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### Development, Diplomacy, and Expertise: Placing State Bureaucratic Labour in the CIDA-DFAIT Merger (June 2021 Final Research Report)

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**RESEARCH PROGRESS REPORT #4  
(June 2021)**

***Development, diplomacy, and expertise:  
Placing state bureaucratic labour in the CIDA-DFAIT merger***

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This is the fourth and final research report for the SSHRC-funded project *Development, diplomacy, and expertise: Placing state bureaucratic labour in the CIDA-DFAIT merger*, summarizing research activity, findings, and dissemination in the fourth and extended fifth years of funding, April 2019 through April 2021. SSHRC funding expired as of March 31, 2021.

Since the last report, the project expanded into broader questions of historical and institutional significance for Global Affairs Canada and for diplomacy in general, looking beyond the specific amalgamation that created GAC from the former Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT). The research has to date examined how the merger of Canada's development, foreign, and trade policy institutions has altered the labour of professional officer-level experts, the role of policy expertise in the amalgamated department, the day-to-day work and professional identities of its development, political, trade, and consular officers, and how ideas of professionalism within GAC have mattered for larger institutional changes. The final two years of research have focused less on gathering further details through interviews with GAC officers, the primary source of data for the first three years of work, than on examining the relationship between foreign posts and headquarters and how diplomatic institutions such as GAC and diplomatic families manage rotationality as a condition of work and life. Interview data already collected, primary data collected from other Canadian and American sources, and new secondary work in diplomatic history, political geography, international relations, and gender studies formed the backbone of this phase of the project. This report briefly summarizes the work that has been completed in the final two years of funding, identifies lingering questions and themes for possible future research, and suggests some policy fronts on which GAC might concentrate efforts as it continues to work through the amalgamation and its institutional culture continues to develop and adapt.

### **Summary: Years 1 through 3**

The first three research reports, completed in June 2017, June 2018, and June 2019, are publicly available by download as pdf files from the University of Windsor's Scholarship at UWindsor catalog through, respectively, the following links:

- Report #1 (June 2017): <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/research-result-summaries/1/>;
- Report #2 (June 2018): <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/research-result-summaries/28/>;
- Report #3 (June 2019): <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/research-result-summaries/70/>.

Several key themes regarding the CIDA-DFAIT merger and the evolution of Global Affairs Canada were identified in these reports, and these are summarized in more detail in those documents. The most important points examined in the initial three years of research, however,

remain salient in the final two years of work, and eight years after the amalgamation of CIDA and DFAIT. These are twofold:

1. **First, institutional change following the amalgamation is difficult and there is no guarantee of long-term success in creating a cohesive, singular departmental work culture or mandate.** Doing so will require ongoing adjustment and attention to internal mechanisms for classifying positions and organizing expertise in support of department goals and political objectives, and to the management and execution of professional officers' daily work in GAC's different streams. This stream-based structure itself may be an impediment to a cohesive and new corporate and work culture in the department, but what would or could effectively replace it or how it may be adapted to new realities in the department and in foreign, trade, and development policy remains unclear.
2. **Second, the challenges and opportunities presented by amalgamation continue to evolve, though there remains a perception that the department does not better and more effectively identify, organize, and deploy the skills and expertise that exist within its professional officer ranks.** This was a common sentiment among respondents through the first three years of interview-based data collection, and nothing to date has indicated this has changed. Yet the historical and comparative work completed in the last two years suggests this double problem of perception and organization predate this specific amalgamation. And while institutional differences between former CIDA and DFAIT persist in a variety of forms, these are less apparent and important to those with less seniority or working on temporary contracts. Most pertinent here are differing perceptions of and ideas about: professionalism and the value of different occupational groups' expertise and skills; access to promotional opportunities, mobility, and rotational positions; and the nature and relative importance of work in different streams for the department. These ideas begin to erode in favor of a more cohesive perspective in contexts where there is, in fact, some kind of institutional cohesion across pre-existing silos and institutional boundaries, such as when officers from multiple streams or occupational groups work on projects together as a unit, when individuals move between streams in their career progression, and in certain contexts in the field or at post.

## **Years 4 and 5 – Research Results and Dissemination Activities**

The fourth and fifth years of this project were funded through the normal rollover of remaining SSHRC support in year four, and an additional year-long grace period for using funding due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted academic research activities for researchers across Canada. After the previous research report, the primary investigator (PI; Dr. Jamey Essex) had planned to investigate further challenges faced by early career and, potentially, temporary and

contract personnel in GAC's political, trade, development, and consular streams. Obtaining interviews with a significant and useful number of these respondents proved difficult, and so the research turned toward other outstanding questions related to rotationality, gender, and life and work at foreign posts. This allowed reassessment of data already collected through interviews with GAC personnel over the last several years, and comparison with other diplomatic services, especially the US Foreign Service and Department of State. The PI and two research assistants at the University of Windsor collected further data in this phase of the research from relevant secondary sources and media coverage, interviews with retired US foreign service officers and spouses conducted, transcribed, and publicly available through the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Oral Histories collection, and publications from several institutional outlets: GAC and its predecessor institutions; PAFSO; the US Department of State; the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA); the Canadian Retired Heads of Mission Association (RHOMA); and the Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide (AAFSW). Two major focal points emerged from this last phase of the research, both concerned with aspects of rotationality as a condition of work for foreign service officers and others deployed abroad by national diplomatic institutions such as GAC and its predecessor agencies.

### ***Rotationality 1: Risk, danger, and hardship***

The first focus is on rotationality and hardship as spatial and institutional practices for managing a global network of diplomatic personnel and sites, with particular emphasis on how GAC and the US Department of State assess, manage, remunerate, and mitigate risk and danger for personnel posted abroad. This emerged from interviews with GAC personnel over the first three years of research, especially those interviewed while at post, from two different research visits to Canadian embassies in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, and from recent media and public attention on Canadian and American diplomats and their family members experiencing effects of "Havana syndrome." GAC and the State Department and the respective Canadian and American governments have viewed and responded to Havana syndrome through different geopolitical and institutional perspectives. While Canadian and American personnel and governments have viewed the Havana posting quite differently over the last several decades because of their differing geopolitical positions relative to Cuba, the two governments have both received pointed criticism from their diplomatic corps for how they have handled the Havana syndrome cases. A second set of case studies examines how the US has used the physical design and location of embassy buildings as a means of managing risk and danger for diplomatic personnel, looking especially at US embassies in Berlin and Baghdad. The PI had prepared a presentation on rotationality, risk, danger, and life at post, with particular focus on Canadian and American diplomatic personnel suffering the effects of "Havana syndrome" for the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers (AAG), scheduled for April 2020 in Denver, Colorado. This conference was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper on which the presentation was based has subsequently been accepted for publication in the peer-reviewed academic journal *Diplomatica* and will be in print by end of 2021 or early 2022.

### ***Rotationality 2: “Trailing spouses” and life at post***

The second focal point examines how the demands and pressures of rotationality shape social relations and life in extended diplomatic networks at foreign postings, especially how “trailing spouses” contend with mundane but deeply personal issues of building and maintaining community, friendships, and domestic partnerships while at post and across a career of rotational assignments. While this may seem far afield from the initial research on the internal mechanics of the CIDA-DFAIT amalgamation, this aspect of the project builds on central themes related to the gendered nature of development work and diplomatic service, institutional support for officers and their dependents, and the value and organization of certain forms of knowledge and expertise within diplomatic institutions. This research remains in progress, looking primarily at American and Canadian examples, and situating diplomatic spouses and families in relation to institutional changes and spouses’ political standing, role, and voice in the US and Canadian foreign services. A paper examining these points in historical context is under preparation and is in preparation with a targeted completion and submission date of September 2021.

### ***Other research dissemination***

A paper previously presented at a conference in August 2018, examining how perceptions and ideals of professionalism, gender, and institutional affiliation intersect in the amalgamated department through work attire was published in April 2020 in the *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. The full citation can be found at the end of this report. The PI also presented this portion of the research to PAFSO members via Zoom in May 2020, as part of the PAFSO Virtual Breakfast Presentation Series. The particulars of this research are summarized in the third research report in June 2019.

## **Future Research and Areas for Policy Action**

The amalgamation of CIDA and DFAIT within Global Affairs Canada is an ongoing process. First announced in the 2013 federal budget, the merger began a multi-year reorganization of personnel, positions, programs, mandates, and office space that challenged and undid some aspects of institutional difference between CIDA and DFAIT, while entrenching and reinforcing others. At the working level and in the various streams through which daily work in the post-amalgamation department is organized – political, development, trade, and consular – the changes brought on by the merger have often been far-reaching and fundamental. Yet they are also uneven across geographic branches and in the relationships between Ottawa headquarters and Canada’s many foreign posts around the world. This research project has demonstrated that a full understanding of this kind of institutional merger, and specifically of housing development, diplomacy, and trade under one departmental roof, requires an approach that takes seriously the professional identities, work culture, and institutional relationships of those responsible for

Canadian foreign, development, and trade policy and managing Canada's overseas network of diplomatic posts, trade relations, and development programs and projects. This in turn requires a spatial and geographic understanding of the multiple scales, spaces, and bodies through which Canadian policy is formulated and executed and expertise and knowledge circulate.

The published works and presentations resulting from this funded research are listed below, but much more work remains to be done. Rather than recommending specific policy proposals that might be adopted within GAC, the Canadian government and Treasury Board, or the various professional associations and unions representing GAC personnel, this report instead identifies three important further academic questions emerging from the completed research, and two areas of policy action that seem most urgent for GAC as an institution.

### *Further questions for future research*

1. **How have the changes associated with the amalgamation influenced or affected the content and direction of Canadian foreign, trade, and development policy?** The now-completed research project focused primarily on the patterns, spaces, and mechanics of daily work and professional identity, but asked little about changes in the content, formulation, strategic aims, and execution of Canadian policy, especially amid concerns over institutional cohesion and departmental mandates, and growing international challenges such as climate change and the coronavirus pandemic.
2. **Does Canada's overseas network need better organization and support, and if so, in what ways?** This question builds on the research conducted as part of this project on diplomatic networks and spouses, embassy design, and cohesion between streams and between HQ and foreign posts. Canada's overseas network is large and complex due to the global reach of GAC's duties and personnel, the multiple kinds of spaces and personnel that form the GAC network outside of Canada, and a long history of debates about how the department can or should support rotational staff and their dependents. This remains a difficult set of practical, strategic, and conceptual questions with important ramifications for how the department recruits new officers, maintains morale, and addresses quality of life at its rotational posts, and for how GAC sees its overseas presence evolving alongside new forms of digital and public diplomacy.
3. **How does the covid-19 pandemic affect GAC's mandate, objectives, and operation, and what does it mean for the integration of and cohesion between development, diplomacy, and trade in the department?** This is a question that has arisen late in the research but it is vitally important in the context of shifts in funding, reassessments of risk and danger, international health policy, disruptions to the global economy and travel, and concerns over issues such as vaccine passports and 'vaccine nationalism.'

## *Areas of potential policy action for GAC*

- 1. Expertise, skills, and training:** While those in the political, development, trade, and consular streams are all highly skilled and educated, there are marked differences in how the various skill sets, forms of expertise, and access to ongoing training and professional development are perceived and organized across streams and employment categories. Many foreign service interviewees lamented the loss of longstanding FS training programs for new officers and a paucity of promotional opportunities. Development officers and economic analysts noted restrictions on accessing rotational positions, while also expressing frustration over limits on mobility and unclear processes related to a set of recently created FS positions focused on international assistance. There is also a reliance on ‘champions’ in advocating for or advancing the interests and concerns of particular groups (e.g., early career and temporary and contract staff) or addressing workplace concerns (e.g., mental health) in GAC’s structures, and individuals must often rely on existing social networks or the beneficence of particular managers. Career progression is a constant source of tension and morale problems across occupational categories, and early career and contract personnel lack voice in the department and have limited ability to build institutional knowledge beneficial to both themselves and GAC. The amalgamated department should consider developing a coordinated strategy with meaningful employee input from across streams and involving both unions and rank-and-file officers to address these issues, all of which appear to stem from the same root, which is that the department has struggled to find a systematic approach to understanding the skills and expertise that currently exist in the department, and matching these to the challenges it faces internally and externally as Canada’s foreign policy hub. This goes beyond developing the long-discussed “competency-based approach” for identifying and filling boxes on the department’s organizational chart, and requires instead a thorough rethink of what GAC does and why; how the foreign and consular services, trade commission, and development program fit into that and work in relation to one another; and how the professional officer ranks can best enact GAC’s objectives. Coherent and comprehensive recruitment, training, and cohort-building into the department would be a potential first step, but in general this needs departmental attention from the highest levels.
- 2. Ensuring GAC reflects Canada:** Many interviewees also noted that GAC needs to develop a concerted effort to ensure that the Canadian presence abroad reflects Canada’s social diversity. This means looking closely at recruitment efforts and making GAC and the public service an attractive and healthy workplace for those most interested in public service and on the frontlines of Canadian foreign, trade, and development policy. There have been gains in working toward a gender balance over the last several years, but the department could consider further and more long-term strategic action across these fronts. Given the kinds of training and educational backgrounds preferred, the limited number of entry-level positions,



and constraints on funding, GAC must be careful not to recruit only in the narrow Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal corridor, and think about how to broaden its recruitment and training strategies, including language training, to attract and retain officers from across Canada, and from a variety of ethnic, religious, and class backgrounds.

### **Citations**

Below are listed the published works and public and invited presentations resulting from this SSHRC-funded research project. All published works can be provided upon written request to the PI, Dr. Jamey Essex.

#### ***Published peer-reviewed papers***

Essex, Jamey and Joshua Bowman. (Forthcoming) “From the Green Zone to Havana syndrome: Making geographic sense of rotationality and hardship in diplomacy.” *Diplomatica*.

Essex, Jamey and Joshua Bowman. (2021) “Striped pants and Birkenstocks: Work culture, gender, and clothing at Global Affairs Canada.” *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 23 (2): 309-329. doi: [10.1080/14616742.2020.1724814](https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2020.1724814).

Essex, Jamey, Lauren Stokes, and Ilkin Yusibov. (2019) “Geographies of diplomatic labor: Institutional culture, state work, and Canada’s foreign service.” *Political Geography*, 72: 10-19. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.03.005>.

Essex, Jamey and Logan Carmichael. (2017) “Restructuring development expertise and labour in the CIDA-DFAIT merger.” *The Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe canadien*, 61 (2): 266-278. doi: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/cag.12328>.

#### ***Presentations***

Essex, Jamey. “Clothes make the (wo)man: Work attire and institutional culture in Global Affairs Canada.” Professional Association of Foreign Service Officers (PAFSO) Virtual Breakfast Presentation Series, Ottawa, ON (online via Zoom), May 2020.

Essex, Jamey and Joshua Bowman. “Far from home, close to work: Geographies of rotationality in the foreign service.” Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers (AAG), Washington DC, April 2019.

Essex, Jamey. "Three-piece suits and Birkenstocks: Geographies of institutional change and the workplace at Global Affairs Canada." Canadian Association of Geographers (CAG) Annual Meeting/International Geographical Union Regional Conference, Québec City QC, August 2018.

Essex, Jamey and Ilkin Yusibov. "Geographies of diplomatic labor: Institutional culture, collective bargaining, and Canada's foreign service." Annual Meeting of the AAG, New Orleans LA, April 2018.

Essex, Jamey. "Geographies of bureaucratic labor: Expertise, development, and state space at Global Affairs Canada." University of Toronto Development Seminar, University of Toronto, Toronto ON, January 2018.

Essex, Jamey and Lauren Stokes. "Under one roof? Comparative analysis of development and foreign policy institution mergers in Canada, Norway, and Australia." CAG Annual Meeting, Toronto ON, May 2017.

Essex, Jamey. "Between Pearson and Portage: Merging development, foreign, and trade policy expertise in Global Affairs Canada." Graduate Program Colloquium Series, Department of Geography, York University, Toronto ON, January 2017.

Essex, Jamey and Logan Carmichael. "The work of development: Expertise and labour in the CIDA-DFAIT amalgamation." Annual Meeting of the AAG, San Francisco CA, April 2016.