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COMPARING CANADIAN MINING GOVERNANCE IN QUEBEC, ONTARIO, AND BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Gillian Hutchison is a PhD candidate in political science at York University researching the regulatory environment of mineral mining inter-provincially. Her work focuses on Canadian mining corporations vis-a-vis federal and provincial regulations of the mineral mining extractive industry. She is a graduate research associate at the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies and a member of the Canadian Political Science Association and the Canadian History Association.

Tell us about your field, your professional experiences before starting your current studies?

I realized 'what I want to be when I grow up' when I was about 28 years old. I had completed my Honours Bachelor of Arts at the University of Western Ontario and my Master of Arts at the University of Windsor – both in political science – and a co-op post-graduate certificate at Humber College. I came into an opportunity to teach at George Brown College for a Toronto Metropolitan University (then, Ryerson University) program. Here, I designed an introductory political science course for their nursing program. I loved it. I knew that I would have to do a PhD in order to continue teaching at the post-graduate level. A PhD, however, is a full-time job and my ambitions would have to wait until my children were older.

Tell us about your dissertation and how it relates to the study of Canada.

Using historical institutionalist analysis, my research considers the timing, differences, and similarities of three Canadian provincial mining codes. I studied Québec, Ontario, and British Columbia as they are the most significant mineral mining provinces. Like health care and education, natural resources and extraction thereof, is a constitutionally enshrined provincial responsibility.

My research, interview data, and analysis highlights how mining challenges experienced in Canada are rooted in government abdication of its responsibilities. Canadian mining corporations meet and often exceed government standards and regulations. The challenge for corporations is the inefficient response from the Canadian government to regulated standards permit applications. This slows the process and increases the cost of metals and minerals. Standards and enforcements differ across international and provincial contexts.

I have had so much fun studying Canadian regionalism, geology, sociology, and the federal origins of the country.

How did you come to choose this research topic?

A few years before accepting my opportunity at York University, someone asked me to look into the ESTMA (Extractive Sector Transparency Measures Act), a piece of Canadian legislation meant to regulate the mining sector that was proposed in lieu of the existing EITI (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative), a global voluntary program. While their interest faded upon my reporting as it was not immediately relevant to them, MY interest was piqued as both measures concerned mineral mining fiscal transparency regulation.

Though mining may have a bad reputation, it is critical to society. Without it, we would not have the commodities that are central to our daily lives - not only computers, phones, or cars, but also food, clothing, or healthcare. After many hours of research, and a pandemic-induced shift from an international focus to a domestic focus, my dissertation highlights the fact that 'Canada' does not have 'a' mineral mining code. Comparatively, I consider three provinces' practices.

Tell us about the challenges that you as a researcher had to overcome to do this work.

My research was, at first, severely challenged by the pandemic, then, suddenly, made easier by technology advances. Initially, my supervisor and I hoped to compare Canadian mining practices to those in Brazil, but I was forced to pivot because of the pandemic.

Fortunately, because natural resources are provincial responsibilities, each province could be comparatively studied as a unique state. The hard part of electronic research is keeping track of it all!

What advice do you have for those starting their academic journey?

A helpful tip I have learned is to figure out a system for labelling and organizing books, articles, notes, etc. That said, I don't have a brilliant suggestion - I did mine manually by dating everything!

I also found that being a Teaching Assistant helped my research because I could apply examples from my work to teach students how to find and cite resources, take notes, and how to apply what they learned in class to their readings. Talking about your own research also helps you clarify what you want to study, why, and how.

What are key takeaways from your research you want others to come away with?

1) Find out about everything the university has to offer you as soon as you can - ideally before you even start. This includes learning about your department; the 'perks' available to you as a graduate student; the library (i.e. how to search for articles and find your course readings); and different offerings on campus (i.e. food options, pharmacy locations). Most importantly, learn about medical services that are available, including accessibility counsellors and keeping your blood pressure in check!

2) Make friends in your classes, with department staff, faculty members, with librarians, and friends in different departments. They don't need to be your best friends, but meet people you can call or text, ask questions, and compare experiences.

3) Join academic associations that are relevant to your dissertation or thesis topic and learn as much as you can from all 'sides'. Academically, there are numerous extracurricular offerings through York University - I did certificates in knowledge mobilization, personal wellness, and learning skills. I am also a member of the Canadian Political Science Association, Canadian History Association, and Canadian Society of Church History. For my dissertation on mineral mining in Canada, I am a member of Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada and the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy. I even did a summer post-graduate certificate in mining law from Osgoode. These spaces can introduce you to concepts and arguments that may not be accessible in books.

4) Finally, remember your opinion will not always be the popular one, and that is okay. On the one hand, stick to it; on the other hand, be prepared to give a little. The more you learn

about your field, the more likely it is that your ideas will change.

What are the next steps in your research?

"When I grow up" I still want to teach. My ideal would be an opportunity to teach at university. However, mineral mining is necessary and critical to our existence and I would welcome a research position within the industry. I want to do more Canadian research and teach people about how things work here, in Canada.

My experience at York has been difficult. I have learned that our society has to do better to accommodate people with disabilities, invisible and visible, I have both. With my Political Science Ph.D. majors in Comparative politics and Canadian politics, I would like to apply my skills to help governments and academic institutions in this country do better.

For now, I am interested in Critical Disability Studies to better improve opportunities for fellow disabled students and knowledge for all citizens. We all have a lot to learn about this country, its people, and its contributions to our world.