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Panel Discussion: The Future of Finnish Studies in North America  
The 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Finnish Studies at the University of Toronto

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Your Excellency, President Niinistö, and Mrs Jenni Haukio, and distinguished guests.

It is my honor to be invited to this discussion. As a PhD candidate in a Canadian university and a former graduate from the University of Helsinki, I am pleased to have this opportunity to share some of my thoughts on the future of Finnish Studies in Canada and elsewhere.

The following ideas are based on my experiences in two different educational systems, and in two different cultures: Finnish and Canadian.

During the past 25 years, the Finnish Studies program at the University of Toronto has done a great job in teaching students about the Finnish language and culture. Now as a member of the Finnish-Canadian community, I would like to share *three points* with you.

*My first point* is my belief that the Finnish Studies program cannot survive as “Finnish Studies” without the Finnish language. Think of teaching and studying British culture without any command of the English language. I think that culture and language are deeply interconnected.

*The language is the key to the culture*, one might conclude. We should remember this connection when we consider everything else I will say.

*My second point* is that the Finnish Studies program in North America needs to open up to the wider society. The University of Toronto is one of the top universities in the world. To be able to survive in these turbulent times, the Finnish program needs more openness, more interaction, more networks, and more innovation.

I think this is what is just happening here, right now.

If I am allowed to make one concrete proposal, there should be a course titled as: “The Contemporary Finnish Society”. The course could engage visiting speakers from the different fields of expertise. They can be from science, business, culture, or even from sports (for instance, ice hockey connects many Finns and Canadians!).

These new relationships and connections can bring us new innovations and ideas. Personally, I would be interested in learning more about internationally successful Finnish innovations: why they were successful? What was done right and what can we do better?

In Finland, there has been a lot of discussion about the third mission of universities. Two other missions are, of course, teaching and research. The third mission refers to the way how universities contribute to the society: what is the social impact of academic programs? What is the role of academics in public life?

Universities have a role to play in economic, social, and cultural development. The Finnish Studies program could focus on how better carry out its third mission.

*Lastly, my third point is that* anything I just mentioned cannot be done without resources. Now the highest priority should be put in ensuring a stable financial base for the Finnish Studies program at U of T.

In the future, the program will need support from individual donors and non-profit foundations as well as from the private sector. Everyone in this room is welcomed to support the Finnish studies program with their networks and knowledge.

The Finnish Studies program can show its relevance only by being relevant for the students and for the greater community. We have to drop the puck on the ice and start playing the game that is new and has more players.

The Finnish Studies program can have an important role to play as a central hub of the Finnish-Canadian community. It has a cultural significance and it can bring more people together. That is the new game.

All Finnish Studies programs in North America have great opportunities ahead of them. But we need to be able to use these opportunities. We need to bring out new ideas and innovations to develop the Finnish Studies to be the best it can be. And do it together. Thank you.