Riddell Faculty Seminar Series presents:

Power from the North: Modernity and the landscape of hydroelectricity in Quebec

Dr. Caroline Desbiens,
Canada Research Chair,
Laval University

Date: Thursday, February 5th, 2015
Time: 1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Place: Klaus Hochheim Theatre
(5th floor, Wallace Building)

Abstract: In the 1970s, Hydro-Québec declared “We Are Hydro-Québécois.” The publicity campaign slogan symbolized the extent to which hydroelectric development in the North was an expression of Québécois identity, territoriality and aspiration to modernity. Analyzing the cultural forces that contributed to the transformation of the La Grande River into a hydroelectric complex, Caroline Desbiens explores how this “culture of hydroelectricity” shaped the material landscape of James Bay/Eeyou Istchee in the latter part of the 20th century. Policy makers and Quebecers did not, she argues, view those who built the dams as mere workers. They saw them as pioneers in a largely uninhabited landscape – despite the Eeyouch’s presence – now inscribed with the codes of technology, progress, and spectacle. Drawing power from the North has involved more than economic development: it has also contributed to the production of distinct Québécois cultural landscapes that have shifted ways of viewing, and therefore knowing, the region.

Biography: Caroline Desbiens is a Canada Research Chair in Historical Geography of the North at Laval University. She is the author of Power from the North: Territory, Identity, and the Culture of Hydroelectricity in Quebec (UBC Press).

12:00 p.m. Free pizza lunch for graduate students with Dr. Desbiens, Dean’s Office Boardroom - 440 Wallace Building.