Campus traffic patterns changing, audit shows

UVic commuters are taking the bus more, taking their cars less and are even logging onto skateboards to make it to class, according to the latest campus travel study.

The 2004 audit, conducted by Burnt and Associates in mid-October, “is a snapshot of where the campus is at in terms of transit usage, car ridership and bicycle commuting,” says Sarah Webb, UVic’s sustainability coordinator.

UVic has been conducting traffic audits every few years since 1992. The latest data shows that traffic to campus has declined 13 per cent since 2000 while cycling trips have risen by 12 per cent in the same period.

For the first time, less than 50 per cent of the trips to campus were in a single occupancy vehicle while transit ridership has increased by 33 per cent over 2000 levels, representing over one quarter of the trips made to campus.

The 2004 audit was the first one to measure trips to campus by doorboards and rollerblades and also documented the number of UVic employees who work from alternative locations.

Webb says the addition of nearly 400 residence rooms at UVic this fall has already had an impact on traffic to campus. “Parking pass sales are generally down this year. We can definitely correlate the decrease to the addition of on-campus housing.”

She says the data from this latest audit is encouraging and will further assist the university in implementing transportation demand management initiatives that encourage and reward sustainable travel behaviour.

CIBC gift assists transition to workforce

by Chris Thackray

The shift from campus life to the working world is sometimes difficult for students, but a $500,000 gift over five years from CIBC to UVic career services will make that easier.

The gift will support the development of the applied career transition project. This five year pilot project is targeted at recent UVic graduates, not current students, and guides them through their transition into the labour market. In recognition of the gift, the library in career services will be named the CIBC Career Resource Library.

“This gift will allow us to continue developing the programs and services that our graduates need to make the successful change from their studies into meaningful and productive careers,” says Jennifer Margison, manager of career services. The program provides graduates with the guidance they need to build professional relationships and networks that are the foundations of a career.

“Our students are faced with so many questions when they graduate. ‘What can I do with my degree? Where do I want to work? How do I get my foot in the door without any experience?’ Thanks to CIBC’s gift, we can provide support and coaching for new grad as they begin building their professional working lives,” adds Margison.

New medical building throws open its doors

by Beth Hayson

Flanked by dignitaries and doctors-to-be, Premier Gordon Campbell opened UVic’s Medical Sciences Building on Dec. 10 and ceremonially launched undergraduate medical training on Vancouver Island.

“We’ve never educated physicians here before; it’s time we changed that. I can’t tell you how pleased I am that this is happening,” Campbell told a packed audience in the building’s spanking new lecture theatre.

The building, with its state-of-the-art equipment, puts UVic at the leading edge of providing medical education and better health care for the people of British Columbia, commented Campbell.

The new equipment was put to immediate use as many of the 230 guests overflowed to a second lecture theatre, set up with widescreen monitors.

As well as the premier, ministers Shirley Bond and Colin Hansen, members of the UVic executive and board of governors, and medical leaders came to celebrate UVic’s achievement in successfully establishing a home base for the Island Medical Program (IMP).

The IMP—part of the UBC facility of medicine’s new, province-wide MD undergraduate program—has come about thanks to the vision of the provincial government and key collaborations between the universities and the medical community, said Dr. Gavin Stuart, dean of UVic’s medical school.

It’s part of a long-term strategy to help ease regional shortages of doctors, particularly in medically underserved, small and rural communities and such as those on Vancouver Island. It will also nearly double the number of annual medical graduates in the province by 2010.

“This is a great day for health care on Vancouver Island,” said UVic President Dr. David Turpin. “I’m proud of the central role this university is playing in providing more doctors on Vancouver Island and across the province.

“UVic’s expertise in biomedical sciences, as well as the strength of its centres on aging and Aboriginal peoples’ health are among the assets here that will give students exposure to a wide range of medical issues and practices.”

Turpin joined the premier and UVic Chancellor Ron Lou-Poy in unveiling a plaque commemorating

Tsunami aid planned

Like the rest of the world, UVic students, staff and faculty returned to classes saddened and shocked by the images of devastation caused by the Boxing Day tsunami in South Asia. At press time, several campus groups were discussing fundraising initiatives. Check the UVic homepage at www.uvic.ca over the next few weeks for more details.

UVic co-op had contacted students in the affected regions to ensure that those who had stayed in the areas over Christmas break were safe. Several international students who arrived on campus this month come from countries that were hardest hit. They were offered assistance through counselling services, the interfaith chaplaincy and international exchange student services.

Medicin students (left to right) Stephen Burgess, Averil Russell, Michelle Traupmann and Patrizia Moccia celebrate the opening of their new Island Medical Program home.
**Around the ring**

**Men’s soccer team raises championship banner**

UVic athletics kicks off the new year with a tribute to the Vikes men’s soccer team, the 2004 Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) champions. The team will be honored with a banner-raising ceremony on Jan. 7 in the McKinnon Gym during the half time of the men’s basketball game. The men’s soccer squad captured their fourth title—their first since 1996—with a 3-1 victory over McGill University in November. Fifth-year midfielder Sean Battiston was named Adidas player of the game and voted by coaches as tournament MVP. Vikes goalkeeper Trevor Stiles was named as first team All-Canadian.

**Alumni travel program showcases 2005 trips**

The UVic Alumnae and Friends Travel Program will host a Travel Expo on Jan. 20 starting at 4:30 p.m. and continuing to 9 p.m. in the Cadboro Commons (Arbutus/Queenwood rooms). The program’s travel agents—Men Travel and University Travel—will be on hand to offer details and answer questions about their 2005 offerings. Available options range from weekend getaways to extended cruises. A portion of revenue generated by tour bookings helps support students and alumni programs.

**The work stuff en français**

Franklin Pharma and Francophone students from across UVic will reveal in the French language for 24 hours beginning Jan. 21 as part of the second annual Writing Marathon. During the marathon, participants will use knowledge of the French language to create literary texts in a series of workshops held by French-language and literature professors. Marathon participants will share a potluck dinner and breakfast and recharge their creativity with a late night swim and morning activity before writing their final words on Jan. 22. The marathon is an opportunity to learn and practice different techniques of creative writing and meet new people. For more information and to register, visit web.uvic.ca/~lnpoulin/PW401/Assignments/assignement_3/Home/wmportal.htm.

**Conference seeks nominations for outstanding UVic women**

Members of the campus community are invited to put forward names for the UVic Women’s Conference Recognition Awards. The UVic Women’s Conference is the education and personal development of UVic women—students, staff, alumni or faculty. The nomination deadline is 4 p.m., Jan. 13. The goal of the Feb. 7-9 conference is to connect and network UVic women—students, staff, alumni or faculty. The keynote speaker is Kimberley Grist, UVic student and Paralympic medal winner. For more information call 720-8500 or visit web.uvic.ca/women/conference.

**New stewardship officer seeks to strengthen links with donors**

by Chris Thackray

While fundraisers emphasize the importance of asking for support, UVic’s new officer of donor recognition and stewardship knows that showing gratitude and staying connected are just as important. “It’s vital that we keep donors connected to the benefits their gifts bring,” says Marg Rose, who came from Winnipeg in November to take up the new donor recognition position in UVic’s development office.

“Marg is a great addition to our team,” says Birgit Cardoneline, director of central development in external relations. “Our donors are central to UVic’s position as one of Canada’s top-ranked universities, and donor recognition and stewardship is a vital part of the service we provide to our supporters.”

Rose has more than 20 years experience with college, corporate and non-profit organizations. As former executive director of Literacy Partners of Manitoba (LPM), the helped raise over $4 million for research and services for adult learners in Manitoba. Her organizational skills helped LPM win the Canada Post Literacy Community Leadership award in 2003.

In 2003 she was called to the House of Commons to act as policy advisor to federal officials. During her tenure with LPM, she achieved a 300 per cent increase in revenue and doubled its membership base. She’ll soon complete her master’s in adult education at St. Francis Xavier University.

“I’ve been making the case for supporting education for a long time,” says Rose. “UVic’s donors and supporters know the value of higher education. I want to strengthen their connection to our university’s mission and strategic plan. We want to provide a first-class education to people of all ages.”

For Rose, people always come first. “Future development is based on one-to-one, personal relationships. People give to people, not to institutions. So my first task is to listen, to find out what donors want from us as their lives change. I hope to help our team develop meaningful ways to help donors feel appreciated by UVic.”

The acknowledges that UVic already has a number of outreach and donor relations programs. “UVic is doing great things in these areas. Now we’re focusing even more time and resources to make sure our supporters are appreciated on an individual level.”
Things are flowing in the right direction for UVic’s facilities management. The university has received the Capital Regional District EcoStar Award in the category of urban watershed quality. Lieutenant Governor Isma Campbell presented the award to facilities management director Jerry Robson and sustainability co-ordinator Sarah Webb in November. The EcoStar awards honour individuals, groups or organizations that have contributed to collaborative efforts to address urban water quality. UVic was recognized for the development of its integrated storm water management plan, and for its implementation of best management practices in both new developments and retrofits.

UVic’s associate vice president of planning and sustainability, Mary Anne Waldron, was among 10 distinguished BC lawyers appointed Queen’s Counsel in December. The QC designation is an honour conferred on members of the legal profession to recognize exceptional merit and contribution. Appointees require that nominees demonstrate professional integrity and good character, and be a member of the BC bar for at least five years. Waldron has been a faculty member in UVic’s law school since 1976, served as associate dean of law from 1988 to 1996, and was acting dean from 1993 to 1994. She’s a former master teacher award winner and has served on several university committees.

Dr. Harold Coward, for studies in religion and society, has been elected president of Academy I of the Royal Society of Canada for a two-year term. Academies, or the Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences, is designed to recognize excellence in the arts, humanities and social sciences. UVic has six current and former faculty members who are fellows of the Royal Society of Canada.

Biology PhD student Chris Darimont has won the Animal Action Award for Conservation in Science from the International Fund for Animal Welfare. Darimont, who shares the award with his research partner, Chester Starr (Lone Wolf) of the Heiltsuk First Nation, uses non-invasive techniques to study wolves and predator-prey relationships in BC’s Great Bear Rainforest. The project is funded by the Raincoast Conservation Society. Darimont is also an outspoken critic of bothahlen and invasive wildlife management practices such as predator control and wolf sterilization.

Marnie Swanson, university librarian since 1988, has won the 2004 Distinguished Alumni Award from the University of Alberta Library and Information Studies. Alumni of the department were among the first of the graduate courses of U of A library studies program and has devoted more than three decades of her time and energy to the Canadian library community.

Norma Mickelson, a former director of the University of Alberta’s School of Library and Information Studies, shares the award with his research partner, Chester Starr (Lone Wolf) of the Heiltsuk First Nation, uses non-invasive techniques to study wolves and predator-prey relationships in BC’s Great Bear Rainforest. The project is funded by the Raincoast Conservation Society. Darimont is also an outspoken critic of bothahlen and invasive wildlife management practices such as predator control and wolf sterilization.

Dr. Arif Babul (physics & astrophysics) was named Canadian Astronomer of the Month for December 2004 and January 2005 by the Canadian Astronomical Society. A feature on Babul on the organization's educational website (www.cas.ca) included background information on his research interests, why he studies and works in Canada, and why he chose to work at UVic. "With active participation in the educational programs in B.C.'s Great Bear Rainforest. The project is funded by the Raincoast Conservation Society. Darimont is also an outspoken critic of bothahlen and invasive wildlife management practices such as predator control and wolf sterilization.

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After 15 years of planning experience in areas as diverse as Toronto and the Okanagan, UVic alumna Tracy Corbett is back on campus, guiding implementation of the university’s campus plan as UVic’s new director of campus planning and sustainability.

"There’s no shortage of issues to be addressed as a result of the campus plan and the report of the planning review team, called the Haven report," says Corbett. "Some of the more immediate tasks include developing a consultation process and a set of principles for public involvement to guide future planning.”

She’s also working with campus community members and adjacent municipalities to develop a strategy for dealing with parking needs as the university redelves lots within the Ring Road for academic uses.

"I was pleased to see the strong commitment to sustainability and ‘smart growth’ principles articulated in the campus plan,” says Corbett. "I think the university is well positioned to become a model of sustainable and green development.”

Some of the projects suggested in the campus plan—that Corbett will be working on in the near future—include the Village Centre, the Southwest Quadrant Study, and future options for the CV/J lands, the large open area bordering on Cedar Hill Cross Road to the east of the University Drive.

Corbett holds an undergraduate degree from UVic in geography and economics and a master’s degree in science in planning from the University of Toronto. She started out working for Metro Toronto and has done stints with the central Okanagan Regional District, the city of Calgary and the Capital Regional District. Corbett has also been employed in the social service field as a consultant in social research and program evaluation.

UVic achieves another top three finish

UVic has emerged from the university rankings season with yet another top three finish, this time in the annual university accountability survey by professors in Wilfrid Laurier University’s school of business and economics.

UVic finished third out of 46 Canadian universities ranked on their accountability to the public in 26 different categories. UVic was rated the fourth C.U. university to make the top 12.

The accountability survey rates the depth, clarity and quality of publicly available university information on everything from its mission statement to performance targets to detailed financial statements and research summaries. UVic’s success in the accountability survey follows a third-place finish in the comprehensive category of the annual Maclean’s ranking of Canadian universities, a third-place finish among comprehensive universities across the country in the Research Influence measure of research activity, and an A-plus grade for education in the Globe and Mail national university report card.

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It’s a jungle out there

by Lynnda Hills

The Ring January 2005

What better place to study tropical biodiversity than in the tropics?

Malaysian field guide Kumanadevan Lamminathan with UVic biology students.

New website explores B.C.’s critical energy issues

by Lynda Hills

More than 50 per cent of B.C.’s energy needs are met by oil and gas, most of which is produced in the northeast of the province. In order to inform the public about this critical issue, UVic biologist instructor Dr. Whitcher (earth & ocean sciences) has developed a new website—www.energylec.ca.

Although information on the topic is available elsewhere, it’s our goal to provide an integrative and dynamic site with comprehensive coverage,” says Whitcher. “We view our role as an independent knowledge broker.”

The site tackles not only the natural science questions, such as geology and geophysics, but also deals with the myriad environmental, social and jurisdictional issues surrounding the subject. The site focuses initially on B.C. offshore oil and gas questions.

The site does not advocate a position of keeping or lifting the B.C. offshore moratorium, but is built around the belief that “informed people make better choices.” It’s sponsored by UVic and the Coasts Under Stress program.

Whitcher, whose research includes petroleum geocchemistry and climate change, is a major contributor to: the federal public review panel on the moratorium; the expert panel on science issues related to oil and gas activities, offshore British Columbia; and the B.C. government’s scientific review panel’s report on offshore oil and gas exploration.

New buildings feature water re-use systems

by Lynda Hills

Every time students, staff and faculty flush the toilets in the new Medical Sciences Building, they’re helping the university conserve water. That’s due to the new campus water reuse initiative, which is taking treated waste water from the outdoor aquatic facility on campus and recycling it into toilets and urinals.

The aquatic facility is located behind the Cunningham Building between Petch and the Engineering Lab Wing.

“Facilities management wanted to go beyond traditional water conservation and into waste water re-applications,” says Sarah Webb, UVic’s sustainability co-ordinator.

The re-used water will come from the aquatic facility’s fish and intertidal research tanks. “Water is treated through an ionisation process to ensure the highest water quality standard,” says Webb.

Benefits include: lowering the demand for potable water, saving energy and money, and reducing the load on Oak Bay’s sanitary sewer system.

Over the course of a year it’s estimated that the project will save the CRD staff more than two million litres of potable water.

The second phase of the initiative will use the same water system for the new Engineering/Computer Science Building, and will also augment the building’s regular heating source. An additional system will capture energy from the water to heat the buildings through a warm-to-waste heat pump.

Both new reuse systems have been planned with extra pipes that use regular water. This will allow facilities management to automatically switch over to this backup system should the need arise.

“The university worked closely with engineering consultants, Oak Bay, the CRD and the Vancouver Island Health Authority to ensure that a system that is safe and reliable,” says Webb.

With these projects, UVic is able to submit an application to the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Program (LEED).

“THE LEED green building rating system recognizes buildings that emphasize low-impact design, construction and operations,” says Webb. “The result is high-quality and high-performance buildings with reduced environmental impacts.”

LEED building ratings are certified silver, gold or platinum. With this two-phase initiative, the Medical Sciences Building is aiming for gold level status.

“Extremely excited about this project,” says Webb. “It’s a great opportunity to turn waste water into water for domestic use.”

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from most departments at UVic and developing resources for teaching assistant training.

"Dave continues to seek new and innovative ways to improve his programs," says master’s candidate Kristen Arwood. "His adherence to the notion of peers teaching peers demonstrates his respect for graduate student skills."

Dave won the Alumni Award for Teaching Excellence at UVic in 1997 and the most covered award in Canada for teaching excellence—the 3M Teaching Fellowship—in 2000. "Dave deserves to be recognized for his hard work, dedication, respect for all people and for the passion and enthusiasm with which he approaches his job," says Arwood.

Roger John, aboriginal student advisor in the faculty of human and social development, combines advocacy, moral support, referrals, academic advising and supportive counselling to create a sense of community for aboriginal students.

"Roger works closely with aboriginal students and staff and faculty, as well as non-aboriginal staff, faculty and students, offering advice, information, and counsel on respectful protocols across cultures and peoples, as well as ways of learning, knowing and conducting research," says Dr. Michael Prince, acting dean of human learning, knowing and conducting research, "Roger has worked tirelessly in developing connections among First Nations students, faculty members, staff and communities, making UVic a more welcoming learning environment for First Nations students," says Angela Antoine, assistant aboriginal student advisor.

Darlene Pouliot, administrative assistant in the department of history in art and a UVic employee for 19 years, is considered 'the nerve centre' of the department.

"Darlene performs her duties with outstanding competence, efficiency, dedication, cheerfulness and generosity," says one of her nominators.

Pouliot’s proficiency and grasp of university policy and procedures improves co-workers and students alike. She’s an advocate for students and is especially aware and protective of their rights. Throughout her day she helps with everything from most complex procedural matters to a blown light bulb.

"Darlene has a caring, helpful attitude that she exhibits to all her colleagues in all situations," says Anne Henry, undergraduate advisor in the faculty of fine arts. "She’s the most thoughtful person I know. Pouliot’s dedication also extends to a range of faculty, university and civic involvements. She’s active in her own community, whether it’s teaching folk art painting, organizing the campaign for the Diabetes Foundation in her neighbourhood or arranging a Christmas fund to provide gifts for a needy single parent family.

Fourteen people from several departments put their collective heads together to streamline access to UVic’s research expertise. The expertise database group developed and implemented an online database that taps into university knowledge.

"With this resource, faculty can look for collaborators, administrators can locate expert committee members, and industrialists can find new partners," says Dr. Richard Keefer, associate vice president research. "Prospective graduate students can also search for potential supervisors and the general public can explore the depth and breadth of research at the university."

"The expertise database group is a wonderful example of how administrative staff across several units are dedicated to the efficient and effective operation of UVic," says Keefer. The expertise database can be accessed through the research link on the UVic home page, or by visiting uvic.ca/experts.

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An associate professor in the department of Hispanic and Italian studies, Beatriz de Alba-Koch teaches Spanish and courses on colonial and 19th-century Hispanic American literature. Born in Mexico, de Alba-Koch graduated from the Instituto Tecnologico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey. She earned an MA in Spanish from Queen’s University and a PhD from Princeton, and pursued graduate work in Latin American studies at the University of Paris VIII. She has published several articles and a book on late colonial Mexican literature.

“In everyday life, people are affected by climate and the weather, as well as industry-related air pollution,” says Bouslaem Khouider, assistant professor in the department of mathematics and statistics. Khouider uses applied mathematics to study turbulent premixed flames, and computational fluid dynamics to better understand tropical meteorology. Khouider earned his PhD in applied mathematics at the Université de Montréal in 2002 and spent three years training at the Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences in New York University before coming to UVic. The faculty of business has become even more international with the addition of Dr. Basma Majerbi. A professor of international finance, investments, derivatives and risk management, she’s fluent in English, French, Arabic, and is familiar with Italian and Spanish. Majerbi joined the faculty last summer, and divides her time between teaching and research in international finance, international asset pricing and emerging markets.

Ever wonder what child prodigies used to do before the days of chess and sport, or when the first baby diapers were used? Dr. Helene Cazes can tell you. Cazes, an assistant professor in the French department, is writing a book on the history of diapering and women’s role in the history of childhood. She teaches courses on the history of ideas, women authors and literature in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Before coming to UVic as a sessional instructor, she taught at the Universities of Paris V-Sorbonne and Paris X-Nanterre.

Acclaimed Canadian playwright Joan MacLeod joined UVic as an assistant professor in the writing department last fall. She teaches dramatic writing and is known for tackling important social issues and weaving them into the context of family relationships. MacLeod has written eight plays including The Shape of a Girl, which has been touring for four years, has been translated into six languages and was recently optioned for television rights.

The concept of grid computing is simple: many individual computers are linked together, much like the Web, to create a large system with computational power that far surpasses that of supercomputers. In principle, any researcher can log on to a grid and use the memory and processing abilities of all its computers, no matter where they are. UVic’s current grid, GridX1, allows physicists easy access to computing power by linking numerous large research computer sites across Canada.

Now GridX1 is going international, joining forces with the world’s largest grid project, the LCG Project, located at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) laboratory in Geneva. As a result, particle physics researchers the world over will be able to use the new international grid for the next major project in particle physics—the Large Hadron Collider (LHC). The LHC is an accelerator which brings protons into head-on collisions at higher energies than ever achieved before. This will allow scientists to generate still further into the structure of matter and recreate the conditions prevailing in the early universe, just after the Big Bang. The LHC will generate more data than any previous grid to date.

“The Web was invented by particle physicists in order to share data more easily and it ended up changing the way the world works and exchanges information,” says Dr. Richard Kenler, a physicist and UVic’s associate vice president research. “The grid is the next step and promises to change the way we process information and create new knowledge.”

“We’ll collect a petabyte of data a year beginning in 2007 and the grid is the only way to analyse it,” says Dr. Randy Sobie, an adjunct professor at UVic and an Institute of Particle Physics research scientist. A petabyte is a million gigabytes or approximately 100 times the amount of information in all the books in the U.S. Library of Congress.

Sobie and UVic’s particle physicist Dr. Bob Kowalewski worked with researchers from the National Research Council, the TRIUMF laboratory and the University of Alberta and SFU to hook the GridX1 Project to the international grid in Geneva. The team is also collaborating with researchers from the WestGrid Computing Consortium to help connect its large cluster at UBC to the international grid.

For more information, visit Sobie and UVic’s particle physics scientist. A petabyte is a million gigabytes or approximately 100 times the amount of information in all the books in the U.S. Library of Congress.

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Wednesday, January 26

Lansdowne Lecture 7 p.m. Old-Growth Forests, Coal and Conservation Paradigms. Dr. Jerry Franklin, Univ. of Washington. Strong C103. 721-7554

Thursday, January 27
Lansdowne Lecture 5:30 p.m. Patterns of Forest Mortality in the Pacific Northwest: Lessons in the Learned for Forest Management. Dr. Jerry Franklin, Univ. of Washington. Univ. Centre A180. 721-7903

Women Scholars Lecture 7:30 p.m. Melting Glaciers and Emerging Identities in the Sierras in the 21st Century. Dr. Lucille Clifton, UBC. Hickman 110. 472-5305

Saturday, January 29
University of Victoria Opera Gala 8 p.m. Janos Sandor, conductor. UVic. Centre Auditorium. 860-7929. 721-7903

United Way campaign goes over the top

by Lynda Hills

The 2004 UVic United Way campus campaign came to a triumphant end in December with a final total of more than $207,000. The target was $200,000.

“This has been a great campaign. We have a large group of new donors, and our regular donors have increased their contributions to make UVic the second largest campaign in the region,” says campaign chair Dr. Rebecca Grant. “With an average pledge of more than $300 per donor, we can all be proud of the university community.”

Among the many efforts on campus were the McPherson Library book sale that contributed $5,734 to the campaign, and the Hearts and Hands craft fair which contributed $1,608.

The surprise fundraising hit this year was the penny drive challenge, which raised $1,415. The winner was the history department, with geography coming in second.

According to Grant, groups such as the Engineering Students’ Society, the Commerce Students’ Society, the Hearts and Hands organizers, and departments that staged events or organized raffles, went above and beyond to make the campaign a success.

“Ed also like to personally thank the United Way campaign team for the time and effort they contributed,” Grant says. “Year after year, these volunteers are the real muscle behind our results, and they deserve the gratitude of the entire university community for a job well done.”
We all know how frustrating it can be to try to listen to someone when other people in the room are talking. You wish you could lower the volume on everyone else so you can follow what the speaker is saying.

Well, that's not going to happen. But what if you're a hearing-impaired child in a classroom? Sometimes you can hear the teacher, but classroom discussions can be a confusing jumble of voices. Wouldn't it be great if there was a way to signal to the rest of the class that they need to quieten down?

That is going to happen—thanks to the creativity of the University of Victoria Assistive Technology Team (UVATT), a group of UVic researchers who design, build and test customized devices for the disabled.

The UVATT team includes faculty and staff from a wide range of disciplines, technicians, graduate students, co-op students, and hundreds of engineering undergraduates who enthusiastically design new devices as part of their course work.

"Students get to spend their time and energy on projects that are making a real difference in people's lives," says UVic biology Dr. Nigel Livingston, founder and director of UVATT. "You can't get that sort of experience out of a textbook."

Just ask Michael Osusky. Last fall, the third-year engineering student spent a co-op work term with UVATT, building and testing a system to help hearing-impaired children in the classroom. "It's great," says Osusky. "You're not just sitting in a lab cranking out code or working on something little. You actually see it impacting someone in a positive way."

All UVATT projects are suggested by individuals or organizations in the community who identify a specific need. In this case, the team is working with a Delta-based teacher for the hearing-impaired who selected two children in her school district who need assistance.

"We were asked to develop an indicator light system that would signal the other students to quieten down," says Livingston. "Many kids are self-conscious about their disability and don't want to draw attention to themselves by putting up their hands."

The prototype system features a microphone and sound meter, data acquisition hardware, a laptop computer especially programmed to analyze sound amplitude, and a small external circuit that triggers a traffic lights-sized LED panel to turn yellow or red when sound levels exceed specified thresholds.

With feedback from UVATT team members, Osusky selected the components, custom-programmed the computer and built the external circuit board. He tested the system in a UVic lecture theatre and in classrooms at Lansdowne Middle School in Victoria and Hawthorne Elementary in Delta.

"At Hawthorne, we connected a remote switch to the computer so the hearing-impaired students could press every time they perceived the sound level getting too high for them to understand what the teacher was saying," says Osusky. "This allowed us to set thresholds for the indicator lights."

Threshold levels can be easily adjusted by the student or the teacher. When class noise reaches 5 to 10 decibels below the threshold, the light turns yellow. When the threshold is reached or exceeded, the light turns red.

"The light is placed at the front of the classroom so that the other students can respond accordingly when the light goes on. "When we tested this at Lansdowne, the response was very positive," says Osusky. "They noticed when it went yellow and made a conscious effort to quieten down."

Last month, the system was shipped over to Hawthorne for long-term testing. Refinements are already underway to make it more portable and cost-effective.

"Using a microprocessor instead of a laptop we've got the parts costs down to about $250," says Livingston. "We want to get that down to less than $100 so that a school can have several and not have to move them around."

Time will tell whether the system truly does the job, says Livingston. "We know it works technically, but the real bottom line is if the students come back to us and say they're understanding the teacher better and are learning more. That's the ultimate goal."