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<b>Supervisor's Department</b>	Social Science
<b>Project Title</b>	Vanishing North: Visualizing and (re)imagining climate change in the Canadian Arctic

### **Description of Research Project (1500 characters maximum)**

This research project focuses on the non-human actors and victims of climate change in the Canadian North, and in particular their media representation in both national and international contexts. That is, in these media representations, who represents the glaciers, melting ices and shifting layers of permafrost in the Canadian Arctic? In addressing this question, this project aims to argue that Canada faces its own particular crisis of representation in light of the intersections and collisions between dominant historical and contemporary patterns of representing the Canadian Arctic across different visual mediums of communication (art, photography, journalism, etc.). Shaped by explorers, scientists, tourists, artists and photo-journalists who serve as witnesses to the spectacular grandeur of the Canadian Arctic, visualizations of the Arctic, both past and present, tend to be informed by a dominant and idealized image of the North, one that ultimately hinders current efforts to effectively represent climate change in that region.

This research hypothesizes that the Canadian North has been visualized along the lines of two ideal types. First, since the early colonial explorers of the 18th and 19th centuries, such as during the Franklin expedition (1845), the Arctic has been imagined as a stage or passive backdrop for human drama; it has been a space informed by political interests and shaped by northern “intrigue narratives” (Sandlos, 2001). Human actors drive the narrative as they competitively race to stake their claim on the land, or use the land to make scientific and/or political claims. Today, the legacy of these colonial narratives endures in visualizations produced or endorsed by contemporary scientists, explorers, and politicians, as they race to bear witness to a changing Arctic landscape before it is “too late”. For example, Jill Heinerth – a diver, photographer, and Royal Canadian Geographical Society ‘Explorer-in-Residence’ – pays homage to the Arctic landscape painters and climate scientists who have compelled her “...to [visually] document this rapidly changing landscape from above, below and within the ice” (Heinerth, 2017). Similar to the motivations of last-chance tourists, she considers herself among a privileged few with the “last chance” to witness the Arctic as a “harmonious organism” in its pure and pristine natural state. In news media, Heinerth’s sentiments are echoed by Canadian scientists and politicians who convey this sense of urgency in their eyewitness testimonials on the devastating effects of Arctic climate change.

By contrast, another idealized visual type of the “True North, Strong and Free” has been most clearly given form in the Arctic paintings of Lawren Harris, a founding member of the Group of Seven. Emblematic of Canada’s national identity and rapidly gaining international recognition, Harris’s iconic Arctic landscapes increasingly stand at odds with a rapidly changing Arctic ecology. Describing Harris’s painting *Icebergs, Davis Strait* (1930) for the Art Gallery of Ontario’s exhibit “Idea of the North” (2015), Andrew Hunter writes that “In the foreground of [the painting], Harris added what feels like the lip of a stage (as he often did), drawing the leviathan up to the shore, and you stand here to take it all in, as if the scene has come to you, is laid out in front of you, to possess” (2015, p. 53, emphasis added). In Harris’s paintings, then, the icebergs are themselves a stage; an invitation for possession, floating in the vastness and emptiness of a dehumanized wilderness (Bordo, 1993). While the Arctic itself is an ever-changing unpredictable environment that is neither silent nor still, Harris’s icebergs give the impression of monumental, solid forms that are permanent and static, eternal and timeless; and this impression has implications for envisioning the ways in which climate change has and will alter the Canadian Arctic landscape. By taking the Arctic out of time, it becomes difficult to imagine climate change since the passage of time is essential to its definition. By creatively rendering unspoiled and dehumanized landscapes, the land seems to stand outside of a network of associations that would otherwise connect it to human actors, severing the link between melting glaciers and human action. By giving ‘solid weight to the North

through an “aggressive” and “virile” (Finley, 2004, p 242; King, 2009) style of oil painting, the Arctic does not appear as a vulnerable or decaying landscape. These historical tropes are reproduced in contemporary visualizations of the Canadian Arctic. Artists, photo-journalists and tourism promoters persist in taking Arctic landscapes out of time by reproducing Harris’s aesthetic in static imagery that celebrates the timeless and majestic beauty of the Arctic at the expense of more nuanced renderings of the complex and catastrophic ongoing impacts of climate change for the Arctic ecosystem.

In short, the mythology of this “cold kingdom” made of “pin and pine, snow and slow” (Anderson, 1946) has trapped us into reproducing the same kinds of mythic winter-bound images of Canada-as-Arctic (e.g., the #WeAreWinter Olympic campaign, Canadian films funded by Telefilm, etc.), which in turn has made it difficult to imagine otherwise. Yet imagining otherwise is necessary if we are to visualize the toll and effects of climate change on the quintessential, imaginary Canadian Arctic landscape. To begin the work of imagining and visualizing otherwise, this project raises the following questions which aim to disassemble and dismantle the national mythic image and idea of the Canadian North: How do we re-imagine the Canadian Arctic? How do we begin to see it as an actor rather than as a backdrop? How do we visualize glaciers, melting ices and permafrost as victims rather than as victimizers?

### **Undergraduate Student Responsibilities (1500 characters maximum)**

The undergraduate student will be responsible for the following tasks:

- gathering traditional media and social media representations of climate change in the Canadian Arctic as per the supervisors' further detailed instructions
- creating and maintaining an archive of media representations: this will include updating a spreadsheet of the images
- compiling an annotated bibliography that is relevant to this research project

### **Qualifications Required (750 characters maximum)**

- ability to properly format bibliographic citations
  - ability to create annotated bibliographies
  - ability to navigate various social media platforms (e.g. Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, Facebook, etc.) in order to search and compile images from those platforms on climate change
  - ability to navigate news media sites and archives in order to search and compile relevant images
  - preferred qualification: experience with and/or the technical know-how to use visual analysis software
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