

**ACUTE:  
The First Twenty-Five Years,  
1957–1982**  
**Marjorie Garson**

**E**EDITOR'S NOTE: *This document, subtitled "A brief history of the Association of Canadian University Teachers of English" was prepared by Marjorie Garson in 1982 and published in pamphlet form in 1983. ESC: English Studies in Canada is proud to reproduce here Professor Garson's text verbatim, in an effort to preserve the historical record and honour the efforts of the early members of ACUTE, the parent association of this journal. A list of the original members of ACUTE follows this text. However, given space considerations, only that one of the original five appendices is here included.*

From the perspective of 1982, and an Association membership of over nine hundred, it is possible to look back with some satisfaction on the twenty-five years that have elapsed since that June Sunday in 1957 when eighty-two teachers of English from across Canada met with the Learned Societies at the University of Ottawa and voted to continue to meet on an annual basis as a nation-wide professional organization. The decision filled a need which had been felt for decades, and was the culmination of years of preliminary effort on the part of a number of individuals whose lives and careers were interwoven with the development of English studies in Canada.

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ACUTE emerged partly out of other, broader-based organizations. The oldest of the Learned Societies, the Royal Society of Canada, had been founded in 1882 with the intention that it should, like its English and French prototypes, serve as a focus for the intellectual life of the nation in both the arts and the sciences. In their 1947 study *The Humanities in Canada*, Watson Kirkconnell and A.S.P. Woodhouse recommended the establishment of an association dedicated more particularly to the humanities, and their suggestion resulted, in 1950–51, in the organizing of the Humanities Association of Canada (HAC). By this time, however, teachers of English—who were heavily represented in the Humanities Association—felt the need for a still more specialized association.

At the ACUTE dinner given in his honour in 1978, Clarence Tracy was to recall the situation of the English specialist before the founding of ACUTE. He spoke of the frustration he had himself felt, as a young academic teaching on the prairies in the 1940s, in attempting to maintain his scholarly interests in isolation from colleagues with whom he could discuss them; of the lack of “official” encouragement of the discipline—the absence of travel and research grants, or indeed any form of financial support of the English scholar; of the scarcity of outlets for scholarly publication in Canada; and of the minority position of Canadian academics at the conventions of the Modern Language Association, the only meeting-place for Canadian scholars in the North American academic community.

The 1957 meeting had been preceded by a number of other attempts to organize a national association of English professors. In the late 1920's there were two conferences held in the West; the University of Toronto and Dalhousie were represented at the second of these. The first national conference was held in Toronto in 1928, attracting representatives from UBC, Alberta, Manitoba, Dalhousie, Queen's, and Acadia, as well as from Toronto itself. It was not until 1950, however, that steps were taken towards setting up a national organization which would meet on a more regular basis. In that year, three Canadian delegates to the International Conference of University Professors of English at Oxford revived the idea of a Canadian association. They were A.S.P. Woodhouse (Toronto), F.M. Salter (Alberta) and H.J. Alexander (Queen's). These three, joined by Roy Daniells (UBC) and Claude Bissell (Toronto), arranged what Clarence Tracy was later to call “a dry run organized by Woodhouse and Co. in Toronto ... where, I think, I read my first ‘learned’ paper”. This meeting, held in the spring of 1952, was funded by a \$2000 Rockefeller Foundation grant secured through the Humanities Research Council, by the University of Toronto itself, and by contributions from the other universities involved,

each paying \$30 per delegate towards a travel fund (amounting to about \$2000) which was then disbursed to individuals in proportion to the distance travelled (Some variation of this formula for sharing costs continued for years). Both President Sidney Smith of the University of Toronto, in his welcome to the delegates, and Professor Woodhouse, in his opening remarks, recalled the fine tradition of English studies in Canada, Smith suggesting that the decline of the classics was leading to the preeminence of English as the central humanities discipline. The papers read at the conference reflected a wide range of literary and professional interests: there were sections on Canadian literature, on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, on contemporary literature, and on teaching problems, and two general meetings on “What is expected of a Department of English” and “Aims and Methods of Literary Scholarship and Criticism.” At the final general meeting, an executive committee was appointed, consisting of Roy Daniells (UBC), chairman, William Robbins (UBC), secretary, and H.J. Alexander (Queen’s), member at large.

Although it had been hoped to organize another conference in three years’ time, it proved impossible to raise the necessary funds. In the fall of 1955 the committee, beginning to plan the financing of a meeting scheduled for the following spring, ran into trouble. Both the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Foundation, approached for a \$2000 matching grant to complement the moneys contributed by the individual universities, declined their support, and it was reluctantly decided in April of 1956 that the conference would have to be postponed for another year.

Professor Woodhouse immediately began to prepare for the following year, seeking to persuade the University of Toronto to repeat for 1957 what it had done five years before. By the fall of 1956, however, it was felt that it might be better not to meet in Toronto again, in spite of the large Toronto contingent and the prospect of financial help, but to join with the Learned Societies in Ottawa in June. Through the energetic efforts of the committee—generously assisted by John E. Robbins, Secretary-Treasurer of the Humanities Research Council, and Walter Herbert, the Director of the Canada Foundation—a grant was secured, at the last moment, from the Canada Foundation; it was on 9th March 1957 that Roy Daniells was finally able to telegraph to William Robbins “TWO THOUSAND ASSURED DEFINITELY NOT CONTINGENT ON TWO DAYS MEETINGS.” John Robbins and Walter Herbert have always had a special place of honour in the memories of the ACUTE members who organized this first meeting, and they were for years sent an annual report of the activities of the organization which they so materially helped to found.

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Clarence Tracy recalled the 1957 meeting as an occasion on which, “along with so many others, I signed the roll with the sense that I was helping to make history.” The list of the eighty-two founding members is an impressive one, widely representative of the strength of English studies in Canada at that date. The meeting was addressed in the morning by Northrop Frye and in the afternoon by Murdo McKinnon, and the two addresses, in retrospect, seem emblematic of complementary sides of ACUTE. Professor Frye spoke of the significance of the emergence of such an organization at that particular point in history, when literary criticism was beginning to be recognized as a field of study in its own right, and when creative writers too were tending to reflect in their work a sense of the underlying structures of literature. Although in the discussion which followed his provocative statement—a statement which preceded by just months the appearance of *The Anatomy of Criticism*—there was no formal theoretical attack on his distinction between art and criticism, there was a lively debate as to whether or not propaganda can ever be art—a debate which evoked from Professor Woodhouse the observation that too rigorous a definition of literature would exclude the whole rhetorical tradition. In the afternoon, taking quite a different tack, Professor McKinnon ruefully and wittily outlined the immense practical problems of running, and working in, a university department of English—how curricula should be set up, how faculty should be deployed, how an individual could devote adequate attention to his own scholarship in the face of all the claims that are made on his time. The discussion which followed this paper was focused by Professor Woodhouse’s emphasis on the need for expanding graduate education in English in Canada. The sense of a profession at the crossroads, becoming aware of itself and of its challenging future, emerges strongly from surviving records of the discussions at this historic one-day meeting.

The group went on to discuss the formation of a permanent association. It was a motion by F.M. Salter, seconded by C. T. Bissell, and passed by a unanimous vote, which brought into being the Association of Canadian University Teachers of English. (The name was altered at the last moment—whether from CAUTE or CUTE is not entirely clear—and it seems to have been Professor Frye who suggested the rearrangement of the initials into their present memorable acronym.) The problem of funding on a permanent basis was discussed; each member was to be charged a fee of \$1.00, and the executive was asked to consider both a continuation of the \$30.00 university registration scheme and an attempt to obtain a bloc grant

through the Humanities Research Council. There were, however, warnings that ACUTE ought not to *expect* contributions from outside sources.

In October of 1957, Millar MacLure, the new Chairman of the organization, wrote letters to colleagues across Canada, reporting in detail on the June meeting and asking department chairmen to collect fees from their own members. As a result of his vigorous campaign, the membership increased to 172; as a result of this thoughtful planning and energetic solicitation of papers, the first regular annual conference of ACUTE was held in Edmonton in June 1958, within the facilities offered by the Conference of Learned Societies, and with a full program of papers, symposia, and discussions. Funds for this meeting were obtained from the Humanities Research Council, the newly-named Canada Council, and individual universities, and ACUTE has continued ever since that date to be assisted by contributions from tax-supported bodies—in most recent years the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

For a number of years ACUTE existed primarily to put on an annual conference and to organize the giving of papers. Its initial impetus was centripetal, its purpose to bring its members together—in the discussion of scholarly papers, in the sessions devoted to the practical problems of teaching English in Canadian universities, and in the social gatherings which enabled colleagues from all parts of the country to meet informally and establish some degree of connection and fellow feeling. It was not until later in its existence that ACUTE began to turn outward to the community and to represent the interests of the profession to governments and other organizations in an increasingly energetic way.

The main work of the early presidents was the organizing of the annual program. In fact, as Juliet McMaster pointed out in 1977, in her successful appeal to UBC to grant the incoming president and secretary of ACUTE some teaching relief, the officers of ACUTE have from the beginning tended to do double duty, the secretary functioning also as the treasurer, and president as the program committee. When ACUTE was a new organization, most of the papers were solicited: it was the president who conceived the general direction of the program and then approached individuals who might be expected either to be interested in addressing the proposed topics or to know other potential speakers in the same area. A number of criteria governed the choice of papers. In the first few years, as the organization experimented to find a satisfactory formula, divergent approaches were adopted. (The attempt to cover a wide range of areas would sometimes result in a schedule so crowded that members were frustrated at being unable to attend all the sessions—or exhausted by the attempt to take in

three hour-long papers one after another. The problem of keeping papers down to a listenable length—35–40 minutes seems to have been aimed at from the beginning—has been a perennial one.) Reaction against such diversity would then create a program so “remorselessly” devoted to the pursuit of a single theme that listeners, again, would protest. The early programs tended to focus quite closely on a single general topic—in 1960, for example, “Romance and Satire”—and, initially at least, to interpret this topic in terms which might be expected to appeal to a general audience, with the motive of avoiding the MLA type of short, highly specialized paper. Other criteria which governed the choice of papers were regional representation—the inclusion of papers from as many parts of Canada as possible—and seniority of speakers—the achievement of a satisfactory balance between senior, established scholars and younger, less experienced members of departments. Because of the need to take so many factors into account, programs tended to evolve in a more haphazard way than the initial topic might have suggested: while it might be possible to elicit some papers prescribed by both period and topic, the desire to hear, say, Priestley on Tennyson or George Johnston on Skaldic metaphor might well entice a chairman to forget about the overall theme of “Man and Society.”

Programs in these early days generally emerged through an informal process of consultation between the president and the membership: the president might ask for suggestions from the membership as a whole, get a number of promising offers, find a common theme emerging, then go back to the members, often through letters to department chairmen, and ask specifically for more papers on that theme—sometimes obtaining them, sometimes provoking the response that speakers must be completely free to address themselves to whatever topics they liked. An attempt was made to avoid repeating topics from the year before and to avoid repeating speakers—those who had given papers one year were excluded the following year. In the attempt to plug holes in the program, avoid repetition, and cover historical periods and geographical areas, papers were often accepted sight unseen, usually on the basis of summaries, but occasionally on the basis of mere titles. By the middle sixties, ACUTE was receiving about twice as many offers to speak as could be accommodated by the conference schedule. Since it was not until the early seventies that papers began to be refereed by outside readers, the amount of work for the individual responsible for the early programs was immense, and the calls upon his or her tact, forethought, energy, and patience correspondingly great.

What to do with the papers after they had been delivered was another question. In the beginning, it was addressed in terms of a somewhat narrow, practical problem: what to give to those members of ACUTE who had paid their dues but had not been able to attend the conference. It was felt that some account of what had gone on there should be produced and sent to all members. How to handle such a report was, however, a puzzle. Secretaries who inherited the job of producing a detailed report on the previous spring's conference when already looking forward to the next felt burdened by a task which they could not regard as their primary responsibility. To reproduce all the papers in full was impossible. Individual speakers, of course, were attempting to get their own papers published and, in the days before Xerox, it was sometimes not easy to get even a single copy of a paper back to ACUTE for summary or for inclusion in the files. Choosing one or two papers to print in their entirety in the annual report turned into an arbitrary selection of whatever was available. Attempts were made early on to assign people to take notes and produce summaries of the papers as they were delivered—a project which proved both difficult (the members of the executive were too busy, other amanuenses sometimes proved less than reliable) and pointless (the resulting summaries were too condensed to be very meaningful). Other expedients were tried. In 1960 ACUTE was approached by a representative from Gage Publishing, who proposed to put out a yearbook for the Learned, and sought one paper from each organization. In the end, two ACUTE papers were published, and the experiment was repeated in 1961; from then on, however, there is no further mention of the Gage yearbook. In 1964, after debating and rejecting the idea of publishing its own journal ACUTE agreed to help subsidize the new *Humanities Association Bulletin*, which would, in turn, print several of the papers given at the ACUTE conference. This system was used for a few years, but the *Bulletin* gradually gave less attention to English studies, and by 1968 the president of ACUTE, Ron Baker, observed in his letter to the membership that there had been increasing pressure for the publication of an ACUTE journal—a step Baker felt was essential at a point when the Association was coming of age and turning into a different and more truly professional kind of organization.

The need for a way of reporting back to the membership on a regular basis was eventually met by the establishment, in 1975, of the ACUTE *Newsletter*; the need for a journal to publish the papers of ACUTE members, by the creation of *English Studies in Canada*.

By 1969 the link between the *Humanities Bulletin* and ACUTE had ended, and the 1970 AGM approved in principle the proposition that ACUTE

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publish a journal of its own; but it was not until two years later that the executive was directed to designate a committee to work towards that goal by preparing a brief on the need for such a journal and the practical problems of running it. This committee, consisting of Gerald McCaughey (Alberta), chairman, Joanne Harriss Burgess (McGill), F.E.L. Priestley (Toronto) and John Stedmond (Queen's, former editor of the *Queen's Quarterly*), presented in the spring of 1973 a convincing argument in favour of the step. Observing that there was not a single Canadian journal of studies in English—that the market was flooded with a great many journals from outside the country, 76% of which were American, at a time when Canada was worried about American cultural domination—the report argued that ACUTE ought surely to be able to do for its discipline as much as other Canadian groups of considerably smaller membership had done for theirs. They recommended that ACUTE take steps to publish a journal, that it select as its editor a known scholar with personal contacts in the Canadian academic and literary world, and with previous experience in editing; that he or she should be assisted by an editorial board of six to ten members, by one or two assistant editors, and by a separate board of management. At the annual meeting in the spring of 1973, another step was taken: fees were drastically raised—doubled for most members—in anticipation of the need to support the new journal.

Meanwhile a second committee was set up to nominate an editor and an editorial board: Paul Fleck (Western), F.E.L. Priestley (Toronto), William Blissett (editor of the *University of Toronto Quarterly*), and John Stedmond (Queen's). In late August, Lauriat Lane Jr. was appointed editor; he in turn selected a small editorial staff: Associate Editor Roben H. Cockburn, Managing Editor James Woodfield, and Assistant Managing Editor Edward J. Mullaly. In September the president of ACUTE made a formal application to the Canada Council; in late September the new editor met in Toronto with the executive and with the University of Toronto Press, which had been selected to print the proposed journal; and by May of 1974 the editor was able to report that the Canada Council had awarded a grant to ESC for publication expenses for 1974. It was in fact not until 1975 that the editor had received enough good material for full quarterly publication. In the spring of that year the University of Toronto Press completed the first issue of the new journal, and was able to supply 175 copies for distribution at the annual meeting. By September the journal was coming out on schedule, and its subsequent history has been one of steadily increasing academic and financial success.



Assisted from the beginning by the Canada Council, *ESC* has always been in the black. When, in a policy announced in June 1976, the Canada Council decided to drop the distinction between learned journals and other periodicals, *ESC* faced a gradual reduction in Canada Council support; at the same time however, it was considering ways and means of reducing the cost of publication, eventually, in 1979, switching with some reluctance from the University of Toronto Press—which the editor praised not only for its fine technical work but for its patience and support—to the Morriss Printing Company in Victoria, B.C., which was able to produce a considerably less expensive issue. It also joined in the legal action, coordinated by the Canadian Federation for the Humanities, against a Post Office decision which would have denied scholarly journals second-class mailing privileges. (The case had still not been heard when the new Canada Post Corporation was created but probably had its effect on the Corporation's decision to continue second-class rates for such publications.) *ESC* continues to be partly supported by government grants—in February 1981 the journal was reviewed by SSHRCC and its grant confirmed for at least three more years—and at present it has 913 regular subscribers (i.e. ACUTE members) and 150 library subscriptions.

The executive of ACUTE decided in October 1977 that the editorship of *ESC* should be formally reviewed every five years. In October 1978 they established a procedure for such a review, formulating a brief questionnaire which was distributed to each member of the advisory board and to three individual members of ACUTE, as well as to any other member who accepted the invitation in the *Newsletter* to return an assessment. The editor was also asked to submit his own statement about the problems, strengths, and prospects of the journal. The result was an overwhelming vote of confidence in the journal and in Lauriat Lane himself. One area of relative weakness was identified—the book review section, which, as Professor Lane complained, received too few books too late—and certain general recommendations were made—e.g., that *ESC* perhaps solicit somewhat more aggressively the truly outstanding work of distinguished academics, and that it print more articles of a general or theoretical nature—but the journal received a very positive assessment from all the readers who responded. Particularly appreciated was its balanced and varied range of articles: the general feeling seemed to be that *ESC* offered, as it should, a wide range of good discussions of significant texts and important issues; that it addressed itself, rightly, to the whole academic and literary community.

*ESC* currently publishes about one-third of the articles it receives. Its policy in theory was to accept unsolicited material only from members of *ACUTE*. From the beginning, however, Lauriat Lane made clear that his interpretation of this principle was a broad one, and that he intended to consider manuscripts from both present and potential members of *ACUTE*—in effect, from everybody working in English in Canada. Although he explained this principle to the Canada Council in the original application of 1974, the Council in 1977 made its continuation of financial support contingent upon a clarification of the policy, insisting that the journal should be open to scholars of all occupations and professions. Partly because of this pressure, partly because of feeling which had already been developing within *ACUTE*, the broader definition was formally adopted. *ESC* describes itself as a journal of scholarship and criticism about all literature in the English language. The original *ACUTE* Journal Committee considered the question of bilingualism, came to the conclusion that token gestures, such as a bilingual title and mast-head, would be pointless, but emphasized that the concept of the journal—then tentatively titled *The Canadian Journal of English Studies*—should not preclude an editorial decision to publish relevant articles in French. No such contributions have, however, so far been received. The journal is now solidly supported by contributors and “booked-up” for a year in advance, its reputation steadily growing as potential contributors become aware of its high standards and wide readership.

The collaboration with the Humanities Association in publishing papers during the 1960’s was characteristic of *ACUTE* in the early stages of its existence. From the beginning the new organization was closely associated with the older one. In 1957, when *ACUTE* was anticipating its first annual meeting, arrangements were made with *HAC* to coordinate the meetings of the two groups and ensure that their programs did not overlap. The issue of joint sessions with the Humanities Association was debated as *ACUTE*’s second annual conference approached. Malcolm Ross, then president of *HAC*, believed that it was important to maintain a common front within the humanities. The *ACUTE* executive, on the other hand, wanted to begin by establishing the association’s identity and autonomy. A compromise was reached—a three-day schedule for *ACUTE*, with the morning of the second day and the afternoon of the third day left free for Humanities Association meetings.

Some version of this kind of split schedule continued for a number of years, as did other forms of collaboration and cooperation. Up until the early sixties, for example, it was traditional for the *HAC* and *ACUTE*

secretaries to get together to work out travel grants, in order to distribute the available money as fairly as possible—since many individuals were members of both organizations. The close link between the two groups continues to the present: in June 1982, at the Ottawa conference of the Learned Societies, ACUTE and HAC joined in a banquet to honour George Whalley, a longtime member of both associations, and to sponsor a plenary lecture by J.M. Cameron. The history of ACUTE's relationship with HAC is emblematic of what was happening among the Learned Societies during this period of expansion and consolidation, as new groups were formed and split off from their "parent" bodies on the one hand, and as they approached one another with proposals for various forms of co-operation and affiliation on the other.

The sixties were a time of enormous expansion in Canadian universities and, of course, in departments of English. As ACUTE was growing, and gaining a clearer sense of its own role and mandate in relation to the profession as a whole, so too other professional organizations were emerging and seeking alliances and connections—some of them with ACUTE. In the mid-sixties two organizations, the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE), an association appealing mainly to primary and secondary school teachers of English, and the College English Association (CEA) of the United States, came to ACUTE with proposals for such affiliation. After considerable discussion it was agreed that there was no particular advantage in any kind of joint membership scheme with NATE. Communications with CEA were kept open for several years—indeed, ACUTE did affiliate with CEA for one year, 1967–8—but in 1970 ACUTE voted at the AGM to sever connections with the American association.

But while formal affiliation with other groups was rejected, other forms of cooperation and alliance were becoming increasingly important. In 1967 ACUTE sent a representative to the founding meeting of the Canadian Confederation of Teachers of English (CCTE) in Vancouver; it was with this group that ACUTE was later to attempt the ambitious scheme of drawing up a model English curriculum from kindergarten to Grade 13. The strong sense of the importance of establishing networks of co-operation is illustrated by the fact that in the same year ACUTE also sent representatives to the conference on the teaching of English and French as second languages which took place at Laval under the auspices of the Centennial Commission and the AUCC, and to a meeting of the Philological Association of the Pacific Coast which met with John Hurt Fisher, executive secretary of the MLA, to discuss ways of linking east and west, Canada and the U.S.A., in a more interdisciplinary approach to the study of language. ACUTE was

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also represented by R.J. Baker when the Royal Society, finding that the meetings of the Learned Societies were becoming unmanageable, took steps in 1967–68 to classify organizations and set up a secretariat which would coordinate the annual schedule.

The expansion of English departments and the consequent increase in the actual and potential membership of ACUTE made new and heavy demands on the increasingly hard-pressed executive. ACUTE was growing rapidly: at the founding meeting there were 82 members; by 1965 there were 300, and by 1971, 530—a total which represented one-third of the university teachers of English in Canada. The clerical work demanded of the executive was growing proportionately. Individual presidents who were fortunate enough to have their own secretaries had sometimes used them to assist with ACUTE correspondence, but it was finally recognized that the successive ACUTE executives needed some reliable secretarial help of their own—the 1963 AGM authorized the current executive to avail itself of \$100 worth!—and that the association needed some more sophisticated form of organization. The president for 1966–67, Neil Compton, outlined innovations which might be considered: much earlier submission of papers, so that they could be refereed by outside readers; the computerization of the mailing list; the establishment of a newsletter; the establishment of a journal. His experience had convinced him, too, that the president ought to hold office for at least two years—a practice which was initiated the following year.

The development of higher education was also forcing societies like ACUTE into new patterns of behaviour in relation to the political world. Up to this point ACUTE had perceived itself primarily as a learned society in the narrow sense, an organization whose main purpose was to hold an annual meeting. It was now beginning to be realized that the association might have an increasingly professional role to play in shaping the changing position of the humanities in Canada. By the end of the sixties there were indications that the structure of the Humanities Research Council was going to be altered in the near future, and that both it and the Canada Council would probably be making increasing use of the learned societies. The feeling that in the coming reconsideration of government priorities the humanities were likely to get short shrift was also growing by the end of the decade. The federal government's decision to reconsider the funding of the humanities along with that of the social and physical sciences caused strong misgivings among the groups who felt themselves most likely to be undervalued in such a context. In 1967 ACUTE supported the Canadian Association of University Teachers in its protest against the Science

Council's proposal to lump the social sciences and the humanities in with the physical sciences when considering future research support; the Social Sciences Research Council (SSRH) and the Humanities Research Council (HRC) joined in voicing their dismay at having their disciplines evaluated by a group which was not primarily concerned with cultural matters. As a result of the concerted protest, the mandate was altered: the Canada Council co-sponsored the study, and a number of humanists were added to the steering committee.

In April 1968 ACUTE was represented by Roy Wiles in the preparation of the joint HRC/SSRC brief to the MacDonal Committee for the Study of Support of Research in the Universities. In December of 1968, ACUTE submitted briefs to the Commission on the Relations between Universities and Governments, and in February of 1969 Roy Wiles drew up for ACUTE a "Brief to the Senate Committee on Science Policy, Recommending More Adequate and Equitable Support of Research in English Language and Literature"—an eloquent appeal for recognition of the humanities as being just as significant in their contribution to the national well-being as more obviously practical areas of study. By the end of the decade, too, ACUTE was strengthening its influence with the HRC. In 1969, under the Council's new constitution, ACUTE was given direct representation; and by 1972 it was the feeling of the AGM that the association should seek still closer ties with the HRC—that, in view of ACUTE's size, it would be reasonable to ask for three representatives instead of one.

By 1974, however, it was clear that the HRC itself was going to be restructured in the federal government's proposed reorganization of all its granting councils, that the role of the Canada Council, too, was going to change, and that ACUTE and other humanities associations would have to reorient themselves to working through different channels. ACUTE was actively involved in anticipating this reorganization. In January 1975 ACUTE wrote letters to Hugh Faulkner, Secretary of State, and C.M. Drury, Minister of State for Science and Technology, commenting on the past programs of the Canada Council and making suggestions for new areas of emphasis. ACUTE also contributed to the composition of a brief by David Steedman, first circulated in draft to member societies in 1977, and finally submitted to the newly-formed Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) on behalf of the newly-formed Canadian Federation for the Humanities (CFH) in 1979, recognizing the potential for positive change in the new arrangements, but warning at the same time against the possibility of increasing *dirigisme* from government.

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That reorganization had finally taken place in 1977, when the Canada Council was redefined as having responsibility only for the arts, the SSHRC was created to take over the programs previously administered by the humanities and social sciences division of the Canada Council, and the Humanities Research Council, its name appropriated by the new council, was renamed the Canadian Federation for the Humanities. ACUTE, along with twenty-four other learned societies, was, and is, directly represented on the CFH board. The Steedman brief, in preparation during the period when the Council and the Federation were emerging, reflected a fairly optimistic view of the possible new relationships between them, and indeed SSHRC has been generous in its support to ACUTE over the ensuing years. The first initiatives of SSHRC, however, alerted the academic community to the possibility that humanists, in particular, were going to have to stand together to ensure continuing recognition and support by the federal government.

One of the first signs of the new temper of the time was SSHRC's "Statement on Aid to Learned Societies in the Humanities and Social Sciences," released in November 1978 "for discussion with the societies," and widely regarded as presenting a rather negative attitude towards the societies whose interests it claimed to represent. The member societies of the CFH responded so vigorously—especially to a proposal to deny funding to small societies—that by March 1980, SSHRC had decided that the decision on funding the Learned Societies should be postponed to allow for further discussion. ACUTE's president, Jan deBruyn, wrote directly to SSHRC in January 1979, pointing out the anomalies he saw as inherent in the proposals and suggesting an alternative formula for arriving at the amount each society should receive. His letter was incorporated, in November 1979, into the consolidated reply to SSHRC sent by CFH. In March 1980 CFH proposed to its constituent societies that it undertake, on behalf of those societies, the administration of a bloc grant from SSHRC. When the societies agreed, CFH approached SSHRC, and by April 1981 the two organizations had worked out a new formula for funding. ACUTE itself would actually receive slightly less under the new arrangements than under the old, but on a predictable basis, so that annual budgets would be easier to plan.

SSHRC's proposal for altering the support of the Learned Societies was followed in June 1979 with a more radical statement of policy—a document which even before its release had occasioned some anticipatory dismay—the "Proposed Five-Year Plan". The section of this plan which evoked the most immediate reaction was the proposal to abolish what

many regarded as the simplest, most workable, and most popular form of release time-leave fellowships. ACUTE at its AGM in 1979 immediately expressed chagrin at this proposal; CFH also lodged a firm complaint with SSHRCC; and the result was that by July 1979 the academic community was reassured that leave fellowships would be retained. Other elements of the plan also evoked negative reaction. The proposal to adopt a special category of financial support for research involving themes of national interest—the “Strategic Grants Program”—aroused strong opposition, among social scientists as well as among humanists. ACUTE’s response to the Five-Year Plan was expressed in the Matthews Report, prepared by a committee composed of John Matthews (Queen’s), Thomas Collins (Western) and David Jeffrey (Ottawa), and endorsed by ACUTE in the spring of 1980. It took a strong stand against strategic grants, arguing that the topics chosen were, and must be, quite arbitrary, and also quite irrelevant to the kind of work done by most humanists. There were, however, some dissenting voices—Michael Hornyansky, for example, reported on a workshop on literacy which he had organized—and the program has in any case been continued, and, in 1981, expanded to include a special emphasis on Canadian themes.

Equally important throughout the history of ACUTE have been projects designed not so much to exert political pressure as to investigate and to persuade. As early as 1963 ACUTE was addressing itself formally to questions of educational policy, and specifically to the report of Roy Wiles’ “Ad Hoc Committee on Standards in English Composition for University Admission.” The “baby boom” which reached the universities in the sixties brought with it profound alterations in the educational scene, and by the early seventies a period of rapid expansion in the universities and radical changes in public and secondary school education had culminated in a widespread fear that student literacy was declining. Official groups were reacting to public discontent in several provinces, and in 1974–75 the executive of ACUTE decided that it was time for the association to come publicly to grips with the question and embark upon the formulation of an official ACUTE policy.

The first result of this decision was ACUTE’s “Report on Graduate Studies in English in Canada,” which appeared in January 1975. Requested by the Canada Council’s Commission on Graduate Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences and prepared for ACUTE by Sidney Warhaft (Manitoba), the report gave a comprehensive description of the development in graduate programs since the expansion had begun around 1955, and concluded that although there was some “loosening” of standards—fewer examina-



tions, the abandonment of the thesis requirement for the M.A.—no great harm appeared to have been done, while other new developments—the emergence of new courses, especially in such fields as Canadian literature, Commonwealth literature and modern literature, and the increasing interest in interdisciplinary studies—could, if balanced with a due regard to tradition, prove to be of positive value. Professor Warhaft recorded a number of areas of student complaint, but concluded that most students, even while confronted with an increasingly restricted job market, were serious, dedicated, and satisfied with what they were getting from graduate school. He concluded his report with a number of specific recommendations about the kind of government support needed by graduate students and faculty, and with the opinion that, while English departments should inform their students frankly about employment prospects, it was not their role to keep applicants out of graduate school on the basis of economic projections: they should keep standards high, do their best to place their graduates, but continue to admit qualified applicants who, in spite of the economic situation, wanted a graduate education. The Warhaft Report was enthusiastically endorsed at the Edmonton meeting in 1975.

Graduate studies were not the only area of concern. The pressure on university departments to offer courses in basic composition to students ill-prepared by their high-school education to write at the university level evoked a statement of “ACUTE policy on Remedial English Instruction in Universities” in the spring of 1976. Prepared by Joseph Gold, whose “Lament for the Language” had appeared in the *English Quarterly* in 1973, the report concluded that the university departments must—though reluctantly and cautiously—recognize their responsibility to students unable to handle university work by helping them make up their deficiencies. The report insisted that this obligation must not be allowed to infringe upon the departments’ main responsibility of teaching English literature at the university level, and it should therefore be accepted only under certain conditions: that students receive no credit for taking the courses; that the courses be funded by special grants-in-aid from provincial governments; and that they be staffed by closely-supervised graduate students. The report also recommended the introduction of a public examination in English open to any applicant in every province. The Gold Report was endorsed by the membership in 1976, and widely circulated.

The discussion provoked by the statement on remedial English generated another project for ACUTE: an attempt, which began in 1976, to work with the Canadian Council of Teachers of English to draft a model curriculum from kindergarten through Grade 13. Representatives from

both groups agreed from the beginning that the only workable approach would be to seek provincial funding, since any chance of getting such a curriculum put into practice once it was drawn up would depend upon the firm support and commitment of each of the individual provinces. The drafting of the preliminary statement of purpose proved more troublesome than had at first been anticipated, the two associations disagreeing on the wording, which seemed to CCTE to assign too much blame for the decline in English standards to the public and high schools. An agreed version was eventually worked out, however, and sent in early 1978 to each of the provincial ministries of education, with the proposal that each province contribute a share of the projected budget of \$150,000. The provinces' replies were overwhelmingly negative, and in the absence of the necessary financial and political support ACUTE and CCTE had no alternative but to drop the project.

ACUTE's concern with curriculum at every level and its conviction that it should formulate for the undergraduate program the same kind of statement as Professor Warhaft had prepared for the graduate program led to one of ACUTE's most notable and controversial achievements. In 1975 the executive decided to establish a one-man commission to report on undergraduate teaching in universities across Canada, hoping to use the resulting report as a basis for discussion which would lead to a policy statement. F.E.L. Priestley, Professor Emeritus at the University of Toronto, was selected for this task. At Professor Priestley's request, he was joined by an assistant, Professor Harvey Kerpneck of the University of Toronto, who helped devise the questionnaire, do the interviewing, compile the data, and write the final report. The two men shared the same point of view and worked virtually as one, as Priestley's tribute to Kerpneck in his Preface makes clear. A grant of \$20,000 from the Richard Ivey Foundation enabled the work to begin, and in December 1975—just before a postal strike—a questionnaire was sent to institutions across Canada to elicit information about the changes in objectives, teaching methods, and curricula in the previous decade and to assess the effects of these changes in the teaching of undergraduate English. During the winter and spring the two men visited over forty institutions for the interviews which were to follow up the questionnaires, and at a plenary session at the ACUTE conference in May 1976 they presented a preliminary report to the membership. Professor Priestley's initial impression was that the widespread emphasis on the need for "remedial English" was threatening to overshadow the primacy of literature itself and to undermine English departments' faith in their

own proper function and their ability to communicate the importance of that function to the public.

The final report, released in February 1977, was a vigorous and sweeping indictment of what Priestley saw as the bad effects of the educational developments of the sixties: the inadequate preparation of high-school students, resulting in pressure on university departments to offer remedial instruction in composition; the hiring, during a period of expansion, of a new breed of instructors, disinclined to teach anything but their own increasingly idiosyncratic specialties; the abandonment of departmental control over both students and curriculum, leading to a proliferation of new, badly-thought-out courses and the neglect of traditional “core” material; the destructive impact on faculty morale of the lack of jobs for young Canadian PHD’s; the threat to university English departments posed by the acceptance in some provinces of B.ED. degrees as a road to high-school teaching; and the irrational emphasis on publication and student evaluation as criteria for tenure and promotion.

As the authors unapologetically explained, the documents frankly presented their shared, and not unbiased, point of view—a strong preference for the traditional course of study, which they firmly believed had been more truly democratic than less rigorous programs which reflected less faith in students’ potential. Professor Priestley explained that their intention was not to evaluate individual departments, still less to publish such evaluations, but to obtain an overall impression of the state of the discipline. He explained that if the report seemed negative, it was because he construed his mandate as the consideration of problems which confronted the profession and the diagnosis of current practices which could lead to problems in the future. The information gathered was confidential, and the departments discussed remained anonymous. But although they were anonymous, they were not always unrecognizable, and those who saw themselves in Priestley’s unsparing descriptions reacted in some cases with anger and indignation. There was some feeling that evidence had been misconstrued by the commissioners, and that the absence of explicit information prevented a reader from using the same evidence to arrive at different conclusions; it was also argued that the emphasis on anonymity was in principle misplaced in a report dealing with public institutions funded by public moneys. Those who agreed with the report’s radical criticism tended to admire its personal style, feeling that one man was better than a committee and that the individual perspective produced a more forceful and penetrating piece of criticism. Those on the other hand, who disagreed with the report, questioning the authors’ methodology or their

objectivity, believed that a larger or more mixed commission might have been a better choice. Particularly controversial was the report's indictment of the development of "luxury" or "gimmick" courses designed to compete for students in a marketplace atmosphere. Though many strongly agreed with the overall assessment of the deterioration of a rigorous, coherent English curriculum, some felt that the condemnation of innovation was too sweeping, the tone too acerbic, and, in particular, that the dismissal of particular areas of specialization reflected too narrow a view of the discipline.

The controversy which followed to some extent thwarted Professor Priestley's own hopes for the investigation and his conception of its essential purposes. He perceived the problems of the profession as essentially political, and had wanted not so much to attack the policies of individual departments—realizing, as he explained to a meeting of the Canadian Association of Chairmen of English in December 1976, that these were shaped by external conditions and pressures—as to change the thinking of governments and university administrations by publicizing the profession's analysis of its complaints. The report, as he conceived it, was directed not entirely or even primarily to ACUTE members but to this wider audience, which he hoped to address with a united voice. Such unanimity proved elusive, however; the document engendered so much debate among the membership that sessions of the annual conference were devoted to it for three years running. May 1976 saw the presentation of Priestley's preliminary report; at Fredericton in 1977, discussion of the final report proved sufficiently lively for the AGM to move that the executive provide a forum for further discussion the following year; and in 1978 no fewer than three panels were devoted to issues Priestley had raised: the relationship between literature and social history, the independence of the individual instructor, and the "publish or perish" issue. If, as one defender of the report has suggested, the value of such projects lies not only in their impact on the community but in the way they stimulate teachers of English to re-examine their own theory and practice, the Priestley Report can certainly be judged to have fulfilled its function.

One detail of Professor Priestley's diagnosis to which nobody took exception was his discussion of the demoralizing situation of young Canadian PH.D.'s who found themselves graduating, after the hiring boom of the sixties, into a very tight job market. The increasingly difficult employment situation emerged at the end of the seventies as one of the most pressing problems facing the profession. At the 1978 ACUTE conference it was proposed that the problem be formally addressed in

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the following year. A Committee on Unemployment and Underemployment was formed—chaired by Alan Rudrum (Simon Fraser), assisted by Stephen Wolfe (Alberta), Anne McWhir (Alberta) and Mark Madoff (UBC) to gather information. Their report, released in 1979, pointed out that because of a relatively young faculty, retirement rates for the coming decade were going to be low; that senior positions which did become available would be filled in most cases not by new PH.D.'s but by individuals already established in university teaching; and that the new graduate, offered only sessional or part-time appointments, found himself not only trapped in a series of dead-end jobs but oppressed by the distrust of his tenured colleagues, who tended to perceive him as a threat rather than an asset to the academic community. The Rudrum Report recommended the initiation of vigorous action to combat this situation: improving the conditions of limited-term appointments while at the same time phasing them out in favour of probationary appointments; shifting funds from the support of graduate students to the support of new PH.D.'s; greater frankness on the part of graduate schools in spelling out to prospective entrants the actual employment situation; and a more creative approach to alternative kinds of employment. Professor Rudrum followed up his report with a letter to chairmen of English in August 1979, suggesting that they consider some of these steps, and reported back—without great optimism—at the 1980 meeting.

At the 1981 meeting Rudrum moved that the committee be dissolved and replaced by a coordinator who would be in touch with four or five representatives across the country. In 1981–82 the new group, headed by Robert Calder (Saskatchewan), who had been a member of the 1980–81 Rudrum committee, continued to monitor the situation, largely by means of personal interviews with department heads; it approached CACE about the employment situation and the drafting of a number of guidelines which English departments might well adopt in relation to temporary faculty; and Professor Calder composed a statement which became ACUTE's contribution to the CFH brief used during a lobby of Members of Parliament at the time of the 1982 Learned's. At the 1982 AGM of ACUTE the guidelines for contractually limited appointments developed by Calder and his colleagues in consultation with the ACUTE executive were overwhelmingly endorsed. The President was instructed to circulate the guidelines to the membership and promulgate them widely both within the profession and beyond it—to Deans, Vice-Presidents, Provincial Ministers of Education, and the Secretary of State. Widespread support for the guidelines was expressed at the June 1982 meeting of CACE, and it is hoped that with

this support from the chairmen of English departments they will have a direct and practical effect on the working conditions of temporary faculty throughout the country.

It is perhaps appropriate that an account of the research projects undertaken by ACUTE should have circled back again to a consideration of the association's "political" responsibilities. In the present economic situation, when universities are under intense financial pressure, the humanities find themselves in a serious, even dangerous, position. It seems clear that organizations like ACUTE will in the future have to continue, and to intensify, their attempts to represent the professional interests of their membership to government and to the community. During the past year, ACUTE has expressed its concern over a number of public issues—the possibility that the tariff on books imported from abroad may again be imposed, proposals to change the copyright law and to revise the law on obscenity, and so on. ACUTE has also responded to the Park Committee's suggestions for radical changes in SSHRCC funding of scholarly publishing—suggestions which would involve, among other things, a shifting of support away from journals printed in the traditional way and towards technologically innovative methods of information dissemination. (These proposals are not to be implemented at the moment, but will undoubtedly come up for discussion again in the near future.) ACUTE was also represented in the humanists' lobby on Parliament Hill in June 1982, organized by CFH to emphasize to members of parliament—especially those who have universities in their own ridings—the need for more money for both research and teaching, and above all, for making new tenure-stream appointments in university departments. These kinds of activity will, if anything, have to be intensified in the future, and it is likely to become increasingly necessary for individuals for whom ACUTE has thus far been primarily an organization which puts on an annual meeting to follow and support the efforts of their professional organization to ameliorate conditions which will increasingly affect all members of the university community.

At the centre of ACUTE's activities throughout the years, however, have remained the successive annual conferences, each with its own location, program, and character. The list of plenary speakers on those occasions is an interesting one. The Association's records show the names of Walter Allen, Ronald Baker, Roy Battenhouse, Roger Bishop, Geoffrey Durrant, Northrop Frye, James Gray, Clifford Leech, Harry Levin, Juliet McMaster, Balachandra Rajan, Ann Saddlemeyer, A.J.M. Smith, Marion Smith and George Whalley, but these records may be incomplete. Literary visitors at the annual conferences have included Chinua Achebe, Jack Hodgins,

Margaret Laurence, Dorothy Livesay, Hugh MacLennan, Alice Munro, Mordecai Richler, and Rudy Wiebe. Banquets have been held from time to time in honour of colleagues who have made distinguished contributions to the profession, such as Roy Daniells, Northrop Frye, Carl Klinck, F.E.L. Priestley, Malcolm Ross, and Clarence Tracy.

Some changes have been made in the structure of the programs from time to time—particularly in 1981 and 1982, largely in response to suggestions brought forward by members interested in critical theory—but the essential principles of seeking a wide range of papers from a broadly representative group of members continues. The number of conference submissions has risen steadily over the years; in 1982 roughly one in four of the papers or proposals offered were accepted for the program. Membership in the Association has increased substantially over the last few years, reaching totals of 879 in 1979–80 and 913 in 1981–82, and as Jane Millgate wrote, as president, in the March 1982 Newsletter, such figures are the more remarkable in that the number of full-time faculty actually employed in English departments throughout Canada continues to decline. This indication of increased participation on the part of members of the profession proves—along with the excellence of *ESC*, the undiminished vitality of the annual conferences, and the growing self-confidence of *ACUTE* as a professional organization—some grounds for future confidence at a time when other indicators seem more than usually bleak.

### Original Members of ACUTE

H.J. Alexander	Donald W. Cross
R. Baker	Roy Daniells
Munro Beattie	D.J. Dooley
C.L. Bennett	Lloyd G. Duchemin
Earle Birney	A.T. Elder
Roger J. Bishop	George Falle
Claude Bissell	H.G. Files
J.B. Black	P.F. Fisher
William Blissett	Northrop Frye
G.L. Brodersen	David Galloway
R.D. Chambers	James Gray
D.R. Cherry	G.C. Haddow
Fred Cogswell	Joyce Hemlow
J. Colosimo	V. Hopwood
Leo A. Cormican	J.T. Jones



R.F.B. King	A.M. Ross
A.M. Kinghorn	Malcolm Ross
C.F. Klinck	Flora Roy
H. Kreisel	A.A. Ryan
W.C. Lougheed	Mariana Ryan
Alec Lucas	F.M. Salter
J.R. MacGillivray	Rupert Schieder
M.H.M. MacKinnon	J. Percy Smith
Millar MacLure	M.B. Smith
Jay Macpherson	Ian Sowton
C. Fred MacRae	J.M. Stedmond
A.E. Malloch	M.W. Steinberg
H.V. Mallon	R.M. Stingle
Elias W. Mandel	W.G. Stobie
Paul Marcotte	Leo E. Stock
M. Mary Agnes, O.S.A.	G.M. Story
Dalton McGuinty	R.H. Strachan
H.M. McLuhan	Walter E. Swayze
Hugo McPherson	W.K. Thomas
Edmund Morrison	Clarence Tracy
Dorothy S. Murphy	J.O. Turner
Alison M. O'Reilly	Alastair Walker
Desmond Pacey	M.G. Wanamaker
M.G. Parks	M.T. Wilson
F.E.L. Priestley	Gordon Wood
W. Robbins	A.S.P. Woodhouse

