Intergovernmental Affairs Supports Rural Development

For more than a decade, RDI and Brandon University have received support from the Government of Manitoba to research rural issues and to increase the knowledge and skills needed to advance rural development.

Current funding from Intergovernmental Affairs provides support for research by faculty and graduate students in the Department of Rural Development as well as RDI activities that strengthen the University's relationship with rural communities in Manitoba. This funding is also used to support thesis research in the new Masters degree program, help with planning of distance delivery of Rural Development courses, facilitate BU Community Outreach activities, and build linkages with other rural development institutions in Canada and abroad.

Ongoing liaison with provincial rural development interests is maintained through a Steering Committee consisting of representatives from the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs and Brandon University.

Major SSHRC Research Project Awarded

Several Brandon University faculty members have been awarded a major research grant toward a three-year project on rural health. This research, funded by one of Canada's major granting councils, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), is being coordinated through the Rural Development Institute.

Rural Canadians are vitally concerned about taking part in health planning processes in order to ensure they have an accessible rural health care system.

One major goal of this project is to develop a framework for determining the health of rural populations. Another goal is to address the gap in research describing the health of rural populations.

Dr. Robert Annis is principle investigator of the project. Dr. John Everitt, Dr. Barbara Gfellner, Ms. Fran Racher, all from Brandon University, as well as Dr. Betty Havens from the University of Manitoba and Dr. Bill Reimer of Concordia University, are co-investigators.

Other BU faculty members involved include Dr. Ken Bessant, Dr. Nukte Edguer, Dr. Noreen Ek, Dr. Doug Ramsey, Ms. Renee Robinson, and Ms. Kim Ryan-Nicholls, as well as Mr. Earl Backman, CEO of the Brandon Regional Health Authority.

The project involves a number of community partners: Brandon Regional Health Authority, Marquette Regional Health Authority, South Westman

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BU Rural Development in Mexico

For some time, the Department of Rural Development and RDI have been interested in building relationships among international students, faculty, and research programs that are focused on rural development.

Over the past year, that interest became a reality. In December 1999, Dr. John Everitt, Brandon University geography professor, gave two RDI workshops at the University of Guadalajara’s Puerto Vallarta campus. These presentations were followed by a visit to Brandon University in the fall of 2000 by the President of the Autlán campus and two faculty members. During that visit Eduardo Santana, Ph.D., and ecologist with the Instituto Manantlán de Ecología y Conservación de la Biodiversidad, gave a slide presentation and lecture on the Sierra de Manantlán International Biosphere Reserve. Dr. Santana’s lecture focused on the role the biosphere reserve plays in rural development in this part of Mexico.

In February 2001, the President of Autlán campus, University of Guadalajara, invited Dr. Robert Annis, Director of Rural Development and Dr. Meir Serfaty, Director of International Activities to speak at the International Seminar on Municipal Governance. Also attending were Brandon University faculty member, Dr. Doug Ramsey, of the Department of Rural Development and Mr. Mike Pellicciotti, Masters of Rural Development graduate student. Ramsey and Pellicciotti collected information on Autlán’s annual Cultural Festival. Ramsey also made a presentation on rural tourism in Manitoba to faculty at the Autlán campus, discussed the development of an inventory on cultural resources, and commented on the links between eco-tourism and environmental education.

Dr. Annis, Director of Rural Development, was enthused about the results of the trip. "I am enormously pleased with the visits by BU faculty, and now one of our students, to the state of Jalisco," said Annis.

"We are building a solid foundation for further exchanges and collaborative research projects. This will help broaden our perspectives on rural community development."

Major SSHRC Research Project Awarded

Regional Health Authority, Virden-Wallace Community Development Corporation, and Wheat Belt Community Futures Corporation. Other partners include Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Health Canada and Statistics Canada.

The team of researchers and community partners will be instrumental in conducting the research and disseminating the research findings to a variety of audiences. Outcomes of the research will be used to help local, provincial and federal governments and organizations develop specific rural health policies. Rural regional health authorities and rural community development organizations will improve their ability to prioritise multi-dimensional (social, cultural, economic, environmental) strategic actions. Rural residents will be directly involved in building partnerships, making plans, and creating customized solutions that will improve, support, and maintain the health of rural Canadians.

Dr. Annis added, "Brandon University will also benefit from the project. The research funding from SSHRC will be pivotal in supporting the development of skilled researchers and encouraging interdisciplinary research activity, as well as future studies at Brandon University in the areas of rural health and rural community development."
Manitoba’s Community Futures Development Corporations: The Hard Task of Assessing Soft Goals

Dr. Gabe Ferrazzi, Associate Professor in the Department of Rural Development, recently received a grant from the Brandon University Research Committee (BURC) to undertake a research project focused on Manitoba’s Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDCs). Ferrazzi will work with the CFDCs to improve the impact assessment practices of these organizations, particularly in relation to what are sometimes neglected “soft” goals.

Many CFDCs have been trying to expand their activities beyond loan provision and entrepreneurship services. They seek to build partnerships and social capital in their communities, undertake community development, and bridge the digital divide. However, there is little guidance on how performance can be assessed in these new areas of CFDC activity.

The project began in April, following a presentation by Ferrazzi to the Community Futures Partners of Manitoba, the umbrella organization for the 16 CFDCs in Manitoba. An agreement was reached to collaborate on the research with the view to produce an impact assessment framework that CFDCs can use as a self-assessment. A core group of four CFDCs—North Central CFDC (Thompson), Parkland CFDC (Grandview), Super Six CFDC (Ashern) and the Dakota Ojibway CFDC—will be involved in the research project.

Initially, the researchers will examine past evaluation or assessment practices used by the CFDCs and review new developments in the area of self-assessment. The researchers and CFDCs will then jointly develop or adapt principles and methods that the CFDCs identify as the most appropriate for their particular context. Ferrazzi stated, “Our goal for the research is to provide CFDCs with a more rigorous, self-initiated, and user-oriented impact assessment. This assessment will allow CFDCs to improve their performance and to more confidently communicate their successes and value to stakeholders.”

The BURC grant has allowed Ferrazzi to bring Mr. Bob Walberg on board as a research assistant. Walberg is currently entering the thesis stage of his studies in the Department of Rural Development at Brandon University. He is also an instructor in Rural Development at Assiniboine Community College in Brandon. The CFDC research will be conducted in 2001, and the findings will be disseminated among the CFDC community as well as academic venues.

Visiting Scholars at Rural Development

Encouraging visiting scholars to come to Brandon and share their expertise is an important component of RDI’s strategy to provide opportunities for rural stakeholders and communities to learn more about community development.

In the fall of 2000, Dr. David Darling, professor at Kansas State University in the Department of Agricultural Economics, was a visiting scholar at RDI and the Department of Rural Development. Dr. Darling is internationally recognized for his work on community development, in particular on the economic vitality of rural regions and small towns.

During his visit to Brandon University, Dr. Darling delivered a number of community-based workshops designed to help groups and individuals make informed decisions in order to successfully resolve and promote community development.

Soon to arrive at BU is Dr. Iain Chrstison, Assistant Dean, College of Agriculture, University of Saskatchewan. Dr. Christison, who is responsible for the academic program at the College of Agriculture, has an interest in exploring linkages with Rural Development at Brandon University.
Year II of Leafy Spurge Research Project Commences

In early May, RDI began the second year of a three-year field research project on *Aphthona lacertosa*, a beetle which has the potential to fight the spread of leafy spurge.

Leafy spurge is an invasive and destructive plant that causes an estimated $20 million economic loss in Manitoba each year.

In 1997, weed inspectors released beetles in 163 sites infested with leafy spurge throughout southern Manitoba. "Our field research for Year II is focused on 20 of these sites," stated Pauline Morton, field research technician from the project. "Counting the beetles will help determine survival rates and how much the bugs are helping control the leafy spurge."

Another research goal for Year II of the project is to identify the extent to which leafy spurge has spread into wildlife areas including parks and community pastures. These areas are particularly valuable as examples of the unique prairie ecosystem as well as wildlife habitat. Preliminary indications are that several of these areas have been invaded by leafy spurge. Some of the areas are noted for containing endangered plant species. "The destructiveness of leafy spurge cannot be over-emphasized," said Dr. Robin Marles, a botanist at Brandon University, who is providing scientific advice to the project. "Wildlife areas are valued for their diversity of native plant and animal species. Because leafy spurge is so invasive, it displaces native plants; and because it is poisonous, our wildlife can't eat it, and our bacteria and fungi can't infect it and control it as part of the normal balance of nature. Thus leafy spurge affects the whole ecology of the invaded area."

The Research Division of Agriculture and Agri-food Canada (AAFC) is funding the field research on the beetles. In addition, Dr. Rob Bouchier, research scientist specializing in insect ecology and weed biocntrol from AAFC's Lethbridge Research Centre, is contributing scientific advice on the beetles. Ducks Unlimited is providing funding and in-kind contributions to the nature lands research component, and to additional beetle releases.

The overall project is lead by the Leafy Spurge Stakeholders Group (LSSG), a multi-agency stakeholder network managed by the WESTARC Group Inc. of Brandon University. Ultimately, the LSSG hopes that outcomes from the research will help determine an integrated pest management strategy, which will help control the spread of this very destructive weed.

RDI Establishes an Editorial Board

RDI has a commitment for high quality publications. Since 1989, RDI has published more than forty reports on a wide range of issues affecting rural communities. Recently, RDI established a formal RDI Editorial Board to review, adjudicate and recommend research reports for their suitability for publication. The Chair of the Editorial Board is former geography professor, Dr. John Welsted, professor emeritus, Brandon University. Other members of the Board include Dr. John Mallea, president emeritus, Brandon University; Dr. Stella Fedeniuk, of the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA), Dr. Alec Paul, Department of Geography, University of Regina, and Dr. Robert Annis (RDI).
A Study of Workforce Shortage in Manitoba's Hog Industry

The Department of Rural Development at Brandon University provides graduate students with the opportunity to complete a research-based assignment within a work environment through the Cooperative Experience course. The focus of MRD student, Candace Benson’s recent placement with Human Resources Development Canada was to examine the extent of the workforce shortage in the hog industry in Manitoba.

The hog industry is one of Manitoba’s fastest growing agricultural sectors valued at $476 million, or 16% of the total agricultural production. Manitoba exported $238 million worth of high quality pork last year to 30 countries and is expected to export over $350 million in 2000. In 1999, the hog population reached 4.7 million pigs, and by 2000 it had increased to 5.3 million pigs. The industry is expected to double over the next five years.

Overall about 12,000 jobs are created by the hog industry. Not surprisingly, findings from Benson’s research assignment indicate that the growth in Manitoba’s hog industry has increased the need for skilled workers particularly in hog barn operations. While there is no method at this time to collect workforce statistics on the numbers of workers employed in the hog barns there is strong evidence to suggest that the majority of hog barn operations are experiencing difficulties finding skilled workers.

This evidence arises from a number of agencies. For example, HRDC indicated that demand for workers significantly exceeds the supply of available workers. Manitoba Agriculture and Food estimated that for every additional one million market ready hogs produced there is a need for 300 workers and 75 barn managers. In addition, the Manitoba Pork Council stated that at least 800 more skilled people are needed within the next five years.

Educational institutions and agencies have tried to address the problem by providing training programs. To date, however, the training courses have not produced enough graduates to offset the shortage. Recently, new programs have been developed to attract workers. A first in Canada is the Pork Production Manager Certificate Program—a combined effort of the Manitoba Pork Council, Assiniboine Community College and the University of Manitoba. Another development is the Pork Production Technician Apprenticeship Program.

Benson concluded, “While these programs should be lauded it is also necessary to acknowledge that the development of large-scale hog operations continues. Ensuring adequate programs exist for the training of workers and managers will be one key to the overall success of these operations.”

BU Forges Framework Agreement with University of Guadalajara

Brandon University and the University of Guadalajara recently signed a Framework of Agreement between the two universities that will enable cooperation and exchange in all academic areas of mutual interest. The partnership may include such initiatives as the exchange of students, research and teaching faculty, cooperation in degree programs, and cultural exchange programs.

Dr. Meir Serfaty, Director of International Activities at Brandon University, states that, "Despite their difference in size, the University of Guadalajara and Brandon University share many similarities, in particular a strong interest in rural development and indigenous studies."

The Agreement formalizes a relationship between the two universities that has been growing steadily over the past three years. "This agreement is particularly important to the Department of Rural Development and RDI," remarks Dr. Robert Annis, Director of Rural Development at Brandon University. "There are a number of strong similarities between rural development issues in Mexico and Canada. All of Brandon University will benefit from the opportunities that will result from this agreement."
RDI Collaborating with National Rural Research Project

In July, a RDI research team led by Dr. Doug Ramsey from the Department of Rural Development and including MRD student Marg Tarleton and Deatra Walsh from Concordia University, will be heading into the rural municipality of Rhineland to conduct household interviews. Rhineland, which includes the communities of Altona, Plum Coulee and Gretna, is one of 32 communities being studied by the New Rural Economy Project (NRE), a nationwide research project based in Montreal at Concordia University.

The New Rural Economy Project is a five-year research and education project of the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (CRRF), a non-profit organization committed to understanding rural Canada. CRRF developed the NRE project in 1998 as a way to better identify the benefits and challenges of living in rural communities in Canada. Along with its research communities, the NRE has established a network of 30 partners, 25 researchers and 18 universities. Research gathered over the five-year period will be analyzed and passed along to rural people, policy analysts, researchers, business community and government agencies at all levels.

The NRE research has been made possible by funding from a number of sources. These include the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Canadian Rural Partnership program of the Rural Secretariat, the Interdepartmental Working Group on Rural and Remote Canada, the Canadian Agricultural Rural Communities Initiative, Health Canada, Natural Resources Canada, Statistics Canada, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, and Concordia University. This funding has been supplemented by hundreds of hours of volunteer work on the part of researchers and rural people.

Rhineland is one of the 20 NRE active research sites this summer. "I am excited that RDI could be a part of the research," said Dr. Doug Ramsey. "This is a great opportunity to better understand agricultural communities in Manitoba and how issues here relate to other rural communities in Canada." RDI has been involved with the Canadian Rural Restructuring Foundation of Canada (CRRF) for a number of years. "CRRF is a national organization of leading scholars and policy analysts with interests in rural development," commented Dr. Robert Annis. "This is very worthwhile research project and we are pleased to be included in the NRE network."

RDI Helps Host Two Major Fall Conferences for Community Development

RDI is working with the Wheatbelt Community Futures Development Corporation as well as the Manitoba Community Development Corporation Association (MCDCA) to host two fall conferences on community development.

The first Manitoba Community Futures Annual Conference will be held in Brandon on September 20-22, 2001. The theme of the conference is Building Stronger Rural and Northern Communities. The program of speakers and workshop sessions has been developed for the benefit of practitioners of community development, municipal, provincial and federal representatives, volunteers in community development, board members for non-profit organizations, regional development corporations and community development corporations. For information on this conference, please contact bdc@wheatbelt.mb.ca or look on the website: http://www.wdd.ca/wb/.

The second conference is the Community Economic Development Conference. It will be held in Winnipeg on October 26-27, 2001. The focus of this conference will be innovative developments and experiences regarding a wide variety of community economic development initiatives. Motivating Manitoba is pleased to present Mr. Ernesto SIroli, author of Ripples from the Zambezi, who has been confirmed as the keynote speaker for the event. For further information on this conference, please contact Ann Ransom at (204) 622-2518.
RDI Reflections on the Department’s Efforts to Develop Distributed Learning Capability

In 1998-99, Brandon University established the Department of Rural Development (DRD) and the Master and Graduate diploma degrees in Rural Development as an academic program targeted at rural development practitioners. Current students in the programs are mostly mid-life professionals attending part-time, originating from the commuting region of Brandon University. The enrollment profile and a market survey suggest that there is a latent demand in Western Canada for a graduate-level rural development program offered by distance delivery.

The Department is eager to reach this group of potential learners. With funding support from the Rural Development Institute, Dr. Gabe Ferrazzi, on behalf of the Department, has taken several steps to test the waters of Distributed Learning. He recently piloted two courses using mixed-mode delivery, a combination of both class work and online student interaction. Courses developed to date are: Rural Community Development (Fall 2000) and Business Development (Winter 2001). Sustainable Development will also join the list in Fall 2001, bringing the total offerings to three courses.

The Department hopes to obtain the needed institutional support to offer the entire MRD program using mixed-mode delivery by the 2003-2004 academic year. Currently, Ferrazzi is reviewing the progress made to date, using feedback from faculty, students, and support units on campus. “I'm certainly excited about the potential of distance delivery,” stated Ferrazzi. “Reviewing our progress will help shape a departmental strategy on the further development and marketing of the Master and Diploma programs.”

Ferrazzi will also present his Lessons Learned at the National WebCT Conference, “Transforming the Educational Experience,” to be held in Vancouver, June 25-27, 2001.

RDI Develops Handbook for Community Adjustment

The situations are familiar—the largest employer in a single-industry town falters, workers are laid off, eventually the plant closes. Less common are communities where the rapid expansion of a major industry or increased diversification of a community’s economic base result in rapid growth of a community. These are examples of community adjustment and, over past six months, RDI has been developing a Community Adjustment Handbook and Resource Toolkit—tools aimed at helping communities mitigate the effects of economic, social or environmental changes.

While there are exceptions, Manitoba communities seldom have the resources to employ professional consultants to lead community adjustment efforts. Instead, communities must frequently rely on citizen committees, part-time planners, and public officials trained in other fields.

The Community Adjustment Handbook is a comprehensive, practical, and easy-to-use outline of processes that will help Community Adjustment Committees develop effective, community-based action plans.

Complementing the handbook is a Resource Toolkit, a collection of print materials that have been selected specifically for their appropriateness to community adjustment, as well as their application to Manitoba communities.

RDI, as well as Manitoba Labour and Immigration, Manitoba Industry, Trade and Mines, and Manitoba Intergovernmental Affairs have provided funding and guidance for the project. “Communities need to know how to mobilize themselves when they get hit with sudden changes to the labour force,” remarked Mr. Roger Brunet from Manitoba Labour and Immigration. Mr. Bob Grodzik, from Manitoba Intergovernmental Affairs, added: “We hope that this handbook and toolkit will provide all communities with tools, information and resources that can be adapted for a wide range of local community adjustment needs and implemented with relative ease.”

Ms. Karen Rempel from RDI is coordinating the project. Dr. Gabe Ferrazzi, from the Department of Rural Development at Brandon University, has provided academic input, with the intention of integrating community adjustment concepts and processes into his community development courses. Referring to his courses, Ferrazzi stated, “My hope is that MRD students not only understand the concepts relating to community adjustment but how to apply them at the community level.”

The Community Adjustment Handbook and Resource Toolkit are expected to be available by mid-July.
Academic Department of Rural Development Moves into the Faculty of Arts

In January, 2001, Brandon University Senate gave approval to include the academic Department of Rural Development as a department within the Faculty of Arts. This move culminates a series of changes to the structure and housing of rural development initiatives at Brandon University.

A close working relationship exists between the Department of Rural Development and the Rural Development Institute. Dr. Richard Rounds, formerly the Director of RDI, has been instrumental in the early success of the Institute as well as in the establishment of the new Masters of Rural Development academic program, and now serves as Chairperson for the Department of Rural Development. Some students of DRD work on Rural Development Institute research projects, and faculty members continue to conduct research on issues of rural concern. Both the DRD and the RDI are located in the same office area.

In addition to Rounds, members of the Department of Rural Development include Dr. Robert Annis, Dr. Gabe Ferrazzi, and Dr. Doug Ramsey.

The Masters in Rural Development and the Graduate Diploma Program began in 1999, and 25 students are currently engaged in their graduate studies. Information on the program, including the newly revised student handbook, can be found on the Department's website: www.brunonu.ca/Academic/RuralDevelopment/

RDI's Newest Publication

RDI will soon release its newest publication, An Analysis of the Population of Agro-Manitoba, by Dr. Richard Rounds, Professor of Rural Development at Brandon University. This report is an update of an earlier work by Dr. Rounds and not only brings recent information into the forefront but also extends the longitudinal timeframe to cover a 35-year period from 1961-1996.

Major topics of the publication include population change, changes in age structure and changes in the labour force. The time frames for various analyses vary somewhat according to when Statistics Canada began collecting information or when given jurisdictions became separate census units. Of particular interest is the division of analyses into the separate geographic frames of rural and urban municipalities (census subdivisions), rural and urban municipalities combined (local area populations), and census divisions (for population projections and broad area analysis).

This report will be of interest to anyone living in agro-Manitoba given the importance of population change to communities and rural municipalities. More information about this and other RDI publications as well as ordering information can be found on RDI's website: www.brunonu.ca/rdi or by calling (204) 571-8515.