Dissent - the critique of and opposition to dominant or official views, practices, and policies - is a fundamental component of a healthy democracy. Meaningful participation through advocacy can occur in many forums, including in legislature(s), in court(s), in the media, and in the street(s). The right to dissent and to advocate for alternative understandings through co-operative action and communication underpins the capacity to engage with public policy and political issues. The rights enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms - conscience, thought, opinion, expression, communication, assembly, and association - demonstrate the importance of social dissent in free and democratic societies.

However, emerging trends in ‘free’ democracies, including Canada, signal increasing state actions that directly and indirectly demonstrate state-antagonism towards dissent and dissenters. Although developing and developed nations can still resort to force to quell dissent within developing nations, Noam Chomsky has said that individuals in developed nations have gained too many rights to allow for the blunt use of state force. In addition to punctuated manifestation of state violence against dissent, developed nations use alternate means of silencing - targeted funding cuts, intimidation, defamation, propaganda, surveillance, muzzling, weakening of oversight bodies, limiting access to information, hollowing out of public education, marginalizing research and knowledge development, and reducing the legal and political space within which dissent can be expressed and heard.

Regulation of dissent though the limitation of the capacity and freedom of individuals and groups engages a range of principles, norms, and practices that span the domestic and international, the substantive and procedural, and the legal and traditional arenas. Differences in intra-state and inter-state interests are obscured and homogenized by reference to national, international, global, and economic (resource) interests of convenient groupings, while the cult of individuality and consumer-citizenry dissolves bonds of solidarity and community. This doublethink of abstract groupings and real isolation, combined with the workings of global capital-favouring capitalism and the increasingly influential role of non-state norm-creators’ challenges to traditional understandings of law, are ripe for scholarly attention.

Concerns about the constrictions of legal and political space for advocacy and dissent, both domestically and internationally, involving state and non-state and supra-state actors, is the motivation for this year’s Osgoode Forum. These concerns call for renewed rethinking and re-examination of legal, social, and political frameworks through with we practice, permit, control, and censor dissent - how we define and demonstrate the relationship between state and society, as well as among individuals and states.
We invite proposals for papers, presentations, panels, and other interventions (including art-based and performance contributions) from Master’s and Doctoral students, artists and activists, from a range of science, social science, and humanities disciplines, including: Law, political science, international relations, international development, economics, sociology, and psychology on the intersection of law, dissent, advocacy, power, and democracy.

Research streams could include, but are not limited to:

1. Dissent and the state-society relationship (in the context of capitalist globalization);
2. “Rule of Law”, dissent, and modes/forums of dissent;
3. Power, advocacy, and dissent;
4. Temporary/Migrant/Displaced Workers/Populations, Rights, Society, and State;
5. Aboriginal rights, Indigenous sovereignty, and Democracy;
6. Governance, Law, Non-State actors, and globalization;
7. Rights of/to dissent within international and national legal frameworks;
8. Role of government in promoting/enabling/hindering/encouraging/discouraging dissent;
9. Marginalization, dissent, and culture;
10. Art and advocacy;
11. Lawyers, Advocacy, and Dissent;
12. University (or other) funding, research, and publication of findings/results;
13. Access/limitation to/of information and democracy;
14. Interaction of Courts, Executive, and Legislative Bodies in Dissent and Advocacy;
15. Domestic or international legal, social, and political constraints on/protection for advocacy and dissent;

Submissions Guidelines:

Please submit your abstracts in English to glsa@osgoode.yorku.ca, and use “CONFERENCE ABSTRACT” in the subject heading. Abstracts should be approximately 250 words in length, and should include (i) your name, (ii) title of the paper, (iii) your organization or institution (if any), and (iv) a list of key words. If you would like your paper considered for publication, please indicate this intention at the end of your abstract. The abstract submission deadline is by the end of day January 31, 2014. Successful applicants will be notified by February 15th, 2014.

Final papers must be submitted by May 1, 2014, to allow for dissemination so that forum participants can engage with authors, and provide authors with feedback and comments.

Information about conference site, accommodation, conference fees, and programming will be provided before the abstract submission deadline at www.glsa.osgoode.yorku.ca.