

The Status of Modern Greek and Hellenic Studies in Higher Education in Canada and the York University Experience

Thomas W. Gallant

Abstract

The development of programs devoted to Modern Greek and Hellenic Studies is a more recent phenomenon in Canada than in the United States. In addition to being younger, the programs in Canada are located in social, political and institutional situations that present them with some opportunities and challenges that differ from those facing US programs. They also confront some of the same dilemmas as colleagues elsewhere as these are common to academia in North America. Because there are fewer MGHS programs in Canada, the possibilities for higher levels of inter-program co-operation and co-ordination are greater. In the ways that the directors and chairs of programs in Canada are addressing the manifold challenges and opportunities gives grounds for cautious optimism regarding the current state and future development of Modern Greek and Hellenic Studies in Canada.

The development of Modern Greek and Hellenic Studies (hereafter, MGHS) at Canadian institutions of higher learning is a much more recent phenomenon than in the US. This is not surprising given that the emergence of sizeable Greek communities occurred much more recently in Canada than it did south of the border. As a point of departure for determining just how many MGHS programs there are at Canadian universities, I consulted the list of programs provided by the Modern Greek Studies Association on its website and the list compiled by a team of researchers at the University of Athens and posted on their website.¹ Much to my surprise, based on these two lists there would appear to be over 40 MGHS programs in Canada, but on further review it is clear that most of these refer to Classics program in which MGHS are largely absent. The reality of the situation is that there are only four MGHS of note in the country: the Program in Hellenic Studies at York University,

the Hellenic Studies Program at Simon Fraser University, the Centre Interuniversitaire d'Études Néo-Helléniques de Montréal (CIÉNHM), and the Center for Hellenic Civilization at the University of Manitoba. I focus first upon these programs.

Canadian MGHS programs: comparative perspectives

In spite of their relatively small number, the MGHS programs in Canada demonstrate a remarkable variety as to their institutional situation, organizational structure, and scholarly orientation—not unlike the situation in the United States, described elsewhere in this issue of the *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*. There are, however, some points of similarity. First, all of the programs are located in major urban universities with very active Greek communities that range in size from very large (Toronto: 210,000) to large (Montreal: 80,000) to moderate (Vancouver: 16,000 and Winnipeg: 8,000). It is not coincidental that the MGHS programs are located in the Canadian cities and provinces (Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia and Manitoba) with the largest concentrations of Greeks in the country. Indeed, another characteristic shared by three of the programs, CIÉNHM, Simon Fraser University and York University, is that they revolve around an endowed chair, and not surprisingly, much of the financing needed to establish these chairs came from the Greek communities. The respective chair-holders are Jacques Bouchard, the Phrixos B. Papachristidis Chaire en Études néo-helléniques et helléno-canadiennes, Andre Gerolymatos, the Hellenic Canadian Congress of BC Chair in Hellenic Studies, and myself, the holder of the Hellenic Heritage Foundation Chair in Modern Greek History. As I discuss below, the presence of such dynamic and supportive communities has both positive and negative impacts on the programs in each of these cities. One of the benefits being, of course, the possibility of on-going financial support from the community, which, also contributes to one of the potential pitfalls and that relates to how university administrators might allocate institutional funds to units that can obtain extra-mural resources. Lastly, all of the programs are relatively recent creations. The Centre for Hellenic Civilization at the University of the Manitoba was established in 1995, the Hellenic Studies Chair at Simon Fraser University came into existence in 1996, the CIÉNHM consortium in Montreal was founded in 2000–2001, and the Hellenic Heritage Foundation Chair at York University was created in 2003. To be sure, MGHS had a presence at these institutions before the foundation of the various chairs and programs, in some cases, like the Université de Montréal, Modern Greek had been

taught there since the 1960s, but it was not until the 1990s that actual programs came into existence.

Though there are only four programs, they demonstrate a remarkable range of variation as to their structure and organization. The two that most closely resemble one another are those at Simon Fraser and York. As we have seen both of them revolve around an endowed chair, but in addition both programs are housed in Departments of History and offer programs in Hellenic Studies that encompass all periods of Greek culture. On the modern side, both programs have two core faculty members, one in history and the other in Linguistics (Simon Fraser) or Linguistics, Languages and Literature (York).² The Centre for Hellenic Civilization at Manitoba is an inter-disciplinary center housed in the Department of Classics. It has no core faculty of its own but instead draws on the expertise of scholars of Greece from antiquity to the present. At the moment the only courses offered by the Classics Department that deal with Modern Greece are language courses. The situation in Montréal is different from all of the others. Rather than being a program housed at a single university, it is a consortium linking departments from McGill University, Concordia University and the Université de Montréal. Of the four programs, it is the only one that focuses exclusively on Modern Greece. In addition, because it combines the resources of departments at three universities it can offer students a fuller range of courses devoted solely to Modern Greece than can the programs at Simon Fraser or York. As to the degrees offered at each institution, we see once again a high degree of variation. Manitoba offers a BA major and minor in Greek, for which students may study Modern as well as ancient Greek but the emphasis is on the latter; Simon Fraser and the Université de Montréal³ offer certificates in Hellenic Studies and Modern Greek Studies, respectively; finally, at York, students can obtain a BA with Honours, a BA major or a BA minor in Hellenic Studies. In sum, even though there are substantially fewer MGHS in Canada than in the US, they show the same high level of variation as to their structure, organization and institutional situation.

On the other hand, there are, I suspect, some opportunities available to the Canadian programs that might not be options open to programs in the US, at least perhaps not to the same degree. One significant difference between Canada and the US is their respective attitudes to ethnic immigrants regarding their relationship to the broader society. The metaphor used to describe this relationship in Canada is not the “melting pot” but rather something more like an ethnic stew. At all levels of government, be it federal or provincial, there are firm policies

aimed to helping the various national groups in Canada to maintain their distinctive cultures and languages. Multiculturalism and diversity are thus prized and supported. This policy has a number of important consequences. First, it means that there are monies and resources available from the federal and the provincial governments to support educational programs geared to specific ethnic groups. Second, it also creates an environment on university campuses that encourages students from various ethnic backgrounds to value their cultural distinctiveness, and this leads to greater demand for courses that speak to their interests. University administrators must pay attention to those needs.

Another difference between Canada and the US relates to the age of their respective Greek communities. The Greek communities in Montréal, Toronto and elsewhere are relatively recent, and in fact are largely products of migration during the 1960s. This is not to say that Greeks were not resident in Canadian cities before then; they were, but not in large numbers (Chimbos 1999; Gallant, Treheles and Vitopoulos 2005). Greek mass migration is a relatively recent development. This also has consequences for MGHS. First, because these communities are composed mainly of first and second generation Greek-Canadians, their connection to Greece is much more tangible and immediate. Greek is the mother tongue for many of them, and most first generation immigrants received the bulk of their education in Greece. Preserving their connection to Greece and Greek culture is a very high priority for many, and ensuring that their children maintain this connection is an even higher one. Second, the youthfulness of the communities here in combination with the previous point mean that second-generation Greek-Canadians who are now only entering university want to enroll in MGHS courses and that they have a greater facility with the language. The Canadian devotion to multiculturalism combined with the Greek communities' desire to preserve the language has resulted in the development of a flourishing ethnic Greek school system that spans both the primary and secondary levels. All of these factors combined present the Canadian MGHS programs with a different set of opportunities and challenges than those faced by colleagues in the US.

The picture of the state of MGHS in Canada would be incomplete without the mention of the fact that, just as in the US, many scholars whose research and teaching touches on Modern Greek are not affiliated with institutions that have MGHS programs. For example, the scholar who has probably written more than anyone else about the Greeks in Canada, Peter Chimbos, holds appointments at two institutions, the University of Western Ontario and Brescia University College, neither of which has a program in MGHS. Another well-known scholar whose

work is grounded in MGS, Evangelia Tatsoglou, is likewise at a university, St. Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where there is no MGHS program. The number of scholars in this situation could be multiplied many times over. Likewise we find that in Canada as in the US, many graduate students receive their doctoral training on topics empirically grounded in Modern Greece at institutions without MGHS programs.⁴ A prominent example of this situation would be Dr. Jack Fairey, who was awarded the 2005 John O. Iatrides Modern Greek Studies Association Best Dissertation Prize for his University of Toronto dissertation that was produced in a department, History, that had no faculty members who worked on Modern Greece.

Augmenting and supporting the study of Modern Greece in Canada are the numerous organizations and associations that bridge "town and gown." In Ontario organizations such as the Canadian Hellenic History Association, the Hellenic Canadian Academic Association of Ontario and the Cultural Association of Hellenes and Philhellenes, to name but a few, provide venues and material support for events and initiatives that bring together scholars and lay people interested in the study of Modern Greece.

Taken all together, then, there is clearly in place in Canada a solid foundation upon which to build MGHS. There are, of course, many challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, and I want next to highlight some of them by analyzing in greater detail one program: the one at York University, which, of course, I know the best.

The York University experience

While the Hellenic Studies program at York is very new, the university's engagement with Greece is not. From 1967 to 1974, Andreas Papandreou was a member and chair of the university's Department of Economics. In addition to his purely academic activities, which included helping to develop what was then a new department, he was, of course, politically active, and York attracted many students who had fled to Toronto to escape the dictatorship in Greece or were Canadians of Greek descent. From the early 1970s onward, Modern Greek language instruction was provided both at York University and at the University of Toronto, but neither institution took the next stage of founding degree programs. There had certainly been discussion between the leadership of the Greek community in Toronto and the academic community about expanding the offerings in MGHS at the university level. It was not, however, until the late 1990s that major steps were taken toward achieving the goal of endowing a chair in MGHS. Under the dynamic leadership and generous

contributions of the Hellenic Heritage Foundation, a concerted campaign of fund-raising was undertaken that brought together numerous groups in the Greek community. After a lengthy deliberative process, the Hellenic Heritage Foundation decided that the chair would be given to York University and that it would be in the field of Modern Greek History. I have the honor and the privilege of being the first holder of the chair.

Like all new initiatives we had to decide what type of program we wanted and then formulate strategies as to how we achieve our goals, given the available resources and the resources we could reasonably expect to lay claim to in the future. The immediate issue we confronted was whether the program would be devoted just to the study of Modern Greece or Greece of all periods, i.e., whether it would be a Modern Greek Studies or a Hellenic Studies program. There are advantages and disadvantages to each model, but given the resources at York, the preference for what type of program the students told us they wanted and an assessment of the potentiality for future growth, York decided on the second option. To obtain a degree in Hellenic Studies at York, a student has to take equally language courses in Modern and Ancient Greek and topical courses covering both Modern and Ancient Greece.⁵ At York, as at many other institutions that offer Hellenic Studies programs there is an imbalance between the Ancient and the Modern components; primarily because almost invariably there is in place already a well-established Department of Classics. And this is certainly the case at York where there are ten faculty members who specialize in Greek antiquity and only three who concentrate on the Modern period. At the graduate level we made the strategic decision to concentrate just on Modern Greek history rather than on Hellenic Studies. The primary factor driving this decision was our belief that students seeking a career in the academy have to be well-grounded in a specific academic discipline, like history, anthropology, literary studies, political science, and the like, and that Hellenic Studies is not such a discipline. Students who wish to specialize in Modern Greek history enter the Modern European history section of the Department of History's graduate program. By grounding their researches in Greek history in a comparative European and Mediterranean framework we believe that our graduates will be well-poised to produce the type of scholarship needed to move the discipline forward (Gallant 1997) and to compete in the job marketplace.

The program is off to a very fine start. After one year in existence there are already over twenty declared majors and, on their own initiative, some of those students got together and founded a Hellenic Studies Student Association. We have found that many of our students are dual majors in Hellenic Studies and Education and that their goal is to get a

teaching position in Greek schools or in bilingual programs. The enrolments in the Modern Greek language and literature and History courses are full and in some years they have in fact been over-subscribed. The average annual enrolment in the Hellenic Studies courses varies between 800 and 1000, of which approximately 200 are in the Modern Greek Studies courses. At the graduate level, we have admitted two PhD and three MA candidates, all in Modern Greek history. As noted earlier there are only three faculty members on the modern side, of whom one is only tangentially in Greek Studies and another occupies a non-tenure stream line, and so clearly manpower is one of our primary challenges.

York has to address three fundamental and critical issues if MGHS are to flourish. All, not surprisingly, relate to resources. Additional faculty lines are a *sine qua non*. It is simply not possible for us to meet the demands of both the undergraduate and graduate programs with only two core faculty members. At the undergraduate levels because of programmatic requirements the person in languages and literature has to offer the same basic courses (Greek I and Greek II) each year, and this severely restricts the number and variety of literature courses that can be offered. The same is the case in history. In addition it means that we can really only offer courses in history and literature. Other faculty lines grounded in other disciplines need to be filled. Next, in order to sustain even basic level research and teaching, the Modern Greek collection in York University's Scott Library has to be expanded considerably. Lastly, at least for the purposes of this discussion, the program has to be able to provide financial support for students to study in Greece. But all of these, of course, require funding.

Canadian universities, like their counterparts in the US, continually face fiscal challenges. York and the other institutions discussed in this article are all public universities and thus depend on the government in their province for their funding. Not too long ago, higher education in Ontario experienced budget cuts. More recently, however, the provincial government has reversed this trend and has increased the amount of monies allocated to Ontario's universities. Whether deciding how budget cuts are applied or how new funds are distributed, university administrators continually face competing demands from the units under their control and they have to make hard fiscal decisions. So here is one area where the success of MGHS programs in raising extramural financing works against them. There is a tendency for administrators to expect that programs and units that have successfully tapped into resources from outside the institutions can and should do so again. For many of us in MGHS, fund-raising, thus, becomes an on-going and essential part of our jobs (see, Klironomos's article in this volume). Such efforts are

on-going at York, and we have already been able to establish one endowed graduate fellowship and one endowed undergraduate scholarship, and we are working to endow at least one additional graduate award and a post-doctoral fellowship. But we cannot rely on outside funding alone; there has to be a concomitant commitment from within the university if we are to succeed. And even with the best will in the world, there is no guarantee that the university's budget will allow that to happen soon.

For these and other reasons, it is imperative that steps be taken now to build an infrastructure that will vouchsafe the future, long-term sustainability of the program. Because, in addition to the usual uncertainties of higher education funding, we have to consider the very real possibility that financial support from extra-mural sources might diminish over time as the demographic profile of the Greek community changes. There is no guarantee that third or fourth-generation Greek-Canadians will evince the same high level of commitment to MGHS that their parents or grandparents have. If what transpired in the US is an accurate predictor, then there are good grounds for suspecting that they will not be as supportive. Hopefully, this will not be the case, but we cannot pin our fate to hope alone. In order to ensure the future of the Hellenic Studies Program at York we have adopted a strategy of integrating it into a number of different institutional settings. From its inception, York University has been committed to developing innovative, interdisciplinary programs and centers, and there are a number of such entities into which Hellenic Studies fits very well. As we have seen, the program is already connected to the departments of History and Classics, and in order to strengthen it intellectually and materially even further, it is also integrated into the activities of a number of different regionally-based, multidisciplinary centers, such as the Center for Germany and European Studies and the York University Consortium for Mediterranean Studies. Discussions are currently underway to establish a Center for Balkan Studies in which MGHS will play a very important role. The idea, then, is to embed the study of MGHS into a number of academic units, some of which concentrate on different spatial, national and transnational, contexts—Greece, Balkans, Mediterranean, and Europe, while others have a topical focus to which MGHS can be related, like the Center for Diaspora Studies. We believe that by so doing we will develop a MGHS program that is intellectually exciting and attractive to our students. We hope also that this strategy will ensure the long-term viability of the program in the face of an uncertain future.

In like vein, we have also embarked on a strategy of building bridges with institutions and organizations elsewhere as a means of pooling and sharing resources. For example, in co-operation with the Modern Greek

Studies Association, York University hosted the 2003 MGSA Symposium; this was the first time that the Association's biennial conference had ever been held outside of the US. Not only did this event generate much positive publicity about MGHS at York, it also exposed many Greek-Canadians, both academics and lay persons, to the activities of the MGSA, and hopefully it marks the beginning of a longer term engagement between the MGSA and Canadian institutions. At an institutional level, York University and the University of Athens have signed a comprehensive agreement connecting our institutions in numerous and meaningful way. By this I mean that our arrangement calls for far more than just the possibility of student exchanges. Instead we are endeavoring to create linkages between some of our departments and programs that truly integrate them. In addition, York and Athens cooperate on a regular basis in organizing joint conferences in Greece. Two such events have taken place so far. The first, in 2003, focused on contemporary trends in Mediterranean history and anthropology and the second, in 2004, was devoted to studies on the construction of cultural nostalgia in the Mediterranean. These are the types of initiatives that we need to undertake in order to create a vibrant and successful program. But if MGHS as a whole are going to succeed in Canada then the bridges that need to be built must connect the existing programs to one another.

*The Canadian Inter-university Consortium on
Modern Greek and Hellenic Studies*

To this end, in April 2003 the Alexander S. Onassis Foundation sponsored and the Greek Embassy in Ottawa hosted a meeting of representatives of the four MGHS programs discussed earlier.⁶ In addition to the three chair-holders and the Director of the center in Manitoba, the organizers invited senior members of each university's upper administration to attend as well. The purpose of the meeting was to explore ways that the four programs could co-operate with one another so as to reduce duplication and competition for resources. At the end of a very fruitful day of discussions, the group produced the "Ottawa declaration" on Modern Greek and Hellenic Studies in Canada. As explicitly stated in the declaration's preamble: "In order to enhance, enrich and develop the study of Modern Greek and Hellenic Studies in Canada, we believe that it is imperative that we build bridges of cooperation between our respective programs, that we explore ways to consolidate resources so as to strengthen each of our programs individually and by so doing to enhance the study of Hellenism in Canada generally, and that, in order to move forward toward achieving these goals that we commit ourselves

to performing expeditiously the following four items.” It was agreed that a concerted effort would be made to ensure: 1) that MGHS courses taken at one institution will count toward the attainment of a degree at the other institutions; 2) that the instruction of the Greek language at each university enjoys a high degree of comparability; 3) that we link and integrate the course offerings at our respective institutions so as to expand the number of students participating in each course and to create a more vigorous and lively intellectual environment for our students; 4) that the programs cooperate in organizing visits of international and national speakers on topics relating to MGHS. These are just a few of the joint initiatives that were agreed to. Finally, as a mechanism for ensuring a greater level of co-operation in the endeavor to achieve these goals, the declaration established the Canadian Inter-university Consortium on Modern Greek and Hellenic Studies. Only time will tell if the Consortium will achieve all of the goals set forth in the Ottawa Declaration, but there can be no doubt that its establishment represents an important, indeed essential step in the development of MGHS in Canada.

In conclusion, then, my assessment of the state of MGHS in Canada is largely positive. The establishment of four different programs (as well as three endowed chairs) during the last decade and their respective development since their inception bodes well for the future. The nature of the Greek communities in Canada and the policies of Canadian governments toward multiculturalism help to create an environment in which MGHS can flourish. The Canadian programs, of course, face many of the same problems and challenges as do the programs in the US, but I remain cautiously optimistic that through initiatives such as the Canadian Inter-university Consortium on Modern Greek and Hellenic Studies we have taken steps that might eventually allow us to address them in positive manner.

YORK UNIVERSITY

NOTES

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¹The links to these websites are <http://www.humanities.uci.edu/classics/MGSA/programs2.html> and <http://history.arch.uoa.gr/hellenicstudies>.

²At the time of writing, Simon Fraser is in the process of filing a tenure-stream faculty position in Byzantine History.

³The programs at Concordia University and McGill University do not offer any degree or certificate in Modern Greek or Hellenic Studies.

⁴A recent survey of PhDs devoted to MGS topics awarded in North America since 2002 indicates that almost one half of them were granted by universities without MGHS programs and in many cases without any faculty who specialized in the field.

⁵Fuller information about York's Hellenic Studies program can be found at the program's website: <http://www.arts.yorku.ca/hist/tgallant/hellenicstudies.htm>.

⁶The participants in this session especially thank Ambassador Loukas Tsilas of the A.S. Onassis Foundation and Ambassador Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos of the Greek Foreign Ministry for their support and efforts in organizing and supporting the Ottawa meeting.

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