating back to 1940, the Federation represents a long-standing tradition of academic excellence. In this enlightening interview, President **Antonia Maioni** discusses how the humanities and social sciences contribute to a better understanding of today's greatest challenges

### Could you summarise the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences' vision and mission statement?

In advancing equity, diversity, knowledge, excellence and innovation, the Federation aims to contribute tangibly to a free and democratic society. Its mission is to promote research, scholarship, creative activity and learning, and works to foster understanding of the contributions made by the humanities and the social sciences (HSS) to Canada and the world. The Federation's origins go back to 1940, before its inception in its current form in 1996, and now comprises over 80 scholarly associations, 79 institutions and six affiliate organisations, representing a total of 85,000 researchers, educators and students across Canada.

### What challenges are you addressing at the Federation?

We work on many issues of importance to our members. Around the world, universities and scholarly associations across all disciplines are being asked to identify and quantify the value of their work. That is particularly the case in the HSS, so we are working through our advocacy and communications activities to articulate the value of research and of the BA degree, and also the creative and critical thinking skills those provide, to an individual and country.

We are also deeply involved in discussions about positioning Canada's research system at the forefront of the global digital revolution. Moving to digital scholarship and research is really a human-centred challenge. We know the technology exists, but it is human interaction with that technology that will move Canadian research forward in all disciplines. Understanding this synergy is central to the HSS.

Linked to the digital scholarship developments is the issue of open access. The Federation is playing an active role in discussions about open access generally, and has taken a leadership role in discussions about open access for scholarly monographs through a project we are undertaking within our Awards to Scholarly Publications Program (ASPP).

### How important is global collaboration to your work?

Global collaboration is very important to us. A huge amount of collaboration is focused around our flagship event, the annual Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences. This is the largest multidisciplinary, scholarly conference in Canada (and one of the largest in the world), welcoming 6,000-9,000 attendees each year. About 70 scholarly associations meet under the umbrella of this event, which provides an exciting environment for collaboration both within Canada and internationally. This year's Congress took place at Brock University in St Catharines, Ontario, and we welcome many international delegates to at this exciting event ([www.congress2014.ca](http://www.congress2014.ca)).

Nationally, we work closely with our member associations and academic institutions to understand their goals and partner with them on projects. We also collaborate with like-minded organisations who strive to promote the value of research and learning, such as the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, the Royal Society of Canada and funding agencies such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

Internationally, we are linked with the American Council for Learned Societies (in fact they are an affiliate member of the Federation), and we have relationships with other organisations on particular issues.

The Federation administers the exciting Aid to Scholarly Publications Program (ASPP) which provides funding for 180 scholarly books every year, so we confer with many Canadian publishers to ensure that administration of our programme is top-notch.

### Is the relationship between the natural and social sciences synergistic?

One must never overlook the crucial contribution of the HSS and even the arts in any endeavour in the natural sciences. As Canada transitions from an industrial to a knowledge-based society, success lies in cross-disciplinarity, creative approaches to complex and rapidly-evolving challenges in areas such as climate change, energy policy, ageing and a shared prosperous future with our Aboriginal peoples. Now, more than ever, we need to bring together content, context and technology in forging new dynamic pathways and cultures of entrepreneurship and innovation.

True, the relationship between natural and social sciences is complex; but any sustainable success in today's world requires a policy framework that actively supports open-sourced innovation, interdisciplinary and cross-sector collaboration that specifically builds on the synergies between the two disciplines. This is key to Canada's long-term prosperity.

### Could you discuss some of the projects taking place within the Federation?

The Federation has a very active Board of Directors that come from across the country, and a highly qualified and professional secretariat. There is always an array of projects going on, whether it's in the area of equity and diversity, research dissemination, teaching and learning or digital technologies.

This year, the Federation's policy work will be focused on two major initiatives. One project is investigating the issue of open access for the ASPP. Through the publicly funded ASPP, the Federation has supported the publication of more than 6,000 books that have helped to enrich the social, cultural and intellectual life of Canada and the world. Each

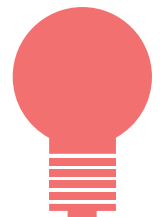
## Ideas can...

“A new idea excites its creator(s), leads to debate and sparks discovery that drives people forward. Ideas give us hope, earn respect for those who went before us and help us build a better place for those who will come. People with ideas enhance their communities, share knowledge with others and build connections for the future. Ideas are about being human and caring about the world.

Ideas have changed us. You may not even know the Federation, but you know the people we represent: 85,000 students, scholars and researchers in the humanities, arts and social sciences. They study everything from geography to religion, and they create and share knowledge that makes Canada a better place. Their ideas are ensuring better futures for the children of immigrants, leading the digital revolution and transforming healthcare to better support families.

This work is crucial. We are at an important time in our history. Issues are global and complex; competition is serious and growing; and old approaches no longer suffice. Never before has understanding humanity, cultures, languages and behaviour been so important.

Thus, emerging from recent strategic planning and consultations, we set our communications targets very high. We want to chart a bold new course for raising awareness for and interest in the humanities and social sciences. So, we started by taking a hard look at ourselves. We asked members, leaders, partners and staff about what makes us, and what we do, important. We've heard comments like, 'you address the most important issues facing Canada and Canadians' and that we are a 'significant force in marshalling the intellectual and political capacity of Canada'. All of this begins with ideas! ”



## ANALYSIS

year, the ASPP awards 180 grants totalling CAD \$1.5 million to support research dissemination.

The Federation has been a supporter of the principle of open access since 2011. To date, most open access discussions have focused on articles published in academic journals and have not included scholarly books in the HSS. However, as the administrator of Canada's single largest fund for such books, the Federation is looking at the issue of open access through ASPP funding.

With a view to serving our members, publishers, other ASPP stakeholders and the public, the Federation will facilitate thorough and wide-ranging discussions on the subject. International best practices and models are also being reviewed. The Federation is committed to supporting the dissemination of research through scholarly books and will carefully consider potential impacts on book publishers and authors while crafting its policy.

The second project is involved in developing a framework for measuring the impact of research in the HSS, which impacts Canada and Canadians in many ways, including the areas of teaching, the economy, communities and public policy. Although the evidence of these impacts is visible every day, measuring them is an enormous challenge. But research in the HSS is recognised as being particularly challenging to measure, as accessible measures commonly used in scientific and technical disciplines – such as citations, patents and licensing revenues – are less relevant.

In an era of ranking and impact measurement, it is increasingly important to develop an accepted set of indicators to measure the impacts of HSS research. This project is still in its infancy, but we expect it to be of international interest once released.

### How does the Federation influence public policy?

The Federation contributes to Research and policy development on issues of concern to the HSS community in Canada. The Federation facilitates its community's contribution to issues such as digital publishing, open access and equity representation in academia. In the past, the Federation has also helped facilitate discussions that feed into SSHRC-led transformations, such as past consultations for strategic planning, the foresight exercise and talent renewal consultations. As such, the Federation has built a strong policy development capacity, facilitating consultations, providing expert advice and disseminating information within the HSS community.

Over the past few years, significant partnerships have been made in a range of matters from equity to industrial R&D, thanks to the guidance and insight provided by the members of the Federation's taskforces. Work on these issues will continue, while the Federation will also explore scholarship and knowledge mobilisation and international collaboration, and will seek opportunities to mobilise the community in response to requests from federal agencies.

### What do the next five years have in store for the Federation?

We are nearing the end of our 2011-15 strategic plan and our Board is now in the process of developing a new plan for 2016-20. There is an ever-present need for creative, agile minds that can think critically, forge innovative ideas and respond intelligently to unexpected national and global developments. For every new issue or crisis that can benefit from a scientific or technical solution, there is an equally important role for analysis, contextual understanding and sound policy making. The goals of the Federation aim to continue to advance knowledge sharing and relationship building across the arts and HSS.

## In pursuit of knowledge

**The Federation's Big Thinking initiatives comprise three distinct lecture series, with the common factor of showcasing the brightest minds**

**BIG THINKING ON THE HILL** – lets leading researchers offer fresh ideas to Canada's parliamentarians, here in Ottawa on Parliament Hill. Perhaps, more than any other Federation initiative, this series demonstrates the critical link between publicly funded research and policy development. Launched in 1994, Big Thinking has featured more than 50 humanists and social scientists presenting their findings to thousands of key members in the Ottawa policy community. Held six times a year, Big Thinking on the Hill lectures are delivered when the House and Senate are in session. The talks are high-profile opportunities to introduce evidence from current research on the most pressing public-policy issues. Researchers featured in the series also have opportunities for one-on-one meetings with members of Parliament and leaders in federal departments. On an ad hoc basis, lecturers can also participate in regional government discussions, media interviews and informal presentations in smaller settings. Big Thinking lectures become part of the public domain shortly after their delivery: [www.ideas-idees.ca/bigthinking](http://www.ideas-idees.ca/bigthinking).

**BIG THINKING ON THE ROAD** – expands research conversations beyond Ottawa and across the country – reaching a spectrum of politicians, researchers, the public and beyond. In 2013, Big Thinking on the Road was held in Banff, Alberta.

**BIG THINKING AT CONGRESS** – benefits from having 8,000+ scholars congregating at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, and is a focal point for the Federation's interdisciplinary programming at this event. This series draws large crowds and profiles six-to-eight leading scholars and public figures each year who present forward-looking research, thought-provoking ideas and solutions to the critical issues of our time.



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