



***Research in Action:***  
***Understanding Civil Justice in the Everyday World***

**Research Priorities and Potentials**

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by

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## Developing Socio-Legal Research Capacity

The lack of capacity to conduct applied social research concerning justice systems and justice issues has been identified as a concern across Canada and internationally, most especially in the area of non-criminal justice. There are many opportunities for conducting socio-legal research that is of applied, substantive, methodological and theoretical value. Raising awareness of the opportunities for new and innovative research concerning Canadian systems of justice and finding ways to increase the capacity to conduct needed research is the goal of the *Research in Action* project. More information and disseminations from this project are available on the Canadian Forum on Civil Justice (CFCJ) website at <http://cfcj-fcjc.org/research/socio-en.php> .

When we speak of “socio-legal research” we mean social research about legal systems, legal processes, paths to justice and related social and legal issues and implications. Research that is evidence-based, interdisciplinary, collaborative, and focuses on issues concerning non-criminal justice is in especially high demand. Justice community stakeholders across Canada and internationally are increasingly convinced of the value of research evidence to informed and effective policy reform and program development.

Lack of identified socio-legal capacity in Canada is of critical concern to CFCJ, government and other justice community organizations seeking to develop new research. Finding researchers with applied research skills and an understanding of Canadian justice systems is a major challenge that impacts the ability to advance current research priorities.

The CFCJ cannot, and should not, directly conduct or oversee all research pertaining to the priorities identified above. Our mandate is to facilitate the sharing of the knowledges and resources required for our partners to be involved in developing and conducting the research that they need. It is their specific, localized knowledge and lived experience that is essential to producing research that is valid and useful.

In recognition of the potential role the CFCJ can play in bringing this about, the BC Law Foundation provided project funding for us to conduct a pilot socio-legal research capacity development project during 2007 and further project funding to continue and enhance knowledge sharing activities. This document has been developed and updated as part of that project. Activities have included:

- Identifying researchers in British Columbia with interest and expertise in community-based research related to legal issues
- Facilitating a series of workshops that brought together our justice community partners with academic, government and private researchers
- Beginning to document socio-legal capacity in British Columbia in the form of a web-accessible database (<http://cfcj-fcjc.org/directory/>).
- Responding to requests for information about socio-legal.
- Participating in community, university and government networks to share and promote understanding of socio-legal research

- Completion of additional research reports drawn from existing socio-legal research data (all publications available at <http://cfcj-fcjc.org/publications/>).

## Research Orientation

While there is potential for many epistemological approaches to socio-legal research, and researchers from all orientations are welcome to submit database entries, the CFCJ is committed to a social constructionist approach to theory and methodology. This approach implications for conducting a research inquiry and it is our position that:

- All knowledge and understanding are mediated by social experiences, statuses and interactions.
- The structure and organization of justice systems, and the relationship between these systems and various groups of the public, are incompletely theorized; nevertheless, strands of relevant and useful theory exist across a number of different disciplines. A synthesis of these as they relate to justice systems will help to advance the development of appropriate new theory.
- The recognition of the richness of expertise collectively held by the diverse participants in justice systems and related legal services/processes is the key to gaining knowledge helpful in advancing both theory and practice. An approach that is grounded in the experience of justice system participants (providers and users) is necessary in order to tap into this pre-existing knowledge.
- The development of theory, methodology and practical application (practice/action) should not occur in isolation from one another, but be addressed as inseparable components of understanding the social world.
- A multiple method approach to data collection is required. No one method can adequately capture all aspects of the complex and fragmented organization of Canadian justice systems. Both the justice community and the public are heterogeneous groups with varied perspectives and situations. Multiple data approaches (such as in-depth interviews, observation, textual analyses, statistical information etc.) increase the richness and validity of the overall data.
- An accessible multiple media approach to dissemination of findings is needed as individuals have varied learning styles and capacities to receive, absorb, and act upon new knowledge. Different social/organizational contexts may have distinct requirements regarding style, content, and approach to accepting and introducing change. Disseminating knowledge in a variety of formats especially designed to be effective with the intended audience is, therefore, a vital component of action-oriented research.

## Research Priorities for the Canadian Forum on Civil Justice

Currently, CFCJ has identified the following areas and issues of research as priorities:

### **The Cost of Justice**

#### **Weighing the Costs of Fair and Effective Resolution to Legal Problems**

Barriers to accessing justice are a serious social concern. The expense of litigation to the justice system and to individuals was identified as one of three major concerns in the 1996 CBA Task Force on Civil Justice. A decade later, participants in the *Into the Future: The Agenda for Civil Justice Reform* conferences (<http://cfcj-fcjc.org/publications/itf-en.php>) have underlined both economic and social costs of accessing justice as a priority concern. This was also a finding in the *Civil Justice System and the Public* project.<sup>1</sup> An important component in evaluating expenditure is in understanding the detrimental economic and social costs that accrue if our civil justice system is not accessible, affordable, fair and efficient.

In response to this issue, the CFCJ has identified, as our top priority, research which strives to increase understanding of costs associated with accessing civil justice, including the economic costs both of litigation and alternative paths to justice. To date we have undertaken the following steps to forward this project:

- In collaboration with the Research and Statistics Division of Justice Canada, we Department of Justice, Canada we developed a paper looking at the social costs associated with the failure to effectively resolve legal disputes (Stratton & Anderson, 2008, <http://cfcj-fcjc.org/docs/2008/cjsp-socialproblems-en.pdf> ).
- With seed funds from the Alberta Law Foundation we have been able to:
  - ✓ Conduct a literature review identifying and assessing previous research concerning the costs of justice (<http://cfcj-fcjc.org/docs/2010/cost-litreview-en.pdf> ).
  - ✓ Establish a collaborative partnership to undertake the research including working agreement on what we mean by the cost of litigation and a preliminary strategy to develop effective measurements of these costs.
  - ✓ Develop proposals for major project funding, including a successful first stage Letter of Intent (LOI) for a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Community University Research Alliance (CURA) grant.
- With funds from the SSHRC CURA successful LOI, we have submitted (in September 2010) a full project proposal (<http://cfcj-fcjc.org/docs/2010/cost-cura-proposal-en.pdf> ). This application is supported by an Alliance of 56 members. The experience and expertise of justice stakeholders and community-based and academic researchers from across Canada, is enhanced by contributions from leading researchers in Australia, the Britain and the USA.

The members of this CURA alliance are well aware that it will be extremely challenging to calculate the costs of justice. Previous research is beset with difficulties concerning

definitions, scope, data access, and measurement validity. It is complex to determine what is to be defined as a cost and then derive a reliable method of measuring that cost. Furthermore, public financial investment in providing access to justice must be considered within the context of the social value of ensuring an effective accessible system. Empirical data about cost is, nevertheless, essential to designing and implementing effective systemic change. Ways must be found to confront the research challenges and evolve new approaches to measurement and estimation that will begin to create baselines and models against which new reforms can be chosen and assessed.

### **Establishing a Justice Index**

The *Into the Future* conference participants also identified as a key issue the current lack of systematically collected statistics pertaining to civil and administrative justice systems and processes. Developing a system of shared statistical information was an agreed priority emerging from these conferences. Establishing a national justice index will be an extremely challenging project that must involve many justice community partners and researchers across Canada. A first step will be to identify and collect any statistics that already exist. A second step will be to collaboratively develop measurements that help us to compare existing data and lead to the future collection of rigorous and comparable national data essential to accessible and cost-effective justice processes for all Canadians.

### **Understanding Public Perceptions About Canadian Justice Systems**

Governments are concerned about public confidence in Canadian justice systems. Across Canada millions of dollars per year are spent on polls that attempt to assess the state of public opinion about “the justice system” and related issues. *Public Confidence and the Civil Justice System: What Do We Know About the Issues?*<sup>1</sup> is a report prepared by the CFCJ for the Alberta Justice Policy Advisory Subcommittee on Public Confidence. Observations are based on an examination of 244 published Canadian and international information items. It is concluded that there is a lack of reliable empirical research addressing issues of public confidence in justice systems, beginning with the failure of most research to clearly define what is meant by “justice system”. The report suggests that partnerships between researchers and justice community stakeholders who understand the complex nuances of both Canadian justice systems and public views and attitudes are essential to developing valid research pertaining to public perceptions about justice issues.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <http://cfcj-fcjc.org/publications/cjsp-en.php#15> as is a more detailed report from which this one was drawn, *Public Perceptions of the Role of the Canadian Judiciary* (<http://cfcj-fcjc.org/publications/cjsp-en.php#12>).

## **Alberta Justice System Legal Services Mapping Project**

The *Alberta Self-Represented Litigants Mapping Project* conducted in 2006,<sup>2</sup> generated considerable interest in Alberta and across Canada. This initiative documented services currently available to self-represented litigants (SRLs) in three Alberta regions. Gaps in current services were identified as well as ways in which present services might better meet the needs of SRLs. Three Legal Information Centres (LInCs) have been established in response to the findings of this report.

Subsequently, members of the Alberta justice community expressed interest in a major project taking a similar approach to mapping all legal and related support services available across the province of Alberta. Such a 'map' has value to all those who provide justice services: the courts, the legal profession, legal aid, public legal education groups, *pro bono* initiatives, librarians, and legal clinics and members of the public attempting to access legal services. It will also be a significant tool for funders and service providers as it will ensure that there is a better understanding of both current services and service gaps. This collaborative venture has been guided by a partnership of Research Directors, an Advisory Committee of stakeholders and local community committees of service providers. The management of the project is overseen by CFCJ. This project has been funded by the Alberta Law Foundation and Alberta Justice.

The *Alberta Legal Services Mapping Project* (ALSMP) will conclude in January 2011. A detailed report for each of the eleven judicial districts has been provided and a final overview report will be completed. Other jurisdictions in Canada have expressed interest in research that employs a mapping process such as this. Details of the project, research instruments, access to the database of services, and all reports and associated publications are available via <http://cfcj-fcjc.org/research/mapping-en.php>.<sup>2</sup>

## **Aboriginal Issues in Access to Justice**

The *Civil Justice System and the Public* research included partners and research participants from Aboriginal communities, and CFCJ continues to work with Aboriginal groups in Alberta and across Canada. *Balancing the Scales: Understanding Aboriginal Perspectives on Civil Justice* and *Justice for Nunavummiut* are reports drawn from that research. These reports and associated lay articles are available at <http://cfcj-fcjc.org/publications/cjsp-en.php>. These reports and articles illustrate how First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples experience barriers to accessing civil and family justice. In the context of their experience the question is posed: Can the civil justice system work for Aboriginal peoples? There are many legal issues and processes relevant to their lives, but criminal incarceration and provincial child protection actions are the two areas of law that persistently impact Aboriginal peoples disproportionately. While any research into access to justice issues should be sure to include Aboriginal perspectives, it is

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<sup>2</sup> A discussion of the mapping approach is provided in Stratton 2009 (<http://cfcj-fcjc.org/docs/2008/stratton-reachingout-en.pdf>). Further details of methodology can be obtained from the author.

particularly important to provide communities with the support they need to develop funding proposals and design and conduct their own research. Aboriginal justice issues were emphasized during the *Research in Action* workshop series and the CFCJ has been approached on several occasions for assistance with proposals that we have not had the capacity to provide.

### **Meaningful Access to Justice for People With Disabilities**

Barriers to accessing justice faced by people with disabilities emerged as an important concern in both the *Civil Justice System and the Public* and the *Alberta Self-Represented Litigants Mapping Project*. In Vancouver, April 2007, a public forum, "Equal Access for People With Disabilities," was facilitated by the Law Society of British Columbia and the recent report of the Ontario "Committee on Accessibility to the Justice System of Persons with Disabilities" underlines the need for changes within the justice system to facilitate access. The Alberta Office for Disability Issues has also indicated interest in this area of research.

People with disabilities account for a small proportion of overall litigants; however, litigants with disabilities are a group that tend to experience chronic social disadvantage and often encounter problems that entwine social, civil, family and criminal justice issues. Social and support services for people with disabilities quite often lack awareness of the legal issues and needs that impact their clients. Research to better understand the special needs associated with different physical, cognitive and psychiatric disabilities is required to assist in developing ways to meet these needs within current and new justice services.

Since we first identified this priority research area, the need for research and action related to providing meaningful legal services and supports to people with mental health challenges has been repeatedly underlined.

### **Issues in Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI)**

PLEI across Canada is one area where quite extensive bodies of research do exist. Currently, however, there is considerable fragmentation of both PLEI research and development within the justice community. This tends to promote duplication of information materials; inconsistent knowledge concerning available PLEI materials, approaches and programs; and competition rather than collaboration for available PLEI funding. Government organizations, the judiciary, non-profit groups and private law firms all routinely produce PLEI materials within the same geographical jurisdictions.

The *Civil Justice System and the Public* research identified a need for better coordinated PLEI and the project data contain extensive discussions about PLEI materials from both justice community and public perspectives. Observations from the Research Team add to the richness of this information. Most of the CJSP publications refer to issues in PLEI and processes such as the Alberta mapping projects (described above) are very beneficial in documenting current PLEI resources. A brief Power Point

summary of key findings is available on our publications page but, data is available for further analysis. Further collaborative research is also required with local, provincial and national involvement to find ways to share current knowledge and better integrate PLEI development in the future. In particular, members of the PLEI community have repeatedly indicated a need to develop more effective evaluation approaches.

### **Dispute Resolution Options**

Almost all discussions about improving access to justice incorporate the promotion of dispute resolution options of all kinds. There is considerable discussion to be identified in literature from several disciplines concerning mediation and arbitration, for example. The *Civil Justice System and the Public* research revealed, however, that there is little solid evaluation research about the effectiveness of various options, and in fact little agreement concerning terminology, program content, purpose, regulation and outcome. Furthermore, this research suggests that members of the public and members of the justice community hold different views about the most desirable characteristics of effective dispute resolution options. Rigorous comparative research into these issues is much needed.

### **Involving the Public in Research on Justice Issues**

It is now widely agreed that it is also important to include public input into all justice related research projects and policy development. Finding ways to effectively involve members of the public in research on justice issues and recommendations for change is part of CFCJ mandate. Research Team observations on the challenges of doing this effectively provide data that has yet to be fully analysed and reported and more research that specifically focuses on effective ways to accomplish public involvement is still required. American research in participatory consultation for public policy development may offer valuable theory and practice examples that can be explored and applied to the context of Canadian justice systems. Follow up focus groups and community workshops associated with the *Civil Justice System and the Public* research provided action models on how to bring together members of the public and diverse members of the justice community across traditionally hierarchical research boundaries. Opportunities continue to arise for involvement in group consultations across Canada and critical analysis of participatory and collaborative research epistemology and practice is also needed.

### **Issues in Administrative Justice**

The *Civil Justice System and the Public* focused on non-criminal legal matters that may potentially come before the courts. Findings from the CJSP, subsequent CFCJ research, and other concurrent studies have underlined the legal needs of the public more broadly. Many of the important laws that affect citizens' rights in their everyday lives (for example, employment standards and conditions, social benefits, immigration, tenancy rights, human rights) are overseen by tribunals and fall into a legal area known as administrative law. The CJSP and the mapping research we have conducted have

demonstrated that civil law and administrative law issues cannot meaningfully be separated when considering access to justice for all Canadians. The pressing need for rigorous, system-oriented research concerning organization, process, equity and access to administrative justice has been underlined. The *Alberta Legal Services Mapping* includes a preliminary attempt to map access to administrative justice services. This project has also underscored interrelationships between repeated involvement in the criminal system for minor offences and a chronic lack of access to social rights and benefits and associated legal resolutions.

## **Research Development**

Participants in the *Research in Action* workshops wanted to see stronger community-university partnerships. A wide range of our justice community partners have expressed the need to learn more about the research development process and academics noted that community groups often had valuable information that they did not recognize as potential research data. Many justice community members would welcome the opportunity for workshops that partnered with social researchers to learn research skills. Others would like to contract social researchers to work with them in developing the following aspects of the research process:

- **Proposal writing.** Non-government, non-profit organizations often lack the resources and/or the training to develop strong proposals for research or program initiatives. CFCJ is frequently asked for assistance and does not have the capacity to meet the demand.
- **Critical literature reviews.** Most of our justice community partners are familiar with the process of researching and summarizing existing literature. Critically analysing such literature to ascertain the state of current knowledge and identify conceptual weaknesses and gaps is, however, an art as well as a skill more often found within social science disciplines.
- **Needs assessment and Mapping.** Justice community stakeholders are embracing collaborative processes, particularly for assessing service needs in communities. ‘Mapping’ is a more collaborative approach to conducting a needs assessment that recognizes multiple, interrelated factors and relationships and encourages community participation and ownership. There are opportunities for research contracts and for opportunities for training contracts or exchanges.
- **Evaluation.** Within the justice community, applications for funding and proposals for programs routinely request evaluation components. At the same time there is growing understanding that traditional approaches to evaluation measurement are not sufficient to providing nuanced understanding of program and policy effects and outcomes. There is high interest among stakeholders to learn more about designing evaluation measures and studies, and opportunities exist for evaluation research contracts.

All of the above research areas may be particularly valuable to graduate students, especially at the doctoral level. Graduate students may have the technical skills to assist justice community stakeholders in processes that provide enumeration and career-building professional experience. Ideally these applied research opportunities can also be matched with students' substantive academic interests.

## **Other Potential for Socio- Legal Research**

The research issues highlighted above have been identified as priority concerns widely shared within the Canadian justice community. There are many other potential socio-legal research areas of importance which are of equally high priority to members of the justice community directly concerned with these issues. There are additional topics that perhaps hold more interest to academics, but can ultimately provide important knowledge to the justice community.

The following list is far from complete. We offer a few ideas that have emerged from our research to date and welcome further suggestions.

### **New Theory About Systems of Justice**

As Wadsworth (2007) asks, "Is it safe to talk about systems again yet?"<sup>3</sup> Wadsworth contends that sociology has moved away from theory and research about systems and systemic thinking and influence, which was once the discipline's defining focus. She observes that there is a growing transdisciplinary interest in organizational theory and systemic thinking and that there is much potential for developing new and dynamic theory and epistemology. System level theories concerning the societal role of non-criminal systems of justice are especially sparse.

### **Hierarchical Relations in Legal Culture, Organization and Communication**

The *Civil Justice System and the Public* revealed a range of issues related to hierarchical relations that are of theoretical interest to social scientists across disciplines and substantive areas. The over-300 qualitative interview transcripts, entered into *Atlas.ti* qualitative software, offer data with considerable potential to inform structure-agency debates.<sup>4</sup> Partial, but currently incomplete data analysis also point to the following possibilities for research concerned with issues in hierarchical organization and communication:

- ***Issues in collaborative partnerships.*** Civil justice reform recommendations have often suggested court user committees as a way to bring together both the public and diverse representation from the justice community. There is less information on how to do this effectively within a system built around hierarchical relations. The justice community is interested in better understanding collaborative process for a variety of purposes (research, policy change, program development and service delivery) and our partners are interested in practical

guides for forming alliances that work. The *Civil Justice System and the Public* was a ground-breaking action research collaboration providing a variety of data with the potential to guide actual practice in establishing such committees. In response to requests from justice community stakeholders, we compiled *Creating Collaborative Alliances for Change: A Dynamic resource for the Justice Community* (<http://cfcj-fcjc.org/publications/cjsp-en.php#24>).<sup>5</sup> There is room for the development of further practical materials and evaluation research will also be required. Theoretically, there is also plenty of room for academic analysis of power dynamics within collaborations across hierarchies.

- **Use of space and architecture.** Court rooms and courthouses are generally imposing spaces within which the communications of a formalized and hierarchical legal culture take place. Although the courts exist to serve the interests of Canadian citizens, people who are not part of this legal culture usually find both the physical space and the interaction rituals intimidating. A very preliminary data report, “The Courthouse as a Physical Building: Impacts on Communication” was generated containing valuable information about the impact of physical aspects of court buildings on communication both between the public and the justice system, and also among those working within the system. Further research is needed.
- **Legal communication culture.** Data from the *Civil Justice System and the Public* also have much to offer researchers interested in communication interaction research. Partners in the *Civil Justice System and the Public* project have begun to develop interactive presentations that demonstrate both negative and positive communication practices across the hierarchies of justice system relations. Material from these presentations needs to be developed into a workshop manual that can be promoted for educational use within the justice system, These materials may be of particular use to private practice lawyers.
- **Communicating with the public from the perspective of the ‘front-line’.** The day-to-day experiences of front-line court clerks, security officers, legal aid receptionists and court workers are often overlooked when developing new policies and reforms. Some of our reports to date identify these issues but there is need for a more detailed focus on the communication needs and supports for those who are often the first point of contact for members of the public experiencing stress.

### **Mass Media Representations of Justice Issues**

Civil justice reform recommendations repeatedly refer to the negative role mass media plays in forming public perceptions of justice issues and systems, but at the same time point to the important and effective role the media could play in informing and educating the public. This is an interesting but very under-researched area of inquiry.

The CFCJ conducted a small exploratory study of print news coverage of civil justice issues, *Beyond the Headlines: The Role of Print Media in Public Understanding of the*

*Civil Justice System* (<http://cfcj-fcjc.org/publications/cjsp-en.php#14> ). The first part of this report discusses perceptions about the role of print media in reporting on civil justice issues from the perspectives of the justice community, the media, and the public. The second part of the report presents snapshots of the extent and content of legal coverage in two newspapers and concludes with suggestions for future research. This report is a starting point for developing dialogue and additional research about media coverage and communication in an area repeatedly identified as key to improving public knowledge about justice in general.

## **Issues in Family Law**

Issues of family law are highly complex and often involve interrelated matters that cross the artificial boundaries created between different areas of law. For example, family breakdown may involve criminal abuse charges (criminal court), child protection action (provincial territorial court), divorce and division of property (superior court) and social support payment disputes (administrative law). Needless to say, this complexity is extremely difficult to negotiate for people who are in emotional crisis. All court jurisdictions in Canada recognize the need to make family law processes easier for those who become involved. There are many opportunities to incorporate legal issues into both academic research and teaching concerning the family organization in society and there are on-going opportunities for applied socio-legal research and evaluation in the area of family law.

## **Potential Research Partnerships in Funding and Student Training**

The CFCJ welcomes interest in research collaborations that might further utilize our existing research data to address issues of practical and policy concern to our partners, or develop academic theory and methodology. We also believe there are promising opportunities to develop justice community and academic partnerships in funding and student training. The report from the Research in Action Workshops documents additional ideas and the challenges to overcome in achieving them.<sup>6</sup> Some possibilities that the *Research in Action* project explores and facilitates are:

- *Applied research contracts.* The Directory of Socio-legal Researchers (<http://cfcj-fcjc.org/directory/>) can help facilitate applied research opportunities between justice community stakeholders and community or university-based social researchers and should be expanded. As well as recording the interests and contact information of researchers, it will ideally post justice research opportunities.
- *Grants, bursaries and fellowships.* The *Research in Action* workshops were an occasion to share information about existing justice and academic community funds to support faculty and graduate student research concerning justice issues. The workshop discussions also suggest that there is room to improve the way such information is shared.

- *Secondment and special project placement.* Personnel exchanges between and among justice community, academic and community based organizations can be highly beneficial in sharing knowledge and enhancing research skills. The CFCJ has already provided such opportunities and will continue to do so whenever possible. Our national network of partners may also enable us to facilitate such opportunities across Canada and we invite inquiries about such possibilities. We observe that some universities have increased interest in facilitating such placements, but awareness of opportunities related to civil justice issues still needs to be increased.
- *Facilitated research partnerships.* At the *Research in Action* Workshops, academics told us that achieving entrée into the justice committee was often difficult. The justice community said it was almost impossible to identify interested academics! Both groups have varying ethical considerations around data and outcomes. The CFCJ has experience with the needs of both communities, including the development of contracts and project charters satisfactory to diverse partners. Capacity permitting we are available to assist in facilitating partnership agreements and sharing the resulting knowledge and processes more widely.
- *Student involvement.* Since 2001, the CFCJ has provided approximately 50 paid research assistant and coordinator positions to law and social science students, in addition to volunteer and practicum opportunities. Most positions have been part-time, but when funding has permitted, we have offered fulltime contract positions to post graduate students (BA to PhD) starting a career in applied research. Such opportunities to gain field research experience are extremely valuable to students, in terms of their on-going studies and future careers. An established research network between justice community and social researchers will increase such opportunities. Some members of the CFCJ staff and other justice community members are qualified to provide input to graduate thesis committees and can offer valuable substantive insights and access facilitation.

## **Additional Research Ideas**

This document is revised regularly. We welcome your suggestions as we continue our project to develop Canadian socio-legal research capacity and increase support for civil justice reform through research.

For more information or to provide additional research ideas, please contact:

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<sup>1</sup> The *Civil Justice System and the Public* research was funded by the Alberta Law Foundation and a SSHRC-CURA grant. For details of this project and related publications see <http://www.cfcj-fcj.org/research-cjsp.htm> .

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<sup>2</sup> The *Alberta Self-Represented Litigants Mapping Project Report* is available at <http://cfcj-fcjc.org/publications/srl-en.php> . The idea and approach for this project built on an earlier collaborative mapping process undertaken by the BC Supreme Court Self-Help Information Centre Committee. The details of that project can be found at: [http://www.lawcourtsed.ca/self\\_help\\_information\\_research/](http://www.lawcourtsed.ca/self_help_information_research/) .

<sup>3</sup> Wadsworth, Y. (2008). Is it safe to talk about systems again yet?: Self organizing process for complex living systems and the dynamics of human inquiry. *System Practice Action Research* 21,153-170.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Stratton's doctoral dissertation, *Getting an Education: Students' Views on Entering and Exiting High School*, engages with theories of structure, agency and resistance, arguing that current theory inadequately explains these interrelated concepts in the context of students' relations with the institution of education and their meso-site interactions with the school. She has suggested that similar issues in conceptualizing hierarchical agency relations are apparent within the *Civil Justice System and the Public* data and would welcome interest in exploring this aspect of the data.

<sup>5</sup> Research Director Teresa Rose and Research Coordinator Mary Stratton also produced a working paper "How Collaborative is Collaborative?: Ideals and Challenges, Tensions and Potentials in Partnership Research," that was written while the action of was still in motion. This paper engages with participatory and collaborative research literature.

<sup>6</sup> This report is available via a link to the project webpage at <http://cfcj-fcjc.org/research/socio-en.php> .