



Globalization by-product?

The end of the Canadianization movement

by Yves Gingras



“Why the drop in the proportion of professors with Canadian PhDs? It can be summarized in two (buzz) words: ‘excellence’ and ‘internationalization.’”

“PHD TO WHAT END?” – an essay by Louis Groarke and Wayne Fenske suggesting that Canadian philosophy PhDs are at a disadvantage when it comes to being hired by Canadian universities – was published in *University Affairs* in the November 2009 issue, stimulating many critical responses. Though the data these two professors used were obviously too limited to really test their hypothesis according to the canons of quantitative social sciences, their essay nonetheless raised an important issue that brings to mind the “Canadianization movement” that characterized English-Canadian higher education from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s.

As the late Jeffrey Cormier showed in his important book *The Canadianization Movement: Emergence, Survival and Success* (Toronto, 2003), that movement started at the end of 1968 as a reaction to the large influx of American scholars filling the job market created by the rapid growth of Canadian universities. At the time, Canadian production of PhDs couldn't keep up with the growing demand by Canadian universities for professors holding PhDs, while American universities were producing plenty of them. Moreover, the Vietnam War also prompted many young American scholars to move north. Critical of the “Americanization” of Canadian higher education, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, the movement culminated in 1981 with the adop-

tion of new rules by the federal department of immigration, giving preference in faculty hiring to Canadian citizens. That was seen as a real victory of the movement, though it was possible to go around these rules when a department really wished to hire a foreign scholar. (Since 2003, these rules have been relaxed significantly.) Obviously, hiring *Canadians* is a different matter than hiring persons who hold a Canadian PhD, but the Canadianization movement also emphasized the importance of training scholars at home.

It seems possible to find an indicator valid for the long-term hiring trend by looking, for all disciplines and not just philosophy, at the changing proportion of professors with a Canadian PhD. The *Commonwealth University Yearbook* has provided data since 1917 on university professors, including the origin of their PhD. It would be too time-consuming to collect the data for all disciplines and all universities. But we have data collected over the years by my team at the Observatoire des sciences et des technologies (OST) on slightly more than 11,000 professors active in 2005 at 10 of the largest Canadian universities for whom we know the origin of their PhD at the time of hiring. This gives a good idea of the evolution over time of the proportion of those professors with a PhD earned in Canada. Though not complete, and biased in favour of large insti-

tutions, these data are nonetheless more than sufficient to exhibit tendencies, since the proportion of Canadian PhDs found in smaller institutions would probably be higher but the general *trend* would likely be the same.

Figure 1 on the next page shows the evolution, over four decades, in the percentage of professors at Canadian universities with a Canadian PhD: a striking inverted U-shape with a maximum in the mid-1980s (red curve), followed by a steep decline starting at the end of the 1990s. In 2005, the percentages are back to what they were at the end of the 1970s. Interestingly, the natural sciences and the humanities closely follow the same trend, with the proportion of their Canadian PhDs starting to decline at the end of the 1980s, while the social sciences resist until the end of the 1990s. As could be expected, the Canadianization movement, though directed at Canadian *citizens*, did indirectly favour the hiring of Canadian PhD holders in all disciplines up until the mid-90s. Of course, the decline in the proportion of Canadian PhDs hired by Canadian universities does not necessarily translate into a decline in the proportion of Canadian citizens hired, since many Canadian scholars hold foreign degrees. (Only data about citizenship could substantiate such a conclusion and this information is not readily available.)

But why such a drop since the end of the →



Who gets hired

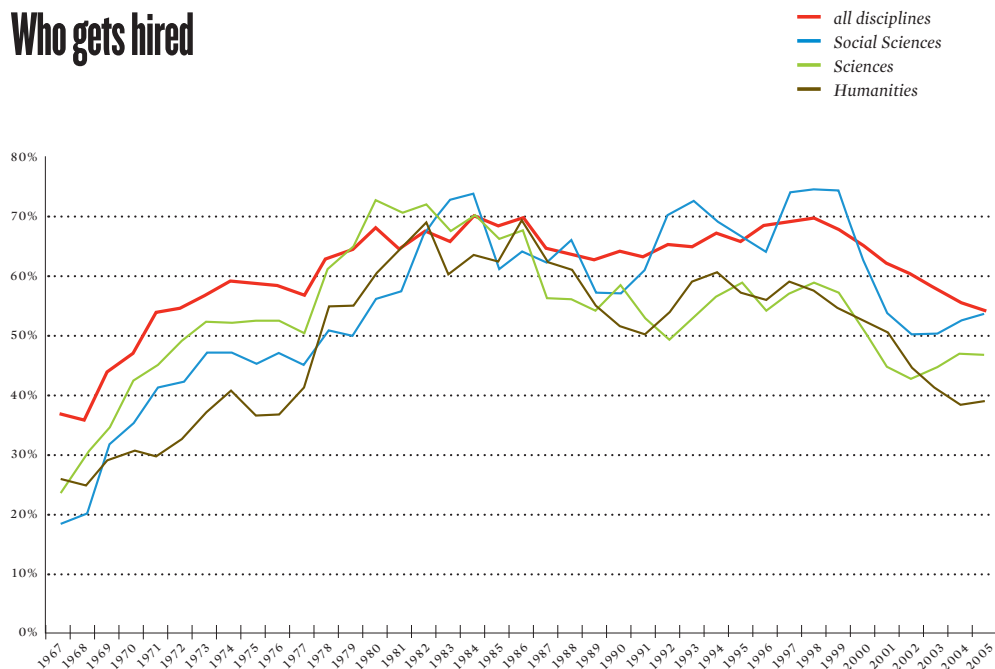


Figure 1: Percentage of professors in Canadian universities having a Canadian PhD for different sets of disciplines, by year of hiring.* Three-year moving average.

*Based on data on 11,000 faculty at 10 very large universities.

1990s? I think it can be related to the new rhetoric that has come to dominate higher education since that time and which can be summarized in two (buzz) words: “excellence” and “internationalization.” Indeed, the new rhetoric quite often, without any empirical confirmation, equates “excellence” with “international,” thus favouring the hiring of foreign scholars. In fact, and contrary to widespread belief, our own data – based on more than 5,000 cases – show no statistical difference in scientific impact (measured through citations) according to the origin of the PhD. Moreover, the productivity of Canadian PhDs is *higher* than that of foreign PhDs, probably due to a more rigorous selection being applied when choosing a “local” candidate over an international one.

With the rise to prominence of the new rhetoric of excellence and internationalization, it could be expected that the “Canadianization movement” would lose much of its power of conviction, appearing to many to be outdated, even parochial. Indeed, the federal immigration department has

adjusted its rules to the new discourse of international competition: in 2003 it removed the requirement to do a first round of advertising for faculty positions limited to Canadians, thus lowering the obstacles to hiring foreign scholars. This change came in the wake of the creation of the Canada Research Chair program that promoted the idea of recruiting the “best” minds in the world.

While the 1970s were characterized by strong Canadian nationalism that translated in academe into demands to teach Canadian subjects from a Canadian perspective, the last decade has seen a complete reversal of the pendulum. Now “globalization” and “international competition” have become the new gods before which all universities must bow, at the risk of becoming “non-competitive” and thus ejected from history. In this context, promoting Canadian PhDs is courageous since it goes against today’s dominant ideology – an ideology that unconsciously reaffirms the old adage that no one is a prophet in his own country.