

# Writing in the Disciplines

## Geography Interview: Prof. Robert Mackinnon

**W.F. Garrett-Petts:** I'd like to welcome you today to our continuing set of interviews on Writing in the Disciplines. Today we are featuring Dr. Robert Mackinnon from the Geography Department. Welcome Robert. What's the first piece of advice you give somebody when they're coming into your Geography class, and they're faced with the very first paper? What would you say to a hypothetical first-year student.

**Robert Mackinnon:** In first year, I think the student has to become aware of some of the materials that can be used to construct an essay. First years, especially, need to get used to using atlases and data– and basically to analyzing and summarizing the patterns inherent in data. That is something that I try to promote, particularly in my first-year courses.

**Garrett-Petts:** So, you're focusing on content primarily then?

**Mackinnon:** In first year, I think it's more a matter of introducing students to the availability of materials out there– and to where you can actually find data and information that will help you understand a topic.

**Garrett-Petts:** Are you terribly fussy then about the way material is organized and presented in essay form?

**Mackinnon:** I am when I read the essay. I really try to go through and make comments about structure and organization, but as far as my teaching goes, I don't spend a great deal of time on how to go about constructing an essay. However, I do that in my more advanced courses.

**Garrett-Petts:** You mentioned constructing an essay and you've been good enough to give us a handout which I assume is something that you give to your students here. It's entitled "Doing Research and Writing About It, or Steps in Constructing an Essay." Do you want to take us through that and let us know in quite specific terms the advice you give to your own students?

**Mackinnon:** Rather than walk through it step by step, I think the one thing I look for in an essay— this would be a third-year essay— the one thing I'm looking for is a tight introduction, one which states the general topic, identifies the sources that are being used, and then presents a bit of a roadmap for the essay. I want to know: Which sections are going to be discussed in a paper? What three or four areas in particular are you going to look at? And in there, usually in the first paragraph or the second paragraph, somewhere at the beginning of the essay, I'll look for what I call a "statement of purpose." Now some people call that a thesis statement, some people call it a hypothesis; but I simply call it a statement of purpose. In its boldest sense it might sound like this: "this paper will examine..." and I've heard some students say, "My English teacher tells me not to do this." It doesn't have to be as boldly stated like that...

**Garrett-Petts:** But you don't mind if it is stated in very straightforward language?

**Mackinnon:** No, I don't. In fact, one of the papers that I brought... you asked me to bring some papers of my own, some examples of other works. Here's one of my own papers that I brought; it's one of the papers that I like (of those that I've written myself). [Professor Mackinnon holds up a book] This is one that was in this little book on the Maritimes: it's really a mid-nineteenth century overview of agriculture and right at the very beginning of the second paragraph I have a statement: "This paper begins to fill in our knowledge of farming of the 1850s by examining crop and livestock patterns and identifying types of farming zones." Very simple and to the point. Now, not always will a thesis or a purpose statement be laid out in those simple terms, and it doesn't necessarily have to be. In fact, a good writer will sometimes have the statement of purpose stated in a less bold sort of way, one that just becomes apparent to the reader as she or he works through the first couple of paragraphs.

**Garrett-Petts:** Last day we were talking with John Belshaw from History. He made similar observations I think about the need to focus on a problem and resolve a problem within an essay– something similar to your statement of purpose or hypothesis? But he seemed much more concerned about the means of expression. He continually made– this won't surprise you Robert– he continually made literary illusions and compared the writing of history to a narrative art form. What I'm hearing from you is that although those may be issues of some importance, they are more peripheral to the job of a geographer?

**Mackinnon:** I think so. As indicated in my handout I think one of the differences perhaps that distinguishes Geography from History, even though human geography in particular is written in a narrative form, is that I think there's more of a spatial component to Geography. There is the interest in place, community, region and, in some respects, a portion of the paper may be devoted to describing the region. So much of human Geography– and I'm sure students who have read materials on my course reserve list in my third year historical Geography course will agree– is quite descriptive of places and so on. But employing description doesn't necessarily mean it's divorced from addressing a problem or a significant historical or contemporary issue.

**Garrett-Petts:** Can you define that term “spatial” a little bit more for us, because that's something that hasn't been introduced before: the notion of writing as being “spatial.”

**Mackinnon:** Well, maybe a good way to do that is to pick some examples. You asked me to bring in an example of a paper written by another Geographer, a paper that I thought was a good example of writing. I picked a paper, it's an older paper written in 1980, written in a journal of forest history, and the title of the paper– it's by Graeme Wynn from the University of British Columbia– and the title of the paper is, “Deplorably Dark and Demoralized lumberers: Rhetoric and Reality in Early Nineteenth Century New Brunswick.” I think this sort of paper combines the focus on issues with good geographical description. He starts his essay by saying, “Many nineteenth Century authors were critical of the North American Lumber industry and of those who participate in it. Some condemned lumbering as an uncertain, itinerant business that led people to live at risk upon the capital instead of the annual produce of the country. Others denounced the harmful social effects of forest employment. In their view, lumbering drew people away from home and substituted bouts of toil and indolence, hardship and...” He's quoting from nineteenth century sources,

sources which give his paper a sense of the nineteenth century views held by people engaged in the lumbering industry.

**Garrett-Petts:** Now so far, to me, it sounds like a History paper. That is, you are sharing the same kind of description that we might have focused on with John Belshaw.

**Mackinnon:** It's very descriptive and I think functions to situate the context of the paper, establishing in a sense the temporal context of the paper. Then the author breaks his paper down. He looks at the rhetoric and he examine why nineteenth century writers felt that lumberers, people involved in the lumbering industry were, in a sense, not contributing to the growth of a mature society or mature community. Then he goes on: he examines the rhetoric. Later in the paper he has a section in the paper which he calls "Reality: Lumber and Farming in early nineteenth century New Brunswick." And here's where I think the paper switches from more of a historical narrative to a spatial narrative: "Despite the importance of the timber trade in the provincial economy, New Brunswick was far from the extensive lumber camp that some have envisaged. Rural dwellers from the majority of its steadily increasing population which rose from some 25,000 early in the century to approximately 200,000 by 1851." And then he goes through, "at mid-century approximately 30,000 people lived in the port city of Saint John, Fredericton, the capital, had fewer than 5,000. Clusters of 2,000-3,000 people lived in small urban centers along the lower reaches of the Miramachi valleys. Elsewhere, villages served a population dispersed about the coasts and major river valleys of the province. A thin line of settlement along the southwest Miramachi River linked the peripheral population of the gulf shore to the more densely populated ribbon of land flanking the St. John Valley." In other words, he moves from sort of addressing the problem of how people talked about the lumbering industry in the nineteenth century to a spatial description of what mid-nineteenth century New Brunswick was like. That is how he constructs his essay.

**Garrett-Petts:** What strikes me from what you've just read, apart from the notion of a temporal dimension and a spatial dimension of the writing, is the attention to detail that's there. Powers of observation are presumably important as you study Geography?

**Mackinnon:** Yes. And that goes back to my comment earlier about trying to introduce first-year students to maps. One of the key tools to Geographers is the map. I think if you read

the pages of the Canadian Historical Review, if you find maps and illustrations in those articles, I would say there's probably some chance that the article was written by a Geographer, or by an Historian with geographical leanings. So, I think the map is a key tool and I think also that map interpretation is a skill. It's a skill like analyzing data, like learning how to present data in particular formats, establishing particular social science tests on data. Reading maps and understanding maps and how they're constructed I think is a skill that...well, it's one of the principal tools of Geography.

**Garrett-Petts:** You talk about the tools of geography and you introduce this visual dimension here when you talk about maps. And I notice from the samples of writing that you gave me, there's also older photographs included in the essay. Can you talk a little bit about using visuals in the writing of essays? Do you look for your students to include a visual dimension? And what are some of the difficulties too about getting such things as permissions, copyright permissions for including such materials?

**Mackinnon:** Ok, well maybe it's a good time to talk a little bit about the student papers I brought with me. Just to show that I'm not totally ensconced in Maritime Canada, although much of my writing is about the Maritimes, I've chosen two papers, one of which is on the Maritimes by one of our well-known students from a few years ago. Some of you may remember Darcy Stainton? I'm sure he wouldn't mind me mentioning that. He wrote a paper on what he called "The Economic Crises of the Nova Scotia Coal Industry: 1921-1951." It's a very data-based paper. He collected Census data, mining record data, and graphed it and looked at trends in the coal industry. I think he really did an excellent job in laying out the data and generating a hypothesis about the data. I think his first paragraph sort of outlines it. Would you mind if I read just a little bit of it? "As an extraction industry, coal mining is often linked with iron, steel, and electricity." Great: nice short sentence. "While the coal marketplace is undoubtedly dominated by the fate of these secondary industries, the connection is often taken as a complete explanation of the economic situation. Graeme Wynn asserts that 'inevitably the fortunes of the coal mining industry reflect the developments of iron and steel production.' While this statement is not untrue, it implies that ultimately the economics of Nova Scotia coal production can be traced entirely through its attendant industries. Rather, production and employee data suggest that many factors that have determined the success or failure of the coal mines have been internal in origin." That last sentence is his thesis or the essay's "purpose statement." He's saying that instead of just the success or failure of the steel industries driving the coal

mining industry, he's suggesting that production and employee data indicate that the success or the failure of the coal mining industry may have had some structural, internal problems. And that's the thesis he addresses. And he basically looks at productivity levels. He says, well Nova Scotia mines had lower productivity than Alberta mines. He looks at capitalization. He makes the argument that, in terms of capitalization, Nova Scotia coal mines embrace technology and the application of capital to the production process later than Alberta and Vancouver Island coal mines did. And so, he makes the argument even in his title: "Too Slow to Catch the West" is the subtitle of the paper, and it sets up the argument.

**Garrett-Petts:** That's the verbal part. Where's the visual complement?

**Mackinnon:** The visual complement is more in the graphs. He's graphically presenting data. He has about 20 pages of graphs, which look at various characteristics of the industry, from age distribution of people employed to production levels comparing Alberta and Nova Scotia.

**Garrett-Petts:** Geographers like that sort of thing?

**Mackinnon:** Yes. Well, it's not as descriptive of paper as the one I read earlier, where we're looking at a particular region, but it's analyzing an industry in that province, and he is comparing it to another province. So, there is sort of an implicit geographical element to the paper, the way it's laid out.

**Garrett-Petts:** I noticed, also, an allusion to Graeme Wynn— somebody you've mentioned yourself several times. Is there a suggestion there that a successful paper might cite sources that might have been mentioned in class or near and dear to the heart of the professor? [Laughter]

**Mackinnon:** I suppose...

**Garrett-Petts:** Who is Graeme Wynn and what role does he play in your courses?  
[Laughter]

**Mackinnon:** I tend to think I'm a little more objective than that. But there are a few, in terms of historical geography– which is the course that I teach at the third-year level– there are a handful of influential geographers. Some of them are quite prolific. These include Graeme Wynn, as well as Cole Harris, both of whom are at UBC, which makes it interesting. Our textbook, for example, has a chapter by both Graeme Wynn and Cole Harris. I think at least one of the articles on course reserve is by Cole Harris. So, yes, these are local British Columbia geographers...

**Garrett-Petts:** And you studied with Graeme Wynn?

**Mackinnon:** Yes. [Laughing] And Graeme Wynn was actually my supervisor for my doctoral thesis, which... [Laughter]

**Garrett-Petts:** And you've written articles with Graeme Wynn?

**Mackinnon:** Yes.

**Garrett-Petts:** So, it was probably an intelligent move on Mr. Stainton's part to cite Professor Wynn?

**Mackinnon:** Well, possibly. But I tend to think I'm a little more objective than that. [Laughter] The second paper, though, is not about the Maritimes, it's about an area near Kamloops. This is more a community-based study, and I think this paper is more similar to the paper I read by Graeme Wynn about the lumber industry in mid-Nineteenth Century New Brunswick. Only this is about a small community near Salmon Arm called Notch Hill. And this paper was written by a student named Virginia Courtney. She wrote a paper for me in Geography 328, in 1993, and I really liked this paper. It was a community study. But the way it was situated– it established this small community within the context of British

Columbia's development. Would you mind if I read just a little bit?

**Garrett-Petts:** Just before you do, it looks to be an image on the front page. Is that true?

**Mackinnon:** There is a map on the front page, which is a map of the very small community, which emphasizes the importance of the railway. Basically, Notch Hill is a railway town.

**Garrett-Petts:** It seems to me that, if we're talking about distinctions between the various disciplines, you would very, very seldom see a visual complement in an English essay. You might see photographs, in particular, in a History essay. You might see charts and tables in a sociology paper. And now in Geography we're seeing a much greater emphasis on the visual—so much so that you seem to take it for granted that there would be an image on the front page.

**Mackinnon:** Yes. Not always. Depending upon the topic. If your paper is explicitly spatial and you're dealing with the pattern of the landscape, so to speak, then I think a map is necessary. With a community study, I think it really is useful to provide a map to show that this is where the community is located, or that this is what it looks like. Even if it's just a location map. That is one thing that I emphasize in my second year of Geography of Canada course. In terms of the term essay, every term essay must have a map to show me the region that the student is discussing in the essay. So, it emphasizes what you've said. But if I could read just the first paragraph of this: you know, I really like this essay: "Throughout the province of British Columbia a major period of settlement and agricultural expansion followed the construction of the C.P.R. Many small communities emerged in the late 1880s in direct response to the needs of the new Trans-continental transportation system. Situated approximately 28 kilometers northwest of Salmon Arm in the Shuswap Lake area, the community of Notch Hill owes its inception to the Canadian Pacific Railway. The rugged topography of the area required "engine pushers" to push the freight trains and pull the passenger trains up the steep 1.9 percent grade from Tappen and Chase where passenger and freight were unloaded and dispersed to the surrounding areas."

**Garrett-Petts:** That "1.9 percent grade" is important, isn't it?



**Mackinnon:** It is. That's the key in terms of why this community came into being, it is that it was located on this rather steep grade along the C.P.R., which required the establishment of "freight pushers" to be established in that community– to drive the engines up the hill. And that's why this community came into being. This is just a wonderful essay. In addition to situating the community and describing the community, she then goes out and interviews four people who live in the community. She talks about the community's experience and, in particular, she talks about the changes that took place after diesel trains were introduced– a change which reduced the need for "pushers." The last sentence of her second paragraph reads: "The community of Notch Hill persisted as a bustling community from the late 1890s to the early 1950s, when the diesel engine replaced the coal engine rendering the 'pushers' obsolete." And so, the rest of the essay deals with the attempts by Notch Hill to sustain itself as a marginal, agricultural community– as a small-scale agricultural community providing food stuffs to the local area. And it's just a wonderful essay. In addition to situating the context of this small B.C. community, the author actually goes out and interviews these four people who operated farms during this period; they talked to her about the problems they faced in terms of marketing and so on.

**Garrett-Petts:** And that gives you that added dimension that you've been talking about before, about textualizing your subjects, spatially and temporally?

**Mackinnon:** It's a very nice essay and it's one of the best local B.C. essays that I've received in my courses.

**Garrett-Petts:** We only have a few minutes left and it's probably a good idea to turn things over to the student panel here and find out what areas we've been missing when it comes to writing in geography– or writing "geography papers." Maybe it's a good idea to start you off by finding out how many of you have studied geography before?

**Student:** I have.

**Garrett-Petts:** Do you want to start us off then?

**Student:** I was going to ask you, is there a difference in writing historical geography compared to urban or environmental geography?

**Mackinnon:** I would like to say I don't think there is a difference. I think good writing stands out. I think clean, clear, short sentences, well-organized paragraphs, are valued generally, and it doesn't matter what the discipline is. One thing I look for, though– and I'll come back to the urban and environmental differences in a moment– one thing I look for when I read an essay is a topic sentence at the beginning of each paragraph, or somewhere in the paragraph. And when I read the essay, I try to think "What is this paragraph telling me?" Sometimes I think that's how I identify "repeats" in a paper: well, this paragraph is discussing this topic or this issue and then the next paragraph...wait a minute, they're saying the same thing again. So, I can comment in the margins appropriately. So, I look for that as a reader– so clear expression and reducing redundancy might be something that students look for when they construct their own essays. Think about each paragraph and each sentence in each paragraph. To get back to your question...

**Garrett-Petts:** Before you do, let's find out what was behind the question. Do you feel there is a difference between those aspects of the field?

**Student:** After studying all of them, I do feel there is a difference in just the way you write. Dr. Mackinnon and I have already discussed questions of personal expression, and from what I've discussed with you, the personal isn't really relevant in historical geography, whereas in environmental geography, when we study the environment, it becomes more relevant.

**Garrett-Petts:** Others of you have found this too? [The student panel agrees] Ok. Look, the jury is in here.

**Mackinnon:** I would say that I tend to lean more towards the historians' approach to writing– more toward the narrative style, where you're writing in the third person, in the past tense; but I find a bit awkward, a sentence with phrases like "I think that," or "my personal view is." I think there are other ways of injecting your own subjective views into a paper without being so blunt.

**Garrett-Petts:** How do you do that? That's a question that has come up a number of times here, where we've been discussing not just the personal in terms of the first-person pronoun, but a personal investment in your topic and the subject matter. How does somebody in second or third year invest themselves personally in a geography paper? How can writing become more than an exercise where the student just satisfies course demands?

**Mackinnon:** I think that a place to put it would be in your final, concluding paragraph, where you can make subjective comments about the data, and about the literature you've read. Much of the literature which addresses this topic seems to emphasize a focus on the "event." Phrases like "In my view" or "in my paper," suggest that there are other factors which lie behind this particular event. In Darcy Stainton's case, he's saying, well everybody seems to emphasize the steel industry being the engine of growth for the coal industry. He is saying, well there are other factors here and there are other problems. You have to look beyond the connections between the steel industry. And so when I read his paper, I see that he has injected his personal view, his interpretation, his organization of the data.

**Garrett-Petts:** By the way he is contextualizing the subject?

**Mackinnon:** Yes. And so he doesn't come out there and say, "I think that Graeme Wynn and others are off-base..."

**Garrett-Petts:** Would he?

**Mackinnon:** Well, he quotes Graeme Wynn right at the beginning. "...I think these authors are off-base by drawing too strong a connection." He doesn't say, "I think this." But it becomes clear to the reader that that's what he's saying. So, in my view, that would be a way to present the personal—indirectly. I think you'll find there are some subtle distinctions between urban geography, historical geography, and environmental geography. Urban geography tends to be a little more scientific, a little more data-oriented, a little more "here's the method I'm using, here's the statistical problem that I'm addressing, and my

paper identifies "A", "B" and "C." It's a little more structured, a little more rigid, perhaps a little less narrative focused. Environmental geography tends to be more issue-oriented, more focused on ecology issues. I think perhaps the instructors would like to see your opinion on the issue: "Where do you stand?" "Are you committed to conservation?" "Are you committed to this particular issue?"

**Garrett-Petts:** It sounds to me what we're hearing once again is the straddling of two areas. The social sciences and humanities approaches are used within a single discipline. One of the things that is coming through, pretty clearly it seems to me with this series of interviews, is that no one discipline has one form of essay. That you have to not only learn how to write as a geographer, how to write as a sociologist, as an English major, whatever, but that you have to learn how to write within the disciplines and across those disciplines at the same time.

**Mackinnon:** I would agree.

**Garrett-Petts:** [To the student audience] Has the discussion here given you a better idea of what may constitute an "A" paper? Or do you still think there's still some magic formula?

**Student:** Perhaps I'm used to especially just writing and getting all these books, especially for History, and getting different interpretations from the academics. But it's rare for me to interview people and include those interviews in the essay. That's what probably makes such outstanding papers. Whether that person is from that community or not, she still went there, or he still went out there and got those people together and had to figure out the facts, weigh bias, perhaps, and still use those academics to back up what she was trying to argue.

**Garrett-Petts:** So that is a dimension that you would reward if you saw it in a paper?

**Mackinnon:** Yeah. The initiative was unusual. It was a labor of love for the person who wrote the paper. I think she was from that community initially, and it was clear as you read the paper that this was more than just an exercise to complete a requirement for

Geography 328. And that's what made it so unusual a paper. It really stood out for the very reasons you've identified. And it was a nice combination of historical literature and sources, which backed up "why this community came into being." She said, "here's the changes that took place when technology changed, and here's what happened to the people who remained." So, it was kind of a nice overview from the beginning. And the community still survives, albeit much smaller than it was before the 1950s. You're right, that was unusual. But I've also seen cases...I had a student last year, who picked a topic that she knew very little about and I thought did a pretty good job. She was doing a study of Quebec in the mid-nineteenth century. It was almost entirely based on a set of primary data. And her job in the term essay was to basically identify patterns and trends in this set of mid-nineteenth century data. And I thought that for someone sitting out here in Kamloops without access to an archive other than in her library loans and microfilm, I think she did an excellent job situating the context of this "bald" data, situating it in the broader context of what mid-nineteenth century Quebec was like. And she had not really known that much about mid-nineteenth century Quebec before she started, so to her credit, it started out as an exercise, but it became a very interesting exercise, one that I think she did a really good job of. So, to get an "A" paper, or to get an "A" in Geography, it doesn't necessarily mean you have to be personally committed to this topic and get as involved as Virginia did.

**Garrett-Petts:** It doesn't hurt.

**Mackinnon:** It doesn't hurt, but here is a student who really just did this out of interest. She said, "Well, I want to learn how to use some data. I'm interested in mid-nineteenth century Quebec. I've done some reading on mid-nineteenth century Quebec." And she produced what I consider a fantastic paper in terms of her observations about the data, what she thought the data was telling her, and then what other sources suggested about the patterns of...

**Garrett-Petts:** There seems to be a lot of common sense in underlying all of this. One of the things that we hear a lot from the English department, especially when we offer so-called "service courses" for professional areas, and we teach writing within those areas, is that people only really do learn how to write once they've got a cause, a purpose, or they've chosen a profession and they find themselves in the workforce and they're having to write professionally. It seems to me to be a little bit difficult when you're going from Geography at 10:00, to English at 11:00 and History at 2:00. But it's still important to know that, within

limits, if you can find some aspect of the subject matter that really does interest you, and that you can commit yourself to, you'll write better. When enrolled in a Geography course, you learn to write like a geographer– and to do this, you must be interested in learning to write like a geographer. Sounds like common sense, eh? You have to bring yourself to the subject. But if you're waiting for geography to come to you, you might have a long wait?

**Mackinnon:** Well, geography also has a problem in that we are one of these disciplines that has a distinct split right down the middle between what's called physical geography– sort of the physical sciences: geomorphology, climatology, and so on– and human geography. There's a clear split. Now, most of our advanced courses at UCC (Thompson Rivers University) emphasize the human geography side of the spectrum. I suppose the environmental courses have a little bit of a foot in both camps, but within the discipline at large there is a very clear distinction. If you pick up a physical geography essay in a journal or a book, it's going to sound very "scientific." It could be written by an atmospheric physicist, or it could be written by a climatologist who has a background in geography. Such writing includes lots of formulas, lots of data, computer models, etc. But then, on the other side of the fence, you have human geography, which ranges from historical geography (tending to lean towards the historian's approach) to a range of disciplines like economic geography (which is a little more economics-focused), urban geography (which is more planning, city-focused), environmental geography (which is more ecology and issue focused). So, you get these subtle differences. So it's hard to say, even within geography, "here is the way a geography paper is written." I've given you some examples of historical geography, but I could easily pick some examples out of the Canadian geographer. I could pick an Urban geography paper, one of which might be really understandable and interesting, particularly for students with an historian background, but another one that might be totally indecipherable because it's about forecasting of population growth and how a city can determine when it will reach the one hundred thousand mark– and what are the statistical methods that you can use to do it, etc.,...

**Garrett-Petts:** I've got a cheeky question for you. [laughter]

**Mackinnon:** OK, ...so there are differences between the disciplines.

**Garrett-Petts:** I haven't asked this of anybody before. You were an undergraduate at one point. When you go to graduate school, you focus on a particular area in your master's and your Ph.D., but as an undergraduate, like everybody, you had to take a full range of courses. Did you do equally well in all the courses that you took?

**Mackinnon:** You're putting me on the spot. I can tell you the ones I did poorly in. I really enjoyed English courses while I was doing my Geography degree. So, I found myself in, I suppose, an unusual situation, by the time I was in fourth year I was taking seminar courses in Canadian Literature and other English courses where three quarters of the students were English Majors, and I was the lone Geography Major in there. But I would say I did equally well in English, History, Geography. I suffered through courses like French Literature, where the lectures were given entirely in French. So, I had difficulty in some courses. I especially remember a French Literature course where the whole course was taught entirely in French and in order to pass, I had to read all the books in English translation. And I barely passed. What I remember from my undergraduate degree is that I did equally well in both geography and English. History? I found it really dependent on the type of history. I remember taking one History course which was very much political history: a course focusing on events rather than people– the great man approach, rather than social or labor history, and unfortunately it was the first history course I took, and it really turned me off history. I could barely read the textbook it was so boring. And then as a graduate student I got turned back on to history. I took a course from a professor– some of you may know his work, he's done some work in British Columbia and on the Prairies, though I think he's more a geographer by training– a guy named Arthur Ray. He's written a lot on the Indians in the Prairies. And I took a course from Arthur Ray– it was more of a labor, social history course. And then I took another course from a woman named Margaret Prang, who used to be the editor of B.C. Studies, and it was an excellent course. She was phenomenal. She was just about ready to retire when I took the course. She was still writing very productively, and she had a really good grasp of the complete spectrum of history.

**Garrett-Petts:** So, it's not just the subject matter, it's the way it's being presented.

**Mackinnon:** It's the way it was presented. So, I found my graduate courses in history were far, far superior to my undergraduate courses in history.

**Garrett-Petts:** Well, thank you very much Robert for joining us today. [To the Student Audience] And thank you. I'm wondering after viewing this video if every essay you get is going to cite Graeme Wynn. [Laughter]

**Mackinnon:** I hope not, I hope not.

**Garrett-Petts:** Thanks.

**Mackinnon:** Thank you.