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## Eagles urges U.S. to learn about neighbors to the north

By **KEVIN FRYLING**  
*Reporter Staff Writer*

While a U.S. proposal to require passports at international border crossings has recently brought Canadian-American relations into the spotlight in Western New York, a UB political scientist says many Americans remain in the dark when it comes to the political upheaval affecting their neighbors to the north.

D. Munroe Eagles, professor of political science, adjunct professor of geography and associate dean for graduate studies in the College of Arts and Sciences, shone a light on these issues yesterday during a talk on "Canada's Unsettled Political Landscape: Implications for the Canadian-American Relationship," presented as part of the UBThisSummer lecture series.

"Canadian-American relations are complex and require active management," Eagles told those gathered in the Natural Sciences Complex for the weekly lecture series. "Both sides of the equation—Canadians and Americans—don't necessarily attend to the complexities of this relationship and what's needed to manage it at the highest level effectively."

The Canadian political scene has experienced a great deal of turmoil during the past several years, he said, with two governments coming to power in the past three years. Eagles pointed to two reasons for this recent upheaval: a proliferation of Canadian political parties during the 1990s and a "sponsorship scandal," known as "AdScam," that brought down the newly elected prime minister, Paul Martin, in 2006.

"It's an unusual time in Canadian history to see this level of political instability," he noted.

Also complicating factors is the fact that parliament under both the current and last prime minister has been composed of minority governments, which makes it difficult to pass legislation, Eagles said, adding that only 12 of 39 Canadian parliaments have failed to produce majority governments since 1867.

Although the merger of the Progressive Conservative Party and the Canadian Alliance to create the Conservative Party—and the election of its leader, Stephen Harper, as prime minister on Feb. 6, 2006—has brought about some sense of stability, Eagles said Harper remains a controversial figure whose political philosophy and personal style clash for some with the traditional vision of a Canadian prime minister.

Harper is a product of the Canadian conservative "Calgary School," which advocates libertarian values, free trade and aboriginal assimilation, and criticizes affirmative action and "activism of the courts," he explained.

He also noted that Harpers' emphasis on traditional values and Christian principles, support of the War on Terror—13,500 Canadian troops currently are stationed in Afghanistan—and extreme pro-Americanism are at odds with the views of many Canadians. He pointed to Harper's 26 percent approval rating as a sign of this tenuous grip on power.

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Yet, Eagles said, these drastic political changes seem to have had little impact on the perceptions of most Canadians and Americans, as public opinion on the relationship between the two nations did not shift significantly between 2005 and 2006, according to data collected as part of a collaborative research project between UB and SES Research, a public opinion and research firm based in Ottawa.

"We don't see much change [in public opinion] for all of the change at the top," Eagles said. "The pro-American orientation of Stephen Harper doesn't seem to be noticed south of the border. Certainly not by George W. Bush—he's got larger fish to fry—but it doesn't seem to be noticed by Canadians, either."

Fortunately, UB is in a prime position to fight this lack of knowledge about Canadian politics, Eagles said, citing the university's location on the Canadian-American border and its Canadian-focused programs, such as the Canadian-American Studies Committee, Canada-United States Trade Center, Canada-United States Legal Studies Centre and the UB Regional Institute, which recently released results of the "Region's Edge," a research and civic engagement initiative focused on issues of cross-border governance, economic integration and related policy implications.

"We need to really work to understand this relationship and make it work for us, particularly here at UB and particularly here on the Niagara Frontier, because we are on the border," he said. "We live with these folks."