

Canada's Scholarly Community: Supporting researchers around the world

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Russia's invasion of Ukraine has reminded us all again of the precariousness of peace around the world. The tragic loss of life, the separation of families, the wanton destruction of infrastructure, historic buildings, and artefacts, and the total disruption of ordinary social, political, and working life—the costs of these in Ukraine and in all conflict zones are enormous. They are devastating.

Scholarly research may not make headlines in this context, but support for the international research community is crucial, and not just to maintain our shared research capacity. Global participation in research is necessary to advance equity, economic prosperity, confidence in the process and results of knowledge production, and international relationships. We all rise if we work together—and learn to trust each other through intellectual exchange and collaborative discovery.

Academic freedom and collaboration have long been recognized as vital principles in Canada. They are key to both the advancement of knowledge and our civil society.

Collaboration is essential to academic work. It allows us to draw upon, and then add to, large knowledge bases. The exchange of information between researchers at regional, national, and international levels is sustained through meetings, publishing, and online interactions, from webinars to the co-creation of databases.

Academic freedom in Canada aims to protect research and researchers from political or corporate interference; this ensures that scholarship is guided by scholarly principles, including

rigor and transparency. Across all subjects of research, academic freedom can shelter informed, public analysis of government, civil society, industry, and other powerful sectors to enable robust public debate.

Transparently and freely sharing knowledge among scholars and our larger communities is fundamental to the work we do. Without scholarly communication and collaboration, research cannot proceed on an informed foundation. Without open and transparent communications, research may be misrepresented, mistrusted, or under-used by the public it is meant to serve.

In line with these core values, scholars with relevant expertise are now contributing to public debate. Across all disciplines, they are trying to develop practical strategies to help those affected by the war. From international research networks to individual university departments, scholars are discussing ways to manage relationships with Russian researchers. They are also trying to support Ukrainian colleagues, protect research information, and think about what the future might hold for affected collaborations. These are complicated questions that require broad input and careful consideration because a lot is at stake – above all peoples' lives.

Canada's response to the current conflict has focused on this most urgent concern: protecting lives. The Government of Canada, and some provincial governments, have announced special programs for Ukrainians who are in or coming to Canada. These are in addition to other programs underway for those who fled Afghanistan this past autumn. Importantly, some include special funding for postsecondary students whose study has been interrupted or halted, and some universities are also responding to the call by providing placements for displaced academics.

The scholarly community's concern is likewise centered on the safety of colleagues and all those in affected regions, but also recognizes that our global capacity is already being diminished by the significant and sustained disruption of research and communications. Such disruptions affect important work on issues of global importance, from climate change and other environmental issues, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, inequality, and food insecurity, to gender rights, migration, educational access, and mental health. We need to come together to make our research communities more safe, inclusive, and active.

National and international academies must continue to discuss effective measures to support broader participation in education and research opportunities around the world, including safe havens for academics who are living in conflict or war zones, facing threats of violence, or intimidated because of systemic bias in their home country. Grassroots bilateral relationships must be nurtured because they build trust across borders and confidence in the public value of knowledge, education, and research.

Academic principles urge us to protect research collaborations and open communications during conflicts, regardless of where they are in the world. Canada's scholars must continue to play a productive role in the development of a truly global research community that is inclusive and works to the benefit of all.