



Getting to know the new Europe

By Monique Jacobs

Europe is in flux, riding a wave of political and economic change unprecedented in the last 150 years, and the University of Victoria is helping Canada keep up. UVic's newly launched European studies program is preparing students to understand these changes and guide Canada's public policy and commercial relationships vis-a-vis the new European environment, in particular the rapid developments within the European Union (EU).

Dr. Amy Verdun, director of the program, says that Canada has suffered from "a belief that there was an excess of Euro-centrism in Canadian academia. Without a specific focus on the EU in universities, we have no clue how to work with the Europeans." Through university programs and the greater understanding of Europe and its people that result, Canada can build greater connections with EU nations and the many international organizations based in Europe.

Verdun strongly believes that such connections are necessary if Canada is to develop a workforce that understands how best to work on the international stage.

"Canada is more dependent than the U.S. on outside markets," she explains. The EU experience provides many examples of how to develop international alliances — examples from which Canada can learn in building economic relationships with Europe and other parts of the world.

Verdun was instrumental in developing UVic's European Studies Program (ESP), which is helping pull Canada out of a 15-year slump in contemporary European studies. Based in the political science department, the program differs from other Canadian university European studies programs in its interdisciplinary focus and its exchange component. It requires students to take courses from several departments outside of political science, including languages and history. Students also must complete one term of course work at a European university or spend at least three months

in an approved work term in Europe.

In addition, the ESP will soon begin offering a European studies minor. "The minor is truly interdisciplinary," stresses Verdun, "because of the required credits from the newly designed 'team-taught' courses from different departments." For example, a student might take a class that focuses on the effects of European monetary integration that is taught by professors from the departments of sociology, political science and economics.

Verdun has attracted funding from the Canadian government and the European Commission to set up a transatlantic student exchange program that focuses on European integration and federalism. She describes the benefits of the European exchange experience with two words, "greater enlightenment." She explains that exchanges help students develop their willingness to take risks, face unknown

challenges and cultivate a focused area of expertise — qualities attractive to employers.

UVic student Caroline Geiger is among the first group participating in the program's exchange component. She has spent the past six-and-a-half months studying at the University of Amsterdam. "In that time," explains Geiger, "I have learned what it is actually like to live in a European country as opposed to just visiting. One gets a better sense of Europe in this way, as well as appreciating an objective view of Canada. In my program there are students from all over the world. This makes classes very interesting, as viewpoints from different nationalities are injected throughout class discussion."

By providing experiences such as this, UVic's program is preparing a new generation of Canadians to make the most of our relations with a changing Europe.



Verdun

DIANA NETHERCOTT PHOTO

SHARPEN YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- Amy Verdun is the secretary of the European Community Studies Association of Canada (ECSAC), based at UVic, which is developing scholarly interest in European Studies through conferences, articles and other means. <http://web.uvic.ca/ecsac/>

- Still under development, the UVic European Studies Program Web site offers information on the program, on past and future lectures, and Verdun's contact information. <http://web.uvic.ca/~europe/>

- The European Union maintains a comprehensive Web site that provides current media releases, basic information on the EU and other affiliated institutions, and EU policies. <http://europa.eu.int/>

- Human Resources Development Canada's Youth International Program provides funding to organizations that set up work experiences on an international scale for unemployed or underemployed youth, helping them gain professional experience to fit the needs of Canadian businesses. <http://youth.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/intern/main.shtml>

- Last month, Prime Minister Jean Chretien announced that Canada and the European Union (EU) have committed to initiatives in higher education and training. The Canada - European Community Agreement Renewing a Cooperation Program in Higher Education and Training reaffirms the goals of increasing transatlantic student mobility, institutional partnerships and the exchange of knowledge and expertise. <http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/hrdc/hrib/learnlit/policy/academic/news/00-01-21.shtml>

FACTS FROM THE EDGE

Amy Verdun's publications include:

- *European Responses to Globalization and Financial Market Integration*, MacMillan Press Ltd.; Britain, 2000. Based on interviews with key informants in the financial institutions of Britain, France and Germany, this book investigates the perceptions of political actors towards the creation of economic and monetary union in Europe.

- *The Coming of the Euro: European Integration Theory and Economic and Monetary Union*. Verdun is the editor. Soon to be published, this book grew out of a UVic workshop entitled "Conceptualizing the New Europe: European Monetary Integration and Beyond."

ON THE EDGE OF YOUR SEAT

Challenges to French Culture in Light of Globalization and Europeanization
Lecture by Thomas Ferenczi, editor, *Le Monde*, and Visiting Professor, Yale University
31 January 1:30-3:30 p.m. Cornett Bldg., rm. A128

Multiple Identities and Political Integration in Europe
Lecture by Peter Kraus, Humboldt University, Berlin
8 February 1-2:30 p.m. Cornett Bldg., rm. A129



SPARK

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