

## Commentary: An Arctic Institute for the New Millennium

In this year of fiftieth anniversary celebrations and much fond gazing back over our history, I cannot resist the temptation to assess our present and, more importantly, to look forward and speculate on where we might be in 2045. Certainly we start with a firm understanding that federal budgets are about to be whacked, perhaps decisively, for the first time since the institute arrived at The University of Calgary. This will cause rethinking of all our activities that rely to some degree on federal largesse: Arctic (about \$39 000 in grants per year), ASTIS (about \$100 000 in contracts and grants per year), Kluane (about \$75 000 in grants per year), and a variety of professional service contracts and related grants of at least another \$200 000 per year. All told, about 30% of our current revenues come from federal sources in one way or another. And so they should, because we are a national research institute pursuing work for the general public good in partnership with a diverse array of northern communities and agencies.

If a solely private market existed for any of these services, we would be there peddling our research wares; in fact, one does not. I can say this with confidence, because over the last nine years of my executive directorship, I have travelled from coast to coast seeking out new sources of funding for our core activities. I have corresponded with leading economic visionaries and social/venture entrepreneurs, ranging from Anita Roddick (Body and Soul, 1991 and international owner of the Body Shop) to Paul Hawken (Ecology of Commerce, 1994 and co-owner of Smith and Hawken) and Douglas House (Building on Our Strengths, 1986 and professor of sociology, Memorial University). The message I have received from all quarters is this: operate according to a strategic plan, diversify the institute's revenues, provide professional services based on the institute's core competencies to a wide range of clients, never stop marketing, retain a surplus on operations wherever possible, create and steward a program trust fund, invest the trust fund wisely, use the interest to continue our work, and publish well and widely to our supporters. I have often been counselled to avoid slipping into reliance on a single funding agency, and to be wary of large, federally financed networks of centres of excellence and other similar federal grants council megaprojects. Simply put, the time spent meeting, writing, and collaborating on these ventures is time taken away from achieving small victories on a variety of fronts, developing professional service contacts (and contracts) in the private sector, and building community joint ventures with a broad base of diverse funding support. In other words, avoid putting all of your research eggs in the federal basket. As 1995 begins, we are taking this advice. A glance at our 1994 Annual Report will reveal that our revenues are diversified, our professional services well accepted, and our research joint ventures broadly based.

Some of you reading this commentary may now be wondering if you picked up the Financial Post by mistake. Do not worry, you have not; it is just that these new considerations constitute the reality of administering any research organization in Alberta in 1995. And I think that they are not necessarily bad realities. They have driven AINA to focus strategically on its activities and to explore intellectually the role of research organizations in civil society—that realm of social activity that exists in the gap between the individual and the state. As deficit governments increasingly pull in their tentacles and off-load responsibilities to civil society organizations, so do those organizations grow in responsibility and diversity. So also grows their need for a committed membership, a renewed commitment to civil service on the part of their staff, and a well-honed set of entrepreneurial skills to keep the doors open, the lights on and the research happening.

In this new environment, AINA has not noticed any undue restraint on what we wish to study; no funding organization has sought to restrain our commitment to participatory action research (PAR) or northern community joint ventures on topics such as traditional justice, medicine, and government, which have ultimately served to criticize existing government program delivery and control. Arctic's peer review system and editorial policy remain completely independent, and our publications committee retains its autonomy to decide which books we publish as Komatik monographs. Our professional service practice similarly benefits from independent board decisions on what work we wish to undertake for which clients at what fees. In no discernable way are our research, publication, and professional services tied to new funding realities in a way that restricts our academic freedom.

So much for now—what of the future? To begin with, the Arctic Institute is not going to go away. It has a 50-year history of evolving with change, responding to new intellectual themes and communicating well with a strong and supportive public membership. We are charter members of Canadian civil society. By definition, civil society cannot exist without the adjoining presence of the state and individuals. As individuals, our members will continue to support us; and the federal, provincial and territorial governments will continue to support our work as well, albeit at reduced levels. Funding for Canadian research on northern topics will, however, increasingly have to come from foundations, corporations, communities, and small business, which is the fastest growing realm of civil society.

By way of prediction, Arctic and the Komatik Series will increasingly have to rely on the membership, authors' page charges, bookstore shoppers, the textbook market, and perhaps advertisers. This will place a premium on original papers, major contributions to northern disciplines, and high quality, functional design and production. The dizzying and disillusioning busywork of publishing for academic tenure and promotion will alter significantly. This will not impact Arctic's contents radically, because we already strive for cogent, original papers that can be read across disciplines, and that make a significant mark on their home disciplines. I would not want over the next few years to be publishing a disciplinary journal in the sciences for fewer than 500 subscribers that focuses on multi-authored short papers of shorter significance, and does so only with enormous federal grant support. Such journals will come under severe financial pressures; many will disappear.

At their sponsoring institutions, university research institutes will have to increase their contributions to teaching and to local and civic service, oft neglected fields of endeavour in the past 20 years. As frontline, first-visited participants in times of fiscal restraint, institutes will have to shine locally in their home towns. Presidents, boards of governors, students, the general public, and corporations will have to know and understand just what they receive for the tax dollars they contribute. For these reasons, the Arctic Institute harbours a host of sessional instructors, lecturers and adjunct appointees, all of whom teach for credit at the University of Calgary. Every term students come to our institute for instruction, and we make sure that deans, vice-presidents and the president know that we preach what we practice. The ink is barely dry on our research reports and monographs before they become texts. As this is being written, we are putting the final touches on an Alberta Access Fund application to create an undergraduate minor in Northern Planning and Development Studies. This will, if successful, make us the first University of Calgary institute to house such a teaching program.

In Calgary we also provide non-teaching services to organizations that enable us to carry gifts from the North to southern Alberta. As a community of southern-based northern researchers, we host an annual northern community foods buffet. Over 150 Calgarians with an interest in the North, from babes-in-arms to grandmothers in their 90s, come to our offices to eat muskox, bannock and Porcupine caribou stew. As Claude Levi-Strauss observed, we know from experience that you can reach many people's heads via their stomachs. Our participatory strategic planning workshops, honed in the North with the Gwich'in, are now in high demand by clients like the Blood Tribe, the Town of Didsbury, the Calgary International Centre, the Canadian Parks Partnership, Friends of the Earth Canada, and the Rotary Club. The model of the Arctic Institute has now spawned a sister institute, the Environmental Research Centre at The University of Calgary, and other campus and Calgary-based research organizations are constantly asking us for advice on coping with change. We regularly dispatch speakers to annual dinners, general meetings, workshops, conferences, and board meetings to share our philosophy, compare notes and think about our collective future. In the next few years we will intensify these service efforts with a broadening network of friends.

Just as the friendship network grows, so does the responsibility to stay in touch. The single most important tool in this task is the Annual Report. In the new millennium, research organizations will have to increase not only their teaching and service profiles, but also their public profile. Given that the general public who pay the taxes (that become the core funding of universities) do not often read peer-reviewed journals or follow the fortunes of federal funding agencies, it is the job of the research institutes to reach them directly. And if the medium of this outreach is boring, arcane, or badly designed, the message will not flow. Consequently we must give great effort to the task of preparing and distributing our annual reports. This is our primary outreach mechanism for those who do not know us, for the toilers in civil society who might like to get to know us, and for the funding organizations that we need to get to know. If the results of our research projects remain closely held, narrowly read and reluctantly shared, we will not be here in ten years to write another commentary piece. The future is over for research organizations that communicate only with other researchers.

The Arctic Institute is now experiencing some early indications of what may become future trends in our research. To begin with, our work in the North is expanding geographically, and we are increasingly being asked to apply our experience to other regions. Over the last year we have undertaken research and professional service activities in the Queen Charlotte Islands, northern Alberta, central British Columbia, and Calgary. We worked in the Western Arctic and Yukon too, but the trend seems to be that PAR methodology, non-adversarial dispute resolution via mediation, and traditional land use and occupancy mapping and co-management (all methodological products of our historic northern work) are now sought in the South. We chose to respond to this call and are happy that we did.

As 1995 moves through its first quarter, the Arctic is once again gearing up for a Federal Environmental Assessment Office Review of a massive industrial project (diamond mines this time), comprehensive claims implementation in Nunavut, as well as the ongoing land claims implementation work in the Sahtu, Gwich'in and Yukon. More and more circumpolar work with Russian aboriginal partners is looming. Community-based healing projects are also multiplying in number, along with long-term research on global warming, ozone depletion and the water quality of northern river basins. Overall, the persistent themes are community collaboration, local capacity building, economic self-reliance, appropriate technology transfer, environmental stewardship, and northern lessons for southern audiences.

At the front line of university classroom teaching, these themes are matched with a growing demand for practical, job-related skills and well-planned, carefully presented lectures. Students are much quicker now to complain about poor professors when the cost of a year at school approaches \$15 000, and the cost of employment opportunity lost while at university may exceed \$20 000. To these concerns are added the special contributions and needs of mature students who bring significant career experience to the classroom. They are loathe to view university as a social institution—the learning is the thing.

As we look out from the Arctic Institute at the approach of the year 2000, we note change as a constant on all our horizons: the university, the City of Calgary, the province of Alberta, the provincial mid-Norths, the Yukon and Northwest Territories, and our circumpolar neighbours. We must be responsive to each of these ever-greater “communities,” but we know that our primary loyalties must be to our membership and our university home.

We thank you, Arctic readers, for your fellowship, scholarship and commitment to interdisciplinary distribution of research results. We also thank you for your commitment to sharing our future as we sail into middle age.

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