



NEW NATIONAL HUB TO GUIDE ENERGY TRANSITION

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THE RING

SUMMER 2022
The University of Victoria's
community newspaper

uvic.ca/news



University of Victoria

SPEED READ

CONVOCATION 2022

Watch convocation online

Spring Convocation ceremonies, including those for returning alumni who graduated in 2020 or in Spring 2021, will be webcast live from June 8–16. If you're not able to attend in person, you can watch the ceremonies on your computer. Video of each webcast will be available for six weeks following convocation. For event times and more information, visit uvic.ca/event/grad-2022

VICTORIA FORUM

Bridging Divides: Turf, Truth and Trust

The Victoria Forum returns in person at UVic and online Aug. 28–30, 2022. Presented in partnership with the Senate of Canada, *Bridging Divides: Turf, Truth and Trust* will explore why our world is increasingly divided along different fault lines, with national and international thought leaders examining ways to bridge economic, social and environmental divides. Register at victoriaforum.ca



FIRST CLASS OF GRADS FROM INDIGENOUS LAW PROGRAM

A special recognition ceremony was held in April for the JD/JID grads. UVIC PHOTO SERVICES

3,809

DEGREES
CERTIFICATES
AND DIPLOMAS
AWARDED TO
SPRING 2022
GRADUATES

Four years ago, UVic launched the world's first law degree to combine the study of Indigenous and non-Indigenous laws. The innovative joint degree program in Canadian Common Law and Indigenous Legal Orders (JD/JID) is breaking new ground for legal education in Canada and has earned UVic's Faculty of Law a well-deserved national and international reputation for leadership in Indigenous legal education and research.

During convocation ceremonies this June, this memorable first cohort of 23 graduates will cross the stage to receive their degrees.

"This is an historic moment, and I am honoured to recognize and congratulate the graduating students of the first JD/JID cohort," said UVic President Kevin Hall. "They are equipped with unique knowledge,

skills and experiences that will enable them to build bridges between multiple legal systems. I look forward to seeing the impact they make on the legal landscape in Canada, and on our ability to move meaningfully and collaboratively towards resolution of the significant and ongoing problems caused by colonialism."

In April, the class of 2022 gathered with family and friends to celebrate their upcoming graduation at a special recognition event hosted at the Songhees Wellness Centre. Greetings and congratulatory messages were sent by prominent leaders from across the country, including Governor General Mary Simon, Justice Minister and Attorney General of Canada David Lametti, BC's Advanced Education Minister Anne Kang and former Senator and Chief Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission Murray Sinclair.

"Congratulations to the graduating students in this unique program. They are leading the change that we hoped for when we issued the TRC report," said Sinclair. "I encourage them to go out into the world and to be bold and creative with their unique legal skills and knowledge."

Interim Dean of Law and JD/JID co-founder Val Napoleon hosted the recognition event, and expressed great enthusiasm for how the new graduates are poised to positively impact law and society.

"Indigenous law is an essential part of Indigenous Peoples being peoples, and it is foundational to Canada's multi-juridical system," she said. "Law is an essential ingredient of every society because it is

SEE INDIGENOUS LAW GRADS, P.8

UVic recognized as a global leader in climate action

The University of Victoria's longstanding commitment and work in research, campus operations and partnerships to protect the environment and improve conditions for the planet and people were recognized by a global assessment of universities. The annual analysis by Times Higher Education (THE), the only international report of its kind, was released in Stockholm.

UVic is second in the world among 1,406 universities for climate action—one of 17 areas identified by the United Nations as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that require urgent action. UVic is 12th globally for its impact across all 17 SDGs.

As an integral part of its mission as a public institution dedicated to education, discovery and knowledge, UVic continues to apply itself to what matters most to our community members and our shared global existence.

"The results show UVic's deep commitment to advancing the SDGs through research, stewardship, engagement and teaching," says Kevin Hall, UVic's president and vice-chancellor.

"At UVic we care deeply about what the UN SDGs stand for and their calls to action to cre-

ate an equitable planet and a sustainable and inclusive economy. We know our university community can make a difference with each innovative research program, campus project and community engagement we undertake—we've taken big steps this year, including the launch of CIFAL Victoria, and we are ready to keep up the momentum."

The THE global assessment measures how well universities help advance the UN's 17 SDGs, a global blueprint for action for people, our planet and prosperity.

UVic's 12th placement in 2022 is in part due to strong performance in several sustainable development goals. Globally, UVic is second for SDG 13 (Climate Action) and for SDG 15 (Life on Land), and among top five for SDG 14 (Life Below Water). Rankings are based on 1,406 institutions including 24 in Canada.

UVic was also the top university in Canada for SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), a key indicator of sustainable campus operations.

The overall rankings reflect UVic's performance in multiple areas including tracking and



UVic biologist Julia Baum underwater, measuring coral health at Kiritimati Island. PHOTO: K.TIETJE

reducing the university's own carbon footprint, its high-quality academic programs, as well as UVic-wide campus sustainability initiatives, and hands-on learning opportunities with diverse communities and Indigenous Peoples.

In the impact areas of climate, environmental change and sustainability, UVic is helping to improve communities and ecosystems locally

SEE GLOBAL IMPACT, P.11

Kristi Simpson
appointed Vice-
President Finance
& Operations

Kristi Simpson has been appointed as vice-president finance and operations, effective June 1. After an extensive international search and considering a strong field of candidates, the search committee was unanimous in their recommendation. Simpson has been UVic’s associate vice-president financial planning and operations since 2005 and was appointed acting VPFO in Dec. 2020. Simpson has been involved in educational financial administration for most of her career including within two school districts, the University of Northern British Columbia and the University of Victoria for the last 19 years. She has a bachelor in economics from UVic and holds CPA and CA designations.

Molson Prize for sociologist’s advocacy

BY RICHARD DAL MONTE

She has worked with, learned from and spoken up for midwives and sex workers, Indigenous women on Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, unhoused people and people who use illicit drugs.

She has published hundreds of research papers and dozens of books, and testified before the Supreme Court of Canada as an expert witness.

And through a lifetime in academia and advocacy, Cecilia Benoit, who as a rebellious teenager resisted her father’s entreaties that she enter a nunnery, has displayed a fervent dedication to groups often marginalized in Canadian society.

For a career marked by empathy, curiosity and scholarly rigour, Benoit, a researcher with the Canadian Institute of Substance Use Research at the University of Victoria, was recently awarded the 2022 Canada Council for the Arts Molson Prize for the Social Sciences and Humanities.

Pioneering research lauded

“For more than three decades, her pioneering research has helped to decrease gender and racial inequities while also empowering youth, women and Indigenous Peoples,” wrote Kevin Hall, UVic’s president and vice-chancellor, in his letter nominating Benoit for the award.

Hall praised her “incredible influence as an educator and mentor,” noting she has supervised 48 graduate students, many of whom have taken up leadership roles in academia as well as the public and non-profit sectors.

“Long before the topic was popular in the academy,” he wrote, “Dr. Benoit has advocated for Indigenous practices and ways of knowing in health care practices, specifically with respect to childbirth practices, midwifery and maternity care. Thanks to her diligent efforts and those of others, midwifery has become recognized as a respected and legitimate profession in Canada and the costs for new mothers and their families covered by the public purse.”

“The social structure was unfair”

Benoit says her twin dedications—to academia and to those who society inadequately cares for and protects—come down to her childhood.

The third youngest of Joseph Be-

noit and Rita LaFitte’s 11 children, Benoit grew up in a poor family noticing that many people in her community worked hard but were unable to get ahead, and thinking there must be ways to make society more equitable.

Despite their limited means, her parents “did provide for us in whatever way they could and they did really stress education as being important.” Still, she could see “the social structure was unfair, the way society was put together.”

“We live in a class system, a patriarchal system and one that’s also very advantageous to people with white skin,” says Benoit, who is of Mi’kmaq and European ancestry.

Another inequity she witnessed in her younger years also proved formative: that women’s and girls’ work never ended while men’s did. Outside their formal workday, men rested while women toiled at domestic tasks without break or reward. “That stuck with me for a long time,” she says.

How to change the world?

“I just got drawn to sociology because that’s where I thought I could start to figure out how I could see the world and figure out why the world is the way it is,” Benoit recalls. “So, developing a way of seeing and, from there, is it possible to change it?”

The first major thing she set out to change was the exclusion of midwives from the health care system. In the early to mid-1990s, she says, some politicians were interested in changing legislation to allow midwives to provide care to pregnant women and to attend births. Benoit’s doctoral and postdoctoral research—which showed the inclusion of midwifery in the Canadian health care system would create legitimate work for midwives, improve care for birthing families and be economical—changed her career.

In fact, when asked about societal changes she’s seen during her working life, she notes that 20 to 30 years ago, a person could be charged for practicing midwifery, and she calls Canada’s legalization and funding of the practice “an amazing achievement in a couple of decades.”

“And it was social science research, and a social movement of people in society, that got the government’s attention.”

Another change she has witnessed as a scientist is the expansion of



Benoit. UVIC PHOTO SERVICES

support for marginalized and street-involved youth: kids who have fallen through society’s cracks. BC will soon have 19 clinics around the province providing them care. And while, as with midwifery and reproductive care, there are improvements still to be made, she says, “youth are getting better health and social care than they used to and it’s because we understand them better; we understand their situations, their challenges.”

Research partners rather than research subjects

Understanding the situations of people who need society’s care is at the core of Benoit’s work, as is this research philosophy: “think of people you interview as partners rather than subjects.”

Indeed, her research with people who sell sexual services—and a number of other topics—started with an invitation within that community to work with its members. As a result of that connection, she says, she and her colleagues conceived a project to study people involved with sex work by comparing their working conditions to those of people doing other kinds of care work: in food and beverage industries, and in hair care and barbering.

A small university news release announcing funding for this project drew an unexpected response, however: an opinion piece in a local

paper saying, roughly, “how dare hardworking women be included in this study with prostitutes?” that was subsequently published across the country.

“It was very ugly. I was shocked,” she says, noting that she received hate mail. “That was my first lesson in stigma.”

“From then, I had to either give it up or dig my heels in and say, ‘it’s hard research and we’re going to do it anyway.’”

Benoit says she’s glad she chose the latter and notes the subsequent research informed a challenge of the criminal code’s approach to sex work—and resulted in her expert testimony before the Supreme Court.

While she doesn’t maintain the schedule she once did, having retired from her position as a UVic sociology professor four years ago, she still conducts research without fear or favour, and by parking any prejudice at the door.

“I guess I continue to be kind of driven by the opportunities that are available to me.”

Asked for advice for emerging researchers, she says: “try to shed light doing the best research you can on social problems in our time—problems that really need solutions but they’re not easily solved, so they need an eye that can get beneath the public debate to see what else we could know and should know.”

SUSTAINABLE CAMPUS

UVic named as one of Canada’s Greenest Employers

UVic has been selected as one of Canada’s Greenest Employers for the eighth time. The national awards recognize Canadian employers that lead the nation in creating a culture of sustainability and climate action.

“We are proud to be honoured as a green employer again this year,” says Mike Wilson, director of campus planning and sustainability. “The university’s commitment to creating and maintaining a green campus and

providing leadership and action on climate change and sustainability is an integral part of our identity. We are looking forward to the launch of our new institutional Climate and Sustainability Action Plan, which was developed with input from students, faculty and staff, and provides ambitious, creative and integrated sustainability solutions while respecting Indigenous ways of knowing and being.”

Sustainable initiatives that supported UVic’s selection in the Canada’s Greenest Employers list for 2022 include:

- A commitment that all new buildings are constructed to meet the LEED Gold standard and better. The new student housing and dining buildings have been designed to meet LEED v4 Gold and Passive House standards. In addition, as part of its building plan, the university prioritizes building on parking lots to help preserve our natural spaces.
- Mobilizing employees and students to increase sustain-

ability on campus through the Campus Sustainability Fund, which provides financial support for employee, student and faculty-inspired sustainability projects. The university has also integrated sustainability as a key part of its curriculum in nearly every major field, from science and engineering to social sciences and law.

- The Campus Bike Centre offers secure bike parking for over 230 bikes, a bike kitchen, gear lockers and benches. It is also home to the unique SPOKES (Student Promotion of Kickstands Etc. Salvaging) bike repair and loan program, managed by volunteers who refurbish donated bikes and loan them out for a nominal fee for the year.

Major sustainability initiatives underway during 2022 include:

- the launch of a Climate and Sustainability Action Plan that will guide the university with an

integrated approach to sustainability across research, education, community engagement and campus operations;

- the opening of Building 1 of the Student Housing and Dining project, constructed to Passive House and LEED Gold construction standards while adding 621 new residence spaces for students living on campus;
- ongoing implementation of the Campus Cycling Plan, which will create an All Ages and Abilities (AAA) cycling network on campus, and
- ongoing implementation of the Campus Greenway, an east-west greenway across campus.

Canada’s Greenest Employers competition, now in its 15th year, is organized by the Canada’s Top 100 Employers project. UVic was also recognized as one of BC’s top employers and as a Top Diversity Employer in 2022, and was seventh on Forbes’ 2022 Canada’s Best Employers list.



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The University of Victoria acknowledges and respects the lakʷənən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Their Excellencies the Right Honourable Mary Simon, Governor General of Canada, and Mr Whit Fraser (centre) participate in a circle at First Peoples House at UVic. UVIC PHOTO SERVICES

Education’s role in Indigenous reconciliation

Governor General Mary Simon visits UVic to learn about UVic programs in Indigenous language revitalization and Indigenous legal orders

BY JODY PATERSON

To see an education system that once destroyed Indigenous culture and identity in Canada being used as a vital tool in restoring both brings much hope for reconciliation, Governor General Mary Simon told Indigenous law and education students who shared their stories with her at First Peoples House at UVic.

Simon participated in a circle with UVic students, administrators and Indigenous scholars to learn more about the university’s new doctoral program in language revitalization and its unique position as the only post-secondary in the world offering a joint degree in common law and Indigenous legal orders.

Six students at different stages of completion of the four-year law program spoke of their own paths that brought them to the program, and their pride in joining a new

cohort of law graduates informed by Indigenous laws that existed long before the colonial legal system was established.

“My grandfather was impacted by residential school, and so did not pass on his culture or language,” third-year student and Nisga’a Nation member Shayla Praud told Simon and Whit Fraser, Simon’s spouse. “So I grew up without that, ashamed of my Indigeneity.

“I wish I could talk to my teenage self now and say that the strength of your ancestors runs through your veins,” Praud continued. “We are re-writing the narrative, and there will be no room for shame, no lies for little girls feeling like they have to pretend they’re not Indigenous.”

The students told of learning of the dual law program through various means: A life-changing talk at a college from John Borrows, UVic law professor and Canada Research Chair

in Indigenous Law; a revelation in the context of gender-based violence of the need to reimagine the future and not just resolve the immediate crisis.

First-year student Ali Lafond said she’s already putting her new legal education to work for her home nation, where she’s working as a legal assistant in the area of child welfare and looking forward to a future career applying an Indigenous lens to entertainment and media law.

Home away from home

At the opening of the circle, Songhees Nation Elder Dr. Skip Dick spoke of UVic and the First Peoples House as a home away from home for Indigenous students—a gathering place where young people and Indigenous leaders could “talk directly to the powers that be” as equals for the first time in history.

That description of a home away from home resonated for Simon, who spoke of her own experiences of being home-schooled by her father and feeling initially envious of the children in her Nunavik community who were leaving for residential school.

“I felt left out,” Simon recalled, “but

after the first year they went, I saw them change. The more they went, the more they changed.”

Onowa McIvor of UVic’s Department of Indigenous Education spoke of the tremendous growth in language revitalization over the past 15 years at the university. What began as an effort at the undergraduate level to preserve at-risk Indigenous languages has developed into masters and doctoral programs for students who are already proficient and now learning strategies for building language revitalization across all sectors in K-12 education to youth counselling.

Simon’s dialogue at UVic was part of a BC visit that began on May 20 and included meetings with government and Indigenous leaders, a tour of an ocean science research institute and a visit to an elementary school. Simon also participated in a ceremony in Kamloops marking one year since the discovery of as many as 200 unmarked graves on the site of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School. Simon told the UVic circle that advancing reconciliation will be a primary goal in her term as Governor General.

around the ring

Action labs to address barriers to equity

This fall, UVic will be launching our first Equity Action Plan. The plan has been in development since early 2021, including four phases of campus engagement. “Calling it a plan is a bit of a misnomer because what we are building is more of an iterative process than a static plan,” says EQHR Executive Director Cassbreea Dewis. One of the tools being explored to encourage the development of bold actions is Action Labs. Action Labs put into practice an equity-centred design approach by bringing together diverse stakeholders to find new solutions to barriers at a systems level, as opposed to the individual or interpersonal level. UVic’s first pilot Action Lab developed more than 100 new ideas—a promising start for the new tool.

More info: uvic.ca/eap

Appointment of new Associate Vice-President Research

UVic chemist Fraser Hof has been appointed as the new associate vice-president research. He will begin his appointment July 1, 2022 for a five-year term. Hof’s will be one of two AVPR positions in the research portfolio, joining current AVPR Cynthia Milton.

ringers

The Canada Research Coordinating Committee announced the appointment of UVic Libraries’ Associate University Librarian Reconciliation **Ry Moran** as one of only 18 members in the inaugural Indigenous Leadership Circle in Research. The Leadership Circle will advise the presidents of Canada’s federal research funding agencies—including CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC, and CFI—on the implementation of the interagency strategic plan, setting new directions to support Indigenous research and research training in Canada 2019–22, and ensure that the path to building new models for Indigenous research and research training will be informed by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.

Librarian **Pia Russell** received two awards from the British Columbia Library Association (BCLA)—the BCLA Champion of Intellectual Freedom Award for the British Columbia Historical Textbooks Project, and the BC Academic Libraries Section Outstanding Contribution Award for her achievements in making a difference. Russell leads the team for the BC Historical Textbooks Project, a multi-year initiative that preserves and highlights unique textbooks of the province’s history, while also confronting many untruths that had been systematically taught for decades. The project influences BC libraries as they strive to make decisions about problematic historical materials as part of decolonizing and Indigenous their collections.

LEADERSHIP VICTORIA AWARD

Anthropologist awarded for fostering improved Indigenous–municipal connections

BY ANNE MacLAURIN

A local anthropologist who has dedicated much of his career to supporting Indigenous Peoples’ land rights is the latest recipient of the Leadership Victoria Award for Extending Reconciliation.

UVic anthropologist Brian Thom is a leading expert in the interplay between Indigenous cultural connections to place, and the legal and political consequences of colonial discourses in Canada and internationally. The extending reconciliation award acknowledges his latest work with ʷSÁNEĆ Leadership Council and the District of Saanich to Indigenousize municipal land use planning in the Cordova Bay area.

“Arriving in my new community of Cordova Bay five years ago, I realized I knew next to nothing about the particular Indigenous histories of this place, so I spent some sabbatical time reviewing ethnographic and archival records, connecting with members in the ʷSÁNEĆ community and becoming more informed,” says Thom.

After attending a public meeting about the proposed Cordova Bay Local Area Plan, Thom offered his expertise to the District of Saanich and the local land use planners, who had little information about Indigenous histories and values related to Cordova Bay.

“I showed my preliminary findings to senior planning staff and walked

them through a Google Earth map I had compiled with records from the UVic Library, Archives and the Royal BC Museum,” says Thom.

“In my archival research, I also found numerous archaeological and burial sites that had been reported from 1946–1984, but never incorporated into the province’s archaeological database,” says Thom.

Thom worked with BC Archaeology Branch staff to get the information into BC’s records system, which in turn triggered new consultations with ʷSÁNEĆ First Nations and a last-minute archaeological investigation before a major new development in Cordova Bay got underway.

Recognizing the opportunity the proposed Local Area Plan gave to move the municipality’s relationship with First Nations to a proactive stance, Thom facilitated the very first joint meeting of the leadership of the District of Saanich and ʷSÁNEĆ Leadership Council in May 2019. The event, funded in part from a grant from the Faculty of Social Sciences, followed Coast Salish protocols, with a Speaker and Witnesses, and became a platform to bring out Indigenous oral histories and teachings related to Cordova Bay. For elected officials and senior staff, hearing the histories and priorities of ʷSÁNEĆ peoples was an inflection point, igniting new commitments to incorporate these values into land use planning and build



Thom on Cordova Bay beach. PHOTO: BRIAN THOM

relationships for other municipal processes.

Together with Elder Eric Pelkey and staff from ʷSÁNEĆ Leadership Council, Thom developed a detailed report for how the District of Saanich might incorporate a more fully realized vision of Indigenous land values into their Local Area Plan, land use bylaws, official community plan, and suggestions for future research. They also worked together to educate and inform the public about the histories of the ancient village of TEL̓IL̓CE in Cordova Bay.

The new Cordova Bay Local Area Plan was unanimously approved

at a public hearing this March. To implement this vision, WLC and Saanich entered into the ÁTOL̓NEUEL (“Respecting One Another”) Memorandum of Understanding. The work charts out a vision for recognizing and respecting Indigenous values and priorities in the community for the next 20–30 years

“I hope the process of incorporating Indigenous priorities into land use planning can be an inspiration for other municipalities to go beyond the territorial acknowledgment to recognizing and respecting First Nation’s territories and ancestral places,” adds Thom.

A tradition of courtesy and respect, rekindled

Installation ceremony for new UVic Chancellor guided by Coast Salish traditions

BY JODY PATERSON

Many of those who gathered earlier this spring for the installation of the University of Victoria’s 12th chancellor had never been part of a Coast Salish welcoming ceremony before.

Tsartlip Elder Al Sam walked them through the process with much care at the ceremony in UVic’s First Peoples House, as renowned legal scholar and judge Marion Buller became the first chancellor in UVic history to ask permission from local First Nations to work on the territory at her April installation. Sam wanted people to understand the Coast Salish protocols guiding the event.

“For the Coast Salish, these ceremonies would be done in our Big House, and we’d have dirt floors and fires burning at either end,” Sam told the audience.

“My late father Sammy Sam did a lot of this, but always within our own culture, in our own Big House. My dad always said, ‘Don’t you ever say no to anybody—if somebody needs your voice, you give it to them.’ So I’ve been doing that now for three decades.”

University protocols re-imagined

The installation of a university chancellor is typically steeped in British tradition. The oath of office is administered by the Queen’s representative—in this case, BC Lt. Gov. Janet Austin. The orator brings the voice of the university senate. The regalia that the chancellor receives carries the colours and symbols unique to the university.

All of that took place at Buller’s installation, but within the context of a traditional Coast Salish welcoming

ceremony.

Sam’s grand-nephew and elected Songhees Councillor Norman Garry Sam represented the Songhees First Nation throughout the ceremony. Songhees Elder May Sam gave a moving Coast Salish blessing that extended to everyone in the room.

Four witnesses from other First Nations—including Buller’s brother Edward—were called upon to carry word of the ceremony and the particulars of Coast Salish protocols back to their home communities. Throughout the event, Indigenous speakers began their comments in the languages of their own nations.

Buller’s regalia—in the purple and gold of a UVic chancellor—was draped on her by outgoing chancellor Shelagh Rogers and Songhees Councillor Norman Garry Sam. Her regalia is adorned with a supernatural eagle and four feathers to represent Buller’s Cree heritage, and her own Mistawasis Nēhiyawak First Nation.

Last September, UVic President Kevin Hall became the first university president in Canada to ask permission from local First Nations to work on the territory at his installation. Buller—an influential Indigenous legal scholar and long-time advocate for Indigenous issues and rights—was eager to follow Coast Salish protocols at her own installation.

A fearless approach to academic policy

Buller became BC’s first female First Nations judge when appointed in 1994, just seven years after graduating from UVic with her law degree. She went on to found and lead BC’s Indigenous



Buller at the installation ceremony. UVIC PHOTO SERVICES

Court, a criminal sentencing court based on Indigenous principles of restorative justice.

After retiring as a provincial court judge in 2016, Buller was appointed chief commissioner of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, whose powerful final report is reshaping thinking and policy in Canada and around the world.

“With your permission, I will work here with a good mind, a good heart, and what I hope will be a very generous spirit,” Buller said to the Coast Salish leaders presiding at the ceremony. She was briefly overcome by emotion as she followed her own First Nation protocol in naming all her relations.

The difficult and inspiring work of

leading the inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls will inform her work as chancellor, Buller told the audience.

“That hope for change, and the willingness to work for it, is what has brought me here today,” Buller noted. “I’ve never been interested in what is easy, but what is good, just and right. I want to see academic policy guided by a full and fearless understanding of our history.”

A new era of installations

UVic anthropologist Rob Hancock was master of ceremonies for the event. He identified his Cree-Métis heritage in his address and highlighted the profound impact of Buller’s work on the lives of Indigenous People.

“She is perhaps too modest about

her many accomplishments, but here are two examples: as Chief Commissioner, Marion called out the Canadian government for committing genocide against Indigenous People. She established and then presided in the first Indigenous Courts. She has changed the lives of many of our people—and for the better.”

Lawyer and UVic Board of Governors appointee Merle Alexander was one of the four Indigenous witnesses at the ceremony, and spoke of his pride at having seen two university leaders follow Indigenous protocol at their installations.

“I see this as an uplifting of Indigenous legal orders in Canada,” said Alexander. “It brings honour to UVic to abide by the legal system that was here before us. I will take that home.”

HONORARY DEGREE RECIPIENTS

This spring, UVic is awarding seven honorary degrees that recognize notable achievements in scholarship, research, teaching, the creative arts and public service.

Honorary degrees have been awarded at UVic since its inaugural convocation in 1964. An honorary degree is the highest honour the university can bestow for distinguished achievement in scholarship, research, teaching, the creative arts and public service.

Senate confers honorary degrees based on the recommendations of a nine-member committee on honorary degrees and other forms of recognition. That committee, in turn, bases its selections on nominations invited from UVic faculty, staff, students and alumni.

This spring’s recipients include:



Hon. Carole James
Honorary Doctor of Laws (LLD)
The Honourable Carole James has been a fixture in the BC Legislature for many years, and is perhaps best known for her role as leader of the BC New Democratic Party. As a lifelong activist, volunteer and public servant, Carole James has dedicated her life to the betterment of our province. She has also served as a foster parent for over 20 years for children and adults with developmental disabilities.



Gordon Denford
Honorary Doctor of Laws (LLD)
Gordon Denford is the founder of family owned Berwick Retirement Communities and is a community leader and philanthropist. He was a founding member of the Canadian Western Bank, which assists small businesses in Victoria and western Canada. He was a driving force to improve the Victoria Airport, where he spent eight years on the Board; two of those as Chairman.



TEMOSEN̓FET Charles Elliott
Doctor of Fine Arts (DFA)
TEMOSEN̓FET Charles Elliott is a renowned carver and printmaker whose pieces are held in institutional and private collections around the world. In a career spanning more than 50 years, he has been instrumental in the revitalization and resurgence of Coast Salish artistic styles, traditions and techniques. As his career progressed, he has taken on a mentorship role supporting emerging Indigenous artists.



Dr. Perry Kendall
Honorary Doctor of Laws (LLD)
Dr. Perry Kendall’s long career in public health has been devoted to improving the health of British Columbians, particularly those who are marginalized. He served as the Provincial Health Officer from 1999–2018, championing the creation of safe consumption sites, declared a public health emergency to address the opioid crisis, managed the H1N1 pandemic of 2009–10 and the SARS crisis of 2003.



Lawrence Lessig
Honorary Doctor of Education (DEd)
Lawrence Lessig’s early career focused on law and technology, primarily as it affects copyright—and that work was instrumental in shaping knowledge in the digital era. He was the co-founder of Creative Commons, a non-profit organization that promotes learning and open scholarship on the Internet by providing legal mechanisms to share creative work while still upholding intellectual copyright.



Rev. Lyle McKenzie
Honorary Doctor of Laws (LLD)
Rev. Lyle McKenzie has served as part-time chaplain at UVic for 19 years. A visionary leader, he helped to develop programs within congregations to advance Truth and Reconciliation and the inclusion of queer siblings. He was instrumental in developing the recent Memorandum between UVic and faith communities and has been a strong contributor to the growth of multi-faith cooperation on campus.

CONVOCATION 2022



CONGRATS, GRADS!

There will be more grads and families celebrating on campus this year. UVic has added an extra week of convocation ceremonies for alumni who graduated in 2020 and Spring 2021 when large gatherings were not allowed due to COVID-19 restrictions. This year will see over 3,700 students crossing the stage at the Farquhar auditorium during 14 ceremonies. In a regular year, approximately 2,400 students graduate in 10 ceremonies.



Student leadership a pas de deux of one and many

3M National Student Fellow proves that creating community and collaboration are at the heart of extraordinary performance



BY PHILIP COX

In the summer of 2020, as the pandemic wore on and it became clear that the next academic year would be spent online, fourth-year honours English student Anne Hung worried that incoming students wouldn't have the same richness of experience that she'd had on campus in her own first year at university—so she decided to do something about it.

By September, she'd established a virtual mentorship program through the English Students' Association that paired 85 first-year students with 25 upper-year student mentors, fostering new community connections built on solidarity, sharing and support.

That winter, as blood supplies in the city's health system ran dangerously low, Hung and fourth-year economics student Jeremy Lacey collaborated to create the UVic Blood and Stem Cell Drive—a campus-wide effort that connected representatives from five student course unions to prompt donations from their members.

This is the type of selfless and thoughtful leadership that will define Hung's legacy after she walks across the convocation stage to receive her degree this June—a practice that's also earned her a 3M National Student Fellowship for outstanding leadership on- and off-campus earlier this year.

"At first, I was hesitant to assume leadership positions on campus, because I had always thought of leaders as unwavering and confident, and I did not feel like one of those people," Hung states. "But the more I learned and grew at UVic, the more confident I felt and the more ideas I had for community building and collaboration."

A former competitive dancer, Hung trained at ballet schools in Vancouver, Calgary, Los Angeles and New York, and has performed in Alberta Ballet's *The Nutcracker* (2011), Ballet Victoria's *The Gift* (2015) and Avant Dance Company's *Take a Bow* (2016). She firmly believes that the lessons she learned through dance have informed her experience at the university.

"Dance taught me the skills that allowed me to complete my degree, work part-time and still have time and energy left over for volunteering," she says. "I consider myself lucky to have been

able to [dance competitively] and pursue my academic interests, and even luckier that the skills from one have transferred so well to the other."

In the classroom, these skills have helped Hung maintain straight As throughout her degree, earning her several awards for academic distinction along the way, while also informing her research. After receiving a Jamie Cassels Undergraduate Research Award (JCURA) in 2021, for instance, she chose to focus on the relationship between the development of Romantic ballet and 19th century print culture and technology, resulting in a project titled *En Pointe, in Print: Dance and the Early Nineteenth-Century Press* in 2022.

Outside of the classroom, Hung's work as vice president of the English Students' Association (ESA), managing editor of the undergraduate journal *The Albatross*, editorial assistant for *The Malahat Review*, student ambassador for the Faculty of Humanities, and co-producer of a podcast for the SSHRC-funded Crafting Communities project show the stamina and dedication of a competitive athlete.

In virtually all of her work, Hung's commitment to the values of respect, equity and diversity through collaborative practice shine through: co-organizing events for the ESA such as a public reading by Oji-Cree Saulteaux poet jaye simpson, whose writing explores their experiences with Indigeneity and marginalization; or supporting seniors and those recovering from illness or surgery through the Canadian Red Cross Health Equipment Loan Program, for example.

She is currently developing an open-access digital exhibit for UVic Libraries' Special Collections, interviewing previously-excluded women of colour and queer and gender non-conforming people involved in UVic's women's movement since the 1960s.

"Anne focuses her efforts on problem solving in ways that will benefit and spotlight others rather than herself," says UVic English professor Mary Elizabeth Leighton. "But make no mistake: Anne has changed the undergraduate experience in humanities and improved the lives of people in and outside of the university."

Hung. PHOTO: LAURA ZEKE



FACULTY OF SCIENCE

Second-chance scientist

BY DOROTHY EGGENBERGER

The world is full of second chances, and is better for the people who have taken them. Julian

Smazynski didn't have the university experience he was hoping for the first time around, but he took a second run. This year he graduates with his PhD in biochemistry and is now a research



Smazynski. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

associate at the BC Cancer Deeley Research Centre (DRC).

Smazynski says you don't need to be an academic all-star in high school to become a great scientist or artist: "I'm a big pusher of 'Don't let anyone else tell you what to do'. Do what you actually think you're passionate about."

Unlikely academic after the unknown

"If you're doing pure research, what you're really doing is studying the unknown," says Smazynski. "Understanding that unknown is what drew me to science."

Like many high school students, Smazynski launched into post-secondary immediately after high school. He left before the year was out. "I realized it just wasn't the right time for me," says Smazynski, reflecting on competing obligations at home and the dramatic transition from classroom to lecture hall.

Three years later, he decided to give it another shot, but this time at Camosun College. Smazynski excelled in the smaller class sizes—a quality shared by university third and fourth year classes, he would later discover. There he learned about immunology, the study of the immune system.

"Our immune system evolved to detect foreign organisms and pathogens on a scale that basically transcends evolution," explains Smazynski. "There are organisms that don't yet exist, but your immune system could mount an immune response against them today. That blew my mind."

He completed a diploma at Camosun and enrolled in UVic's Bachelor of Science program a second time, fast-tracking through first- and second-year courses via UVic's transfer credit options.

"In third year I took a course in immunology taught by Terry Pearson. He has an infectious passion for science," recalls Smazynski. "We learned about a few groups on the island specializing in immunology research. One of them was the DRC. At that point, I knew I had to find an opportunity to get in there."

So, as a third-year student Smazynski sat in on fourth-year lectures to connect with researchers from DRC. He asked about volunteer opportunities, and the snowball started rolling.

The volunteer opportunity became a co-op opportunity, the co-op an Honours Fest project, the project a work term, the work term a graduate studies focus, and from there eventually his master's and PhD.

"Trust yourself when you see something that really excites you and when you find it, seek those opportunities. Don't wait for them to fall into your lap," says Smazynski.

Next generation cancer therapies

Great ideas spin out of academic research. Now Smazynski specializes in cancer immunotherapy, a form of treatment that uses the body's own immune system to prevent, control and eliminate cancer. Researchers genetically modify T cells (immune cells) from a patient's blood sample to improve their cancer-tracking and cancer-attacking ability—called chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T-cell therapy. The newly engineered cells are multiplied into an army and given back to the patient.

"Immune cells, despite our tinkering with them, are quite capable of detecting cancer cells on their own," explains Smazynski, "But cancer cells have mechanisms to inhibit that immune system. Succumbing to that inhibition, the T cells are too weak to kill the cancer on their own." Smazynski is designing new mechanisms for the immune cells to overcome this inhibition.

He's also working on moving CAR T-cell therapy trials from blood-based cancer into the solid cancer space using oncolytic virus therapy—a type of targeted therapy that infects and breaks down cancer cells but not normal cells.

"It's a challenge to find ways to allow these engineered cells to enter a solid tumour environment," explains Smazynski, "If we can initiate a viral infection in a solid tumour, creating an inflamed immune-ready environment, and engineer our T cells to interact with those virally infected cancer cells—that could be a big step forward."

"For me, cancer immunotherapy research offers this endless supply of intrigue and questions," says Smazynski, "I really think the biotech industry is pushing the bounds in next-generation therapies."

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

Grad's research a breakthrough in understanding dementia risk



Yoneda. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Both of this year's UVic Governor General's Gold Medals go to students in the Faculty of Social Sciences

BY ANNE MACLAURIN

Tomiko Yoneda, who graduates with a doctorate in psychology this June, is finding tantalizing clues to healthy cognitive aging—research that has been recognized by one of the two UVic Governor General's Gold Medals awarded during convocation.

The second gold will go to Andrea Mellor, a PhD graduate from UVic's interdisciplinary social dimensions of health program who collaborated with Indigenous urban youth on a graphic novel.

Early detection of cognitive decline and dementia is a passionate occupation for Yoneda, and a primary focus in her PhD work at UVic. During her graduate research, Yoneda identified personality traits that could point to a greater risk of developing dementia. She says that people with a high level of conscientiousness and a low level of neuroticism are less likely to develop mild cognitive impairment as they get older.

A deeper understanding of risk factors, protective factors and early indicators of cognitive decline is what drives Yoneda in her work. Also, seeing firsthand the people living with dementia and their caregivers provides strong motivation for Yoneda to keep going with her research projects.

Throughout her time at UVic, Yoneda is grateful for the multi-year fellowships from

both the Alzheimer Society Research Program and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, as well as several scholarships from UVic's Institute on Aging and Lifelong Health, and the Department of Psychology.

"I also feel incredibly thankful to have been a part of the iLifespan lab—Scott Hofer has always been incredibly enthusiastic and generous in funding research assistant work, research materials and activities (e.g., national and international conferences) throughout my degree," says Yoneda.

Equal praise is given to Yoneda's supervisor Andrea Piccinin, who was an exceptional mentor during her graduate training.

"Dr. Piccinin provided steady encouragement to pursue my research interests, as well as her thorough and insightful feedback," says Yoneda.

Throughout her degree, Yoneda's favourite campus memory is walking or running through Mystic Vale and the alumni trails. As an avid outdoor explorer, she enjoys biking, camping and making beach forts with her six-year-old son.

Yoneda will continue to pursue her passion for research and teaching as a post-doctoral researcher at Northwestern University.

"I truly love teaching and researching, and hope to continue along this academic path in the future," says Yoneda.

FACULTY OF FINE ARTS

Visual arts grad has big designs on life

BY JOHN THRELFALL

If you ask international student Dieu Anh Hoang what aspect of her undergraduate degree had the biggest impact on her, she'll tell you it wasn't the pandemic, it wasn't her co-op terms and it wasn't even earning her BFA in visual arts with honours: it was actually a teacher's advice about living with fear.

"At the start of my second-year sculpture class, my professor told me, 'If you're not scared, you're not in the right place'—and that stuck with me," she says. "It changed my attitude completely: I was scared of that professor and wanted to drop the class, but I realized it was good for me to accept the challenge and step out of my comfort zone. Now, I just tell myself 'I can do this' and I don't think there's anything I wouldn't be able to do."

That "no-fear" attitude perfectly sums up Hoang on the cusp of graduating: in addition to her academic and artistic accomplishments, her work study positions with the Faculty of Fine Arts and her leadership as chair of the Visual Arts Student Association, she also stepped up as the architectural lead for UVic's Seismic Design Team and as a Community + Engage Leader, representing both the faculty and her department.

"I like to put myself in a working environment and take charge of whatever I can," says Hoang on a Zoom call from her family home in Hanoi, Vietnam. "That's how I learn: leadership skills, communication skills, managing skills ... I actually put my studies at the bottom of my priority list, as it was always the least of what I was doing."

Hoang wasn't even phased by the pandemic. "I was really lucky," she admits. "I did my co-op terms online working with UVic's Learning and Teaching Support and Innovation (LTSI), and my classes were among the few held in-person during the pandemic. And my family managed okay in Vietnam, too, so I didn't have to worry about that. It was actually pretty good for me!"

Describing herself as a visual designer ("I like to solve problems within any existing design to make it better and more accessible for everyone"), it was an interest in art and archi-



Hoang. PHOTO: TORI JONES

tecture that drew her to UVic after completing the International Baccalaureate diploma in Abbotsford—but it was her online abilities that probably had the biggest impact on campus life: her three co-op terms with LTSI saw her managing the transition from CourseSpaces to Brightspace.

"I was there the entire time migrating the platforms during the pandemic, facilitating the Zoom workshops for faculty and students," she says. As well as organizing training sessions,

she also created helpful infographics and content for the campus community. "It was great problem-solving!"

As for her art practice, Hoang has a clear preference towards geometric and design imagery—whether that's an exploded cube-based wall sculpture or culture-jamming a bag of groceries as a commentary on consumerism and food fads. ("Do people actually read the labels on what they're eating?") Looking into the future, she can see herself working at a

design agency in Seattle's tech hub ("It's very fast-paced and competitive there—I like that environment") and possibly earning a master's in computer science.

In addition to having learned the positive side of fear itself, Hoang feels one of her biggest degree takeaways is her enhanced people skills. "Knowing how to work with people, learning how to focus on their strengths rather than their weaknesses ... those are skills I can apply anywhere."

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Coming full circle to lead the classroom

BY MICHELLE BUTTERFIELD

Brittany Johnson is just a few weeks away from accepting her Bachelor of Education. This fact doesn't surprise her kindergarten teacher, whose class Brittany recently led as a substitute.

Preparing to collect her degree alongside a Teaching Qualification Service upgrade in French Immersion and a professional certificate in Information Communication Technology, Johnson is already working close to full-time as a teacher-on-call (TOC) for K-8 classes across Greater Victoria.

Today, she taught grade twos. "Oh yeah, it was fun," she says. "It was a good day."

Johnson's personality is bubbly and engaging. She exudes confidence and seems to enjoy being very busy, like she's trying to squeeze out every drop from the day. A dancer, hobby actor and former gymnast, she points to her own teachers who inspired her to take this career path.

"I knew I wanted to be a teacher from when I was really young. Like, kindergarten. I was already helping the teachers in the classroom, and I saw that my teachers were helping me. With teaching, you're actually able to make a real difference in kids' lives. Small or big."

In 2017, Johnson began her studies at UVic in child and youth care after graduating from École Victor-Brodeur, switching into the teacher education program in second year. On top of her studies, she has worked as a bilingual instruc-

tor in several capacities including at the UVic Childcare Services' Arbutus Centre.

She strongly encourages other young educators to explore different areas of teaching and grade levels as a TOC and through practicum. "You're validating what you believe to be true, which is that you want to teach. You're also finding resources and making connections in schools. You get to work with a mentor, so it's still stressful, but you're supported."

In 2021, Johnson took on a position with UVic Libraries Digital Scholarship Commons, building workshops and creating learning tools with technology like 3D printers. "It was so out of my comfort zone, being totally technology-based, but I wanted to try something different."

The use of technology in the classroom is a complex conversation, and young teachers like Brittany are bearing in mind both the ethical and practical considerations using technology as educators.

"It's evolving so fast, and can be a really useful tool. My little brother, who has a learning disability, benefits hugely from using technology. But with creative approaches to learning, the computer can present limitations. It's very interesting to think about."

She cites the many online resources like Google Read&Write that have useful applications in the classroom. "It's an inclusive approach to learning because it can read out loud to you, and it can be in different languages."

She also says access to the internet can be a good way to demonstrate learning, because teachers don't know everything. "When there are limits to my knowledge, I can access resources in class and we can learn together, or I can support my students in a guided inquiry so they become the experts and teach the class. That can be an amazing assessment tool."

Johnson is the co-president of the Education Students' Association, where she worked on several student-led initiatives including leading a team to pull off the faculty's first-ever virtual co-op and career fair with only four weeks' notice. In May 2022, Brittany received the Dean's Undergraduate Student Service Award for her remarkable work building community and fostering inclusivity within the Faculty of Education.

Johnson says her immediate plan is simply to teach—with longer-term goals including a certificate in special education, a graduate degree and eventually a PhD focusing on curriculum and pedagogy.

As she embarks on her next chapter, Johnson is reflecting on her experience at UVic. "There's a strong community and a positive environment in the MacLaurin building. You feel welcomed and appreciated, and the teachers have that extra five minutes after class if you need something."

When Johnson is asked if she is now one of those teachers? "Absolutely."



Johnson. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Business grad helping to create safer, inclusive spaces for online gamers

BY SUSAN PEDERSON

Scott Simpson couldn't be happier with the capstone project that he embarked on two years ago alongside three other cohort members of UVic's custom MBA program for Telus.

Not only does the outcome of Simpson's capstone project—the Telus Esports affiliate program, which was launched by the telecom giant in February—have the potential to change the way the company communicates with gamers, it also aims to combat bullying, racism and sexism in the gaming community.

Simpson, who is director, business development at Telus, hadn't exactly planned to do an MBA at that particular time in his life. In fact, had he not sought a promotion at Telus and been shot down, the capstone project would never have come about.

In 2008, after graduating from UBC with a business administration degree, Simpson joined Telus and methodically worked his way up the corporate ladder—from business analyst to manager of a marketing team. Eager to continue his upward trajectory, Simpson approached his manager to discuss his next advancement, only to be told, "You need to be more holistic in your thinking, and how it impacts the rest of the organization."

A somewhat dejected but undefeated Simpson wondered how to think "holistically" about a company that is 65,600-plus people strong and spans more than 20 countries. After some inward contemplation and research, he landed on the perfect solution: as a Telus representative, he would apply to earn the custom MBA that Telus

and UVic's Gill Graduate School of Business partnered to create in 2015.

"I had always wanted to get my MBA, but I didn't do it immediately after I graduated because I wanted to get work experience," Simpson recalls. And so he found himself back in the classroom, only this time with 18 fellow high-performing Telus employees and future leaders.

Eventually, with Andy Balser, vice president at Telus as their VP sponsor, Simpson and teammates Amit Sharma, Madeleine Baker and Emily McGlenen began brainstorming for their capstone project. Many possibilities were entertained, including brief consideration of gaming's dark cousin, gambling. But this was quickly rejected. "Not quite on brand for us," Simpson laughs.

"However, since we were getting deep into hosting the greater Telus Esports Series, in which more than 800 teams compete for over \$50,000 in prizes, we thought we might just have something here."

The team quickly developed the Telus Esports affiliate program. The premise was simple: the program would reward gamers for referrals to Telus service. "We added fun to it by gamifying the experience and meaningfully connecting to the gaming market, incorporating everything that Telus is."

Working with underrepresented groups in the field, most notably female gamers, the team also took on the task of trying to combat bullying, racism and sexism in the gaming community by carefully vetting the gamers Telus accepts into the program. "We want to build people up on the online community who have the right message,

who will make the community a better place," Simpson says.

A rigorous approval process was developed that involves sifting through all the potential gamers/partners' social media, as well as a multi-level list of checks and balances. Although complex, the process did not deter the type of gamers Telus wanted to attract—in fact, 230 applications were filed during the February 2022 launch week alone.

Simpson says the program and its applicants will be assessed in the next six, 12, 18 and 24 months. "It will be really exciting to further the reach of women in gaming, for example. Right now, only about four per cent of the protagonists in games are female."

Rather than target gamers who already have three million followers, the program targets those budding influencers with around 200 followers. "We want to help them as a sponsor to get their career to the next level. We also want to help lessen the stigma associated with gaming and addiction. There's a lot of good that can come from gaming," says Simpson.

Although he himself isn't a gamer, Simpson knows of what he speaks. His nine-year-old daughter was diagnosed with dyslexia and struggled with reading; but thanks to playing Minecraft, Roblox and other games that greatly developed her focus, she now reads to him and consistently aces her weekly spelling tests. "We don't owe it all to gaming, but if it's supervised by parents, there are a lot of positives," he says.

Simpson admits that he initially went into the MBA program with a cavalier attitude—"almost a 'my way or the highway' attitude. Plus, I was prob-



Simpson. PHOTO PROVIDED

ably lacking a lot of the hard skills, such as the legal side of things, accounting, and math-based and numbers-based learning." But today he has a solid understanding of how those elements impact Telus's business as a whole. In short, he has gained that holistic view of the company he was after.

Another positive outcome for Simpson's MBA team is a marketing award for the Telus Esports affiliate program. Plus, Simpson is reaching the finish line for his MBA. But as satisfying as these wins are, Simpson, who convokes with his cohort this June, says he has gained a much longer-term sense of satisfaction—that of having forged business bonds with classmates he knows will last a lifetime.

INDIGENOUS LAW PROGRAM GRADS

CONTINUED FROM P. 1



Ashini

a part of governance, it is a part of how we manage ourselves and it is a part of how we are responsible to ourselves, to each other, and to our global community. I hope our graduates will take with them the ability to centre Indigenous law in the world as a collaborative and principled way to solve problems, so that is never reduced to just words on paper, because it is so much more than that."

Looking ahead, UVic is continuing to build upon its position of leadership and will be home to the National Centre for Indigenous Laws in the coming years.

Four of this year's 23 program grads are:

Jolene Ashini

Jolene Ashini is the first Labrador Innu woman to become a lawyer. She grew up on reserve and within the Innu territory of Nitassinan, and is a member of the Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation, located in Labrador. She has mixed non-Indigenous and Inuit roots, with ties to Nunatsiavut on her mother's side, while her father was Innu.

She was raised in the Innu way of life, while keeping in touch with influences of Inuit culture. Living in Nutshimit, her life and work have been intertwined with strong Innu principles, knowledge and experiences.

She served as a band councillor for the Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation, where she realized that to do more for her community and others, she needed to further her education to apply the law, fairly, to Indigenous peoples. Before UVic Law, Jolene completed a BSc in geology at Acadia University, where she was vice president of the Indigenous Student Society of Acadia.

"One of my life's great privileges was to be



Fox

able to walk the path of law school alongside the rest of my cohort," she says. "With this program, I had the opportunity to meet people who are now my closest friends and who I would consider my family, and we were able to learn from some of the most well renowned Indigenous professors, First Nations communities, Hereditary Chiefs and educators—no other law school could provide that type of education."

She will soon article with Olthius Kleer and Townshend LLP (OKT) in Toronto. OKT is a law firm that specialises in Aboriginal law, representing First Nation and Indigenous clients from across Canada.

Beth Fox

Beth Fox is a Blood Tribe member from Treaty Seven territory in Southern Alberta. She graduated with a bachelor's and then a master's of social work from the University of Calgary before entering the JD/JID program.

She is one of three siblings to graduate with a law degree from UVic, and plans on joining her siblings in private practice later this year.

A highlight of law at UVic was the time spent at Ye'yumnuts learning about Coast Salish law from professor Sarah Morales and community Elders.

"This was particularly special to me because we had a foundation in Coast Salish law and language that started in the classroom, and being physically present on the land created a new level of understanding and insight to me," she says.

Looking ahead, she plans to complete her articles, get called to the bar and dedicate her skills to work for Indigenous rights and communities.



Hawthornthwaite

"The opportunities to learn from some of the leading Indigenous legal scholars has made my law school experience special," she notes. "I would encourage any student interested in enrolling in the program to take opportunities to learn from and be mentored by the professors here."

Thomas Hawthornthwaite

Thomas Hawthornthwaite was born and raised in Nanaimo and is a member of the Squamish Nation. Before enrolling in the JD/JID program, he completed his undergraduate degree in business and commerce at UVic's Peter B. Gustavson School of Business.

He has had a passion for law throughout this life and was attracted to UVic Law because of its innovative and progressive approach to legal education.

"My favourite moment of the JD/JID program was when John Borrows first took us out onto the land to demonstrate a new pedagogy I had never experienced. It was at that moment I knew the program was something special," he says. "It has really been the people who have made this experience special. From my peers, to my professors, to the guest speakers and to the those we've met through the field schools. I would tell future applicants to take the plunge, and know that they have a myriad of extraordinary people who will support them at every step towards their goals."

Looking ahead, his plans are to draw from his experiences in corporate law and his commerce degree to assist First Nations in creating business opportunities, with an ultimate goal to one day create a new separate-entity structure that



Lawson

protects First Nations and adheres to the specific Indigenous legal order in which it is applied.

Skeena Lawson

Skeena Lawson is a settler who grew up on Wet'suwet'en territory in Smithers. After completing her undergraduate degree in history at Mount Allison University, she worked on Parliament Hill through the non-partisan Parliamentary Internship Programme, and taught middle school English in France before starting law school at UVic in 2018.

"My favourite moments were where we could see sources of law outside the classroom and ground what we were learning in a place or activity," she says. "Some highlights were drum making in First Peoples House, learning how to build fishing spears at Ye'yumnuts during our field school on Coast Salish territory, digging up rice lily bulbs at Cluxewe and our entire cohort paddling two dugout canoes in Kwakiutl territorial waters."

She is particularly interested in the nexus between environmental and Aboriginal law pertaining to conservation, resource use, and land rights and title. Looking ahead, she sees a future working in this field and would like to help Indigenous nations assert sovereignty over their own lands. In her spare time she loves to ski, cycle, do crosswords and play the piano.

Last summer, she worked with OKT Law in Yellowknife where she learned more about environmental law and land use and its connection to Aboriginal rights and title, treaty rights and the Crown's fiduciary obligations to First Nations.

She will be articling in Victoria with the Ministry of Attorney General's Legal Services Branch.

Conversation set grad on path to engineering

BY ANNE TOLSON

As Meg McPherson graduates this month with a BEng in electrical engineering and a new job in Vancouver, she recalls a pivotal conversation that started her on the path where she finds herself today.

“I was at a trade fair in my high school and got talking with a woman who was an electrician,” says McPherson, who is originally from Calgary and was in grade 11 at the time. “We talked for quite a while, and what she told me about her career really inspired me.”

McPherson told the electrician that from a young age she’d always loved immersing herself in tasks that involved designing and building.

“By the end of our conversation, she had me excited about the field and convinced me to apply for a summer job as a pre-apprentice electrician.”

McPherson spent the next two summers of high school working for a local electrical company, pulling wire, running conduit, installing pot lights and wiring receptacles. Following grade 12, she enrolled in an engineering technologist program in Alberta.

After receiving her diploma, McPherson put her new skills into practice, heading to Peru to volunteer with the Light Up the World charity.

“We went to very remote areas of Peru and installed solar panels in in very small villages that don’t have access to electricity,” she says. “It was a great opportunity—you think you’re going there to learn about installing solar, but it was much more about learning about the culture of Peru.”

Returning to Canada, McPherson knew she wanted to take her education further. So she signed up for the one-year Engineering Bridge Program at Camosun College, and then trans-

ferred to UVic to complete her degree.

Transitioning from college to university took some adjustment, and McPherson was glad to have made the journey with friends she’d found in the bridge program.

“We’re called ‘the bridgies,’” she says. “We’re a big group of engineering students who arrived at UVic at the start of the spring term and we stuck together because we knew each other and everything was so new.”

McPherson was part of a small group of “bridgies” who later worked on a capstone project during the requisite fourth-year engineering design course.

For their project, the five electrical engineering students used two types of machine learning algorithms to detect what are known as “eccentricity faults” in the motors of electric cars. These types of faults indicate that the rotor is out of alignment. Not knowing about the faults can lead to unpredicted breakdowns and costly repairs.

Detecting faults in the induction motors used in electrical vehicles motors isn’t new. But the UVic group’s approach—which focused on time instead of the frequency—is considered unusual and opens more possibilities for cheaper, simpler and more robust detection of eccentricity faults.

The group’s project was so successful that their instructor encouraged them to turn it into a paper for submission to the international conference on power electronics, machines and drives (PEMD 2022).

“The group’s research finding has a huge impact on society and will be presented at a very prestigious conference to be held in the UK,” said T. Ilamparithi, an assistant teaching professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering.

This June, McPherson will be among three



McPherson. PHOTO: SUBMITTED

of the original group who will fly to England to attend the conference at Newcastle University. She agrees that it’s a wonderful way to finish off her degree.

When she returns, McPherson will resume working at BBA Consultants, an engineering consulting firm in Vancouver where she completed three co-op terms.

During those co-ops, McPherson undertook a wide variety of tasks, from developing electrical design documentation for a mining project to consulting with BC Hydro on cybersecurity program compliance for the utility’s substations.

“With consulting, you can be thrown into totally different projects, and that’s what I love about it,” says McPherson. “BBA also has a great work environment—they really strive for teamwork and collaboration and I really enjoyed that.”

Her first co-op was with Riverside Energy Systems in Kamloops, where she helped to design and install renewable energy systems—specifically solar technology for grid-connected and off-grid systems.

Over the longer term, McPherson says she’d like to participate in more engineering volunteer opportunities overseas, perhaps by getting involved with an organization such as Engineers Without Borders.

In the meantime, she feels like she’s in the right place.

“I don’t know exactly where in the field of electrical engineering I want to end up in. Right now, I’m interested in everything,” she says. “With engineering consulting, you can get experience in so many different areas, so I think for starting out in my career, this is a great place to be.”

FACULTY OF HUMAN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Change of heart brought mature student to nursing



Cundiff. PHOTO PROVIDED

BY STEPHANIE HARRINGTON

Nursing may not seem like a common career path for an arts graduate, but health care runs deep in Tory Cundiff’s family.

Growing up in a family of doctors—both her parents and step-parents are physicians—Cundiff says she wasn’t a “science kid” and had never considered a career in health care. Instead, she earned a double degree in international relations and Latin American Studies from the University of British Columbia.

But after volunteering at a health resource centre for women in Vancouver’s downtown Eastside, Cundiff understood that her physician family had a bigger impact on her than she thought.

“I started to realize that it had shaped a lot of how I see the world,” she says.

In June, Cundiff will walk across the stage to receive a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. She is also completing additional certification in critical care nursing after finishing a practicum at Victoria General Hospital’s (VGH) emergency department. Although she initially envisioned becoming a nurse practitioner, Cundiff has be-

come drawn to the ER’s fast-paced environment.

“I never got tired when working, everything was so novel. It’s a real adrenaline rush,” Cundiff says.

Until she finishes her critical care training, Cundiff is working on the surgical floor at VGH. She took five years to complete her degree, instead of the usual three, so she could give birth to her first child and look after her daughter, who is now three. Being a mature student had its advantages, Cundiff says, including the ability to manage her time well.

“The faculty was so supportive of my re-entry,” she says.

After graduating from her first degree during a recession, Cundiff is grateful to have so many job opportunities and career paths in nursing. Over her degree, she completed practicums at long-term care facilities, neuro-rehabilitation and maternity wards, and in palliative care.

Of course, being a health care worker during covid has its challenges. Cundiff has seen the toll the pandemic has taken on her nursing and physician colleagues. Although she was initially nervous about working in a hospital during the pandemic, Cundiff says the experience has

helped her appreciate the crucial role vaccines play in preventing serious illness.

“The only people who get so sick we can’t help them are the people who are unvaccinated. That made it feel a lot less unmanageable than it felt at the beginning of the pandemic,” she says.

Another less talked about aspect of the pandemic, Cundiff says, is the increase in people coming to hospital very ill with other diseases because they didn’t get adequate care during covid. Cundiff is concerned about the number of experienced nurses retiring early, as well as the general state of our health-care system.

“We need dramatic health-care reform, in term of health-care delivery, nurse compensation and people’s access to primary care, which is really suffering,” she says.

Despite the challenges, Cundiff wouldn’t trade her new career for a desk job.

“What I like most is how much critical thinking I have to do in my job and how my job is ultimately so connected to being with people,” she says. “I could not imagine sitting at a desk, working on computer and not being more active and engaged with other people.”

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Catalyzing comprehension in the classroom



McIndoe. UVIC PHOTO SERVICES

Innovative, inclusive teaching is the most fundamental element in Scott McIndoe’s courses

BY DOROTHY EGGENBERGER

The transition from a high school to university classroom can be tricky—moving from a class size of 30 to literally hundreds. Yet, the structure of a first-year lecture stays the same. An instructor asks a question and a few students raise their hands.

“You think you have a good impression of the class and their understanding of the material,” says UVic chemistry professor Scott McIndoe. “It wasn’t until I started using clickers that I realized the majority of the class was struggling.”

Clickers are an interactive technology that enables instructors to pose questions to students and immediately collect and view the responses

of the entire class. Now, instead of a handful of students, 200 or more will answer a question at the same time. McIndoe also uses Google Form for anonymous questions during class—the QR code is posted in the classroom and McIndoe receives the questions to his phone.

For his creativity, innovation and inclusiveness, McIndoe was named a 3M National Teaching Fellow this Spring—one of 10 post-secondary educators across Canada to be recognized for their exceptional leadership in undergraduate education.

Transformative teaching

McIndoe is an international expert in mass spectrometry of organometallic compounds and catalysts. Since join-

ing UVic in 2003, he has introduced new ways of teaching chemistry and helped rejuvenate the chemistry department’s first-year course curriculum.

“I’m struck by how Scott has constantly changed his delivery and methods over the years, while also maintaining a high level of structure and organization to ensure students’ benefit,” says UVic chemist and Canada Research Chair Fraser Hof, “There are no gimmicks here—Scott is an educator who is incredibly skilled and profoundly committed to his students.”

McIndoe establishes a level of trust and engagement that keeps students coming back for more. Since he began innovating in the classroom and lab, more students than ever have signed up for—and succeeded—in higher-level chemistry courses.

Not your usual office hours

McIndoe’s key to success is focusing his efforts on improving the undergraduate experience for the larger student body, rather than showcasing star pupils. Case in point: he transformed his office hours by relocating from his office to a lecture hall. Instead of one student, he meets with anywhere from 30 to 150.

In 2020, McIndoe’s Zoom class included both live, virtual office hours as well as an online discussion forum, which housed thousands of student posts. “I appreciate how valiantly he tackled the ridiculous amounts of forum posts,” commented one student.

Volume is no deterrent for McIndoe. Also in 2020, he flipped the virtual Zoom classroom by presenting a pre-recorded Zoom lecture to engage students in a live chat during the video. A chat log for one 50-minute class was

hundreds of lines long: students asking for a simple, catch-up clarification; students asking follow-ups to help form basic ideas; and students posting ideas and questions that extend the lesson to a higher level.

A signature of his Chemistry 101 class—called a ‘godsend’ by many students—is a lecture book with partially completed PowerPoint slides connected to passages in the textbook. As McIndoe lectures, he fills in missing text, numbers, and molecular diagrams on the slides, and the students do the same in their own lecture books.

“I like the way lectures are done in this course. Having the lecture book which we fill in forced me to actually participate, and had me more engaged than other courses did,” says another student.

Changing students’ minds about chemistry

McIndoe’s engaging and approachable teaching style (and perhaps also his infectious enthusiasm) combats the pervasive view that chemistry, even introductory chemistry, is harder and less approachable than other disciplines. In doing so, he opens up the field to students who may have disliked or even feared this area of science.

“Chemistry strives to answer the question ‘how do things work?’ at the deepest level comprehensible by scientists: at the level of molecules and atoms,” says McIndoe. He maintains that only by understanding molecules better can we solve today’s urgent problems.

“Clean energy. A pristine environment. Cures for cancer. How to feed the world. Sustainable manufacturing. Molecular computing. I’m not pretending that I’m going to solve any or all of these problems, but someone I teach just might, and that makes my career as a researcher and educator both hugely rewarding and a lot of fun,” he adds.

Borders and barriers in harm reduction

Drug-checking programs can track the flow of fentanyl across North America—and shine a light on new substances that could make the drug-poisoning crisis more deadly.

BY AMANDA FARRELL-LOW

Mexico and Canada may be physically separated by thousands of kilometres, but people like Jaime Arredondo Sanchez Lira are working to bring them closer together when it comes to harm reduction and drug policy.

Arredondo is the new Canada Research Chair in Substance Use and Health Policy Research, a professor in UVic’s School of Public Health and Social Policy, and a scientist with the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research (CISUR). He comes to UVic from the Centre for Research and Teaching in Economics in Aguascalientes, Mexico, where he was a professor in the drug policy program.

“I had a not-so-traditional transition to academia,” Arredondo explains. “Before grad school, I worked in the Mexican government in the Ministry of Public Safety in the state of Quintana Roo, where the popular Cancun resort community is located.” This means his first experience in public policy was closely related to public safety, particularly policing. After leaving government to start his graduate studies in San Diego, he began to look at violence and the US-led war on drugs as public-health issues, not criminal ones, and worked

to understand how police themselves could be risk factors for HIV—both for people who use drugs, and for officers themselves, as aggressive tactics used by police against people who used drugs put them all at risk.

Canadian connections

Arredondo’s work in Tijuana implementing a fentanyl drug-checking program with the harm reduction organization PrevenCasa led him to the BC Centre on Substance Use in Vancouver. Getting to know the Downtown Eastside community helped him explore new research ideas around implementing innovative projects in his home country of Mexico and his temporary home in Canada.

“I got to know many of the interventions that are now standard in British Columbia, like naloxone distribution and overdose prevention sites and adapt them to the reality of Mexico and the US/Mexico border,” he says.

Arredondo returned to Mexico, specifically Mexicali and the border town of Tijuana, to help put policies such as overdose prevention sites and drug checking into place. He has worked with charities such as Integración Social Verter, which set up La Sala, the only supervised consumption site in Latin America, and

the fourth in the world specifically for women. He also started a safe smoking distribution program in Baja California. But given the very different status of harm reduction and drug markets in Mexico versus Canada, there are hurdles to overcome, particularly around the power of organized crime in Mexico and how it relates to harm reduction.

“Trying to create a drug-checking service might be a little scarier in Mexico where a lot of community organizations, leaders, journalists or people who used substances are getting killed by disputes with organized crime,” Arredondo says. “To our surprise, we haven’t had any problems with violence from organized crime when it comes to harm reduction. It was more the government who showed resistance to the ideas.” The Mexican government cut all funding for harm reduction in the country in 2018, making it hard to sustain services without external help or research grants.

Harm reduction without borders

With his new CRC appointment, Arredondo is shifting much of his base to Victoria, but his work in Mexico and beyond continues. He says these countries, as well as the US, have a lot to learn from each other in terms of how we approach harm reduction and treat people who use drugs. His work assessing decriminalization in Mexico helped him understand that the law on the books is not always followed by



Arredondo. UVIC PHOTO SERVICES

implementation on the ground.

“These countries are linked by free trade agreements like NAFTA, but also by informal markets such as the political economy of drugs,” Arredondo notes. “I think they all have common issues. One of them is the vulnerabilities around people who use substances and the stigma surrounding substance use. That seems to be equally harmful throughout our region.”

Mapping the North American drug supply

A new project Arredondo is involved in will help connect his Mexican and Canadian research with what is happening on the US West Coast. This region is also seeing a need for harm reduction services, like drug checking and supervised consumption sites,

in the face of rising fentanyl-related overdoses due to a contaminated drug supply, largely coming from Mexico. A new partnership between the OnPoint San Diego needle exchanges service, local health departments and the University of California San Diego will try to implement community-based drug checking similar to UVic’s Vancouver Island Drug Checking Project.

“This new community service in San Diego has the potential to be one key element in the development of a pacific-wide drug monitoring system,” explains Arredondo. “The introduction of fentanyl in the Canadian and BC drug supply is a phenomenon being replicated in other western North American cities, like San Diego and Tijuana. We need to take actions to save lives now.”

Full story: bit.ly/22-barriers

New national hub to guide low-carbon energy transition

BY ANNE TOLSON

A vision to ensure that Canadian policymakers can make the best decisions when setting out to remove carbon from the country’s energy systems is a big step closer to reality with the creation of a national energy modelling centre.

On May 25, Natural Resources Canada announced \$5 million toward the new Energy Modelling Hub (EMH), which will be led by a team of researchers at University of Victoria, Polytechnique Montréal and the University of Calgary.

UVic civil engineer Madeleine McPherson’s vision and research have been a driving force behind the creation of the hub. The new entity aims to provide consistent, evidenced-based tools and information to policymakers on how best to transition from fossil fuels to cleaner energy sources, such as wind and solar.

“Policymakers are looking for pathways to transform Canada’s energy systems to meet climate goals,” says McPherson. “We need modelling to see into the future to show us how to make the best decisions to remove carbon from our energy systems. Then we need to get that information into the hands of the decision-makers who can turn net zero into a reality.”

The work conducted by McPherson and contributing to the new hub reflects UVic’s commitment to climate action, as articulated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Bridging the gap

The energy modelling landscape in Canada is fractured and the hub hopes to link the modelling community and decision-makers. Energy modelling is a process of using computers to simulate various parts of energy systems, which are too vast and complex to replicate in a lab. These models help researchers understand the ramifications of various large-scale “what if” scenarios, and serve as crucial tools in making effective decisions about decarbonization, or the broad, systemic reduction of carbon.

“We’re trying to make predictions 20 or 50 years into the future and we’re trying to understand complex things like how our building energy infrastructure will impact climate and vice versa,” McPherson explains. “Energy models are tools that allow us to ask those exploratory questions before we make massive investments in new systems that will last for decades and cost us billions of dollars.”

GLOBAL IMPACT

CONTINUED FROM P. 1

and around the world.

Helping remote communities switch to renewable energy from diesel. Discovering evidence of the climate’s effect on marine ecosystems to help protect this precious resource. Building on Indigenous ecological knowledge to create environmental DNA solutions. Placing students in sustainability jobs so they can put classroom theory to practice.

These are just a few examples of UVic’s long-established commitment to and actions taken on the values and solutions-focused priorities as articulated in the UN SDGs.

“We are part of a global community that cares about the well-being of people and our planet. We are determined to empower our students, faculty and researchers to pursue bold ideas and turn ideas into action with impact that creates a better world for all,” says UVic Vice-President, Research and Innovation Lisa Kalynchuk. “I am so proud of this year’s impact ranking



McPherson. UVIC PHOTO SERVICES

UVic’s Institute for Energy Systems (IESVIC) will lead the technical side of the new hub, continuing to develop and refine energy models and other tools initiated a few years ago under McPherson’s direction. Polytechnique Montréal will serve as the administrative centre where the hub will be headquartered, organizing workshops and coordinating outreach. The University of Calgary will bring economics and policy expertise to the group.

A vision takes shape

McPherson first got the idea for a Canadian energy modelling hub when she was working as a postdoctoral researcher at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) in Colorado—the primary centre for energy research and development in the US, which works closely with American law makers.

“When I worked at the NREL, I witnessed a very effective vehicle for translating energy modelling work into decision-making,” says McPherson, who is originally from Salt Spring Island—a Southern Gulf Island between Victoria and mainland BC. “It occurred to me that we really don’t really have a similar kind of institution in Canada and that just seemed like a really big gap.”

While a lot of great energy modelling work is being done in Canada, there is no central institution to leverage this expertise to its full potential. McPherson was convinced

that Canada needed its own central hub—with energy models and data that reflected Canada’s social, political and historical realities, such as Indigenous community ownership, for example.

McPherson returned to Canada determined to fill the gap and found a perfect fit at IESVIC. IESVIC researchers focus on the deep decarbonization of energy systems, ranging from buildings and transportation, to power systems and geographical regions of every size.

“I think it’s safe to say that IESVIC is the powerhouse for energy systems modelling in Canada,” she says.

Laying the foundation

Since arriving at UVic in 2018, McPherson has built up a team of more than 20 graduate students and researchers, who have worked with her to develop three key software platforms: a database of energy system information; a growing repository of energy system models that span sectors, scales and vectors; and a visualization platform, which produces graphs and other visual aids to quickly communicate results.

When contacted by an eligible organization, McPherson works with that stakeholder to explore possible energy scenarios, using this software capacity.

“The number of organizations that have reached out over the last few years for modelling work has

been overwhelming,” she says. “It is important work that I really believe must get done, but there is just too much volume for our team to handle on our own—this work needs to be institutionalized.”

Examples of organizations that have reached out include the David Suzuki Foundation, the City of Regina, The Transition Accelerator charity and several research labs.

Determining which energy model (or models) to use depends on what the organization is trying to accomplish. For example, The Transitions Accelerator—a charity devoted to net-zero emissions by 2050—requested a study on how integrating the power systems of the four western provinces could help decarbonize the region as a whole. In another case, the David Suzuki Foundation wanted to explore different pathways to get to net-zero electricity in Canada by 2035.

Going forward, the three software platforms developed at UVic will form the technical foundation of the new national hub. McPherson will be hiring five engineers and researchers to further develop these platforms and work with stakeholder organizations.

Advancing climate action

The new EMH builds on the work of an earlier initiative, which was also funded by Natural Resources Canada. From 2019 to 2021, that group (with a similar name of the Energy Model-

ling Initiative) gathered data, held workshops and forums, and built an inventory of the different modelling groups in Canada and the types of models they use. One of the key recommendations of the earlier initiative was to create an institution like the new EMH.

The three researchers who led that earlier initiative are now part of the four-person executive committee leading the new hub: McPherson at UVic, and Normand Mousseau and Louis Beaumier, both of Polytechnique Montréal. More recently, Blake Shaffer, of the University of Calgary, has joined the executive committee.

Ultimately, McPherson’s team will begin transferring the technology platforms developed at UVic to the central EMH for maintenance and development over the long term. It’s expected the hub will eventually become self-sustaining by transitioning to a service model.

The work done by McPherson’s group—and the EMH—is open source, meaning that their energy models, other tools and training materials will be available to anyone working in the area.

“I’m delighted for other researchers and energy modellers to use our models, data and visualizations, and for other organizations to benefit from them,” she says. “The more of this work in decarbonization that we can do, the better for everyone, and the better for the planet.”

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The Ring Summer 2022 Page 11

Historian of Ukraine thrust into public role by war

BY PHILIP COX

When Russian missiles struck Ukraine in the early hours of February 24, 2022, UVic historian and professor of Slavic studies Serhy Yekelchyk was watching the news in his kitchen in Victoria, waiting anxiously for his parents to call from their family home in Kyiv, as they did every morning.

He recalled stories his mother had told him of the Nazi invasion in 1941, when communications were cut off and ad hoc communication networks were built between families, who would relay news about the life or death of their loved ones.

He thought of Syria, whose city centres and residential areas Russia had bombed indiscriminately in 2015. He thought of Chechnya, 1999.

He wondered when his parents would call well into the afternoon until, finally, they did.

“One of the ironies of war in the 21st century is that communications continue,” Yekelchyk states. “Even in the besieged cities of Kharkiv and Mariupol, the latter of which is basically destroyed, there is cell phone service. In Kyiv, the internet connection was never lost.”

This constant, global connectivity has enabled Yekelchyk not only to stay in contact with his family back home throughout the invasion, but also to defend against their nation’s invaders by rallying support and countering disinformation from here in Canada with his pen, his voice and his vast knowledge of Ukrainian history.

“I am a historian and a citizen, really, of two nations,” he says with an accent that friends here might say is Ukrainian and family there might say is Canadian.

Thrust onto the public stage

Internationally, Serhy Yekelchyk is recognized as an esteemed scholar, public intellectual and advocate for democracy in Ukraine.

Since February, he has fact-checked for the *New York Times*, interviewed for CNN and written for BBC History, the *Wall Street Journal* and Politico—all while speaking at conferences and fundraisers and offering expert commentary for media outlets around the world.

He has begun working with PEN Canada, the local arm of a world-wide organization of writers who advance freedom of speech, oppose censorship and support the rights of intellectuals who are targeted for political ends.

In March, an impromptu public teach-in at UVic about the crisis featuring Yekelchyk and fellow UVic public policy scholar Tamara Krawchenko attracted more than 650 participants from across North and South America in less than 24 hours.

Last month, he regretfully declined an invitation to speak at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, because his calendar was already full up.

For most researchers, this might be the defining moment of their career. For Yekelchyk, it is a matter of duty.

“I am an introvert, actually. I love solitary work in the archive. But there is no choice. This is my contribution to the defense of Ukraine and I am happy to do it.”

The war, he notes, has been ongoing for almost a decade. It is only the relatively recent escalation and full-scale invasion that has made it seem new to some Western audiences.

Yekelchyk has been researching this conflict long enough to have become a specialist on the matter. His book, *Ukraine: What Everyone Needs to Know*, published by Oxford University Press, is currently used as a textbook on the Ukraine/Russia conflict at Cambridge. Serhii Plokyh, the director of the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard, recommends it as “an ABC of the current conflict and the war, written by a very good historian.”

“Yes, this is a defining moment of my career, but I’ve lived through several defining moments now,” Yekelchyk says with a gentle laugh. “The collapse of the Soviet Union, the Orange revolution of 2004/5, the Maidan revolution of 2014, the war in the Donbas since 2014 and now the full-scale Russian invasion, which started in February. This has all led to much media attention for me, because of Ukraine’s increasing strategic importance to the West.”

Living memories

When the war ends, Yekelchyk would like nothing more than to return to hiking with his spouse and son in the mountains, tinkering



Yekelchyk. UVIC PHOTO SERVICES



Professors and writers play an important role in Ukraine as public intellectuals. They are often the stars of Ukrainian television because the media approaches us constantly for commentary about current events. This tells you something—that Ukrainian society is in an active search for truth and justice and for a better life for ourselves and our children.”

—UVIC HISTORIAN AND PROFESSOR OF SLAVIC STUDIES SERHY YEKELCHYK

with woodwork in his garden and building small fires by the ocean in his spare time.

The area of Victoria where he now lives is remarkably similar to his hometown in central Kyiv, with mountains and forests and a high riverbank overlooking a wide body of water nearby.

Yekelchyk describes Kyiv as a city of parks, sandy beaches and small islands peppering the Dnieper watershed, which flows through the centre of the city. It is a place steeped in history, he says, which shaped both his childhood and his life’s work.

“My dad would take me for walks in a local park that had memorial plaques to rival princes who lived in the ninth century. When I was just learning to read, I would try to decipher the font on these plaques. So this history was a part of my everyday life,” he recalls.

Another part of his everyday life as a child was constant reminders of the second World War—traces of trenches in many of the city’s neighborhoods, unexploded bombs and ammunition unearthed by children digging in their backyards or in forests nearby.

Visits to his mother’s family often included strolls through the park developed after the war around Babyn Yar, a ravine near their home where the Nazis massacred 33,771 Jews in 1941—now a major Holocaust memorial.

“Like for many Europeans, World War II is not fully ‘history’ for Ukrainians. It is also living memory,” Yekelchyk explains. “Every family has its stories. Everybody has grandparents who either fought during the war or lived under the Nazi occupation. So that war is always present.”

One family story that had been kept secret from his aunt and mother when they were children concerned a young Jewish girl whom their illiterate, religious mother had hidden from the Nazis for a few days in her wardrobe, and whom Yekelchyk’s mother recalls seeing alive after the war.

Among his classmates, Yekelchyk was one of the few students who knew both of his grandfathers—one a Red Army private during the war and another a colonel. It was far more common for children his age to know only faded photographs of fallen soldiers.

“‘Why was there so much death and destruction in our land? Why we could only speak of it in the way the state wanted?’ These were the type of questions that I grew up thinking about,” Yekelchyk says. “It took me a long time to realize

how important all these thoughts and experiences were for me.”

Yesterday, today

In February, Russian rockets pounded the neighborhood east of Kyiv where Yekelchyk and his spouse, Olga Pressitch—a poet and language instructor who also teaches Slavic studies at UVic—had lived after getting married as undergraduates in the late 1980s.

Ukrainian air defenses that covered the central region of the city were mobilized over its eastern bank, showering explosive debris on late Soviet housing blocks that had once stood as signs of progress, before decades of economic stagnation turned them into symbols of isolation and neglect.

Most people living there today were young adults when they bought their homes in the early 70s and remained there through retirement into old age, leaving few in a position to flee the destruction brought about by the Russian onslaught.

The Russian government calls its invasion ‘de-nazification,’ despite Ukraine having a Jewish president and no members of the extreme right represented in its parliament, unlike in many other European countries.

“De-nazification, to Mr. Putin, refers to us—to the West,” Yekelchyk explains. “He sees Ukrainians as Nazis because they have democracy and they are fighting for the ideals of the West, which represents a threat to his regime. In Mr. Putin’s mythological version of ‘Nazism,’ everyone against his authoritarian rule is a ‘Nazi.’”

Though the war front has moved south-east from Kyiv, military checkpoints cloister the city’s centre and keep key areas cordoned off from most civilians. The subway system that once carried Yekelchyk to the beach with his friends is now locked down for government use. Its stations, among the deepest in the world, were designed as nuclear shelters, equipped with retractable heavy metal doors meant to withstand a nuclear attack.

“Kyiv’s subways were built in the 1960s, when everyone was expecting nuclear war with the Americans,” Yekelchyk states. “We never thought we would see them put into action, except for testing. But they’ve been put into action now—and, of course, it’s not the Americans who are attacking us.”

Democracy today, democracy tomorrow

Although Ukraine has an ancient past, it is still a young nation-state that has transformed itself radically since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the last 20 years, it has undergone two major popular democratic revolutions and embarked on a nationwide process of decolonization most visible in the elimination of cultural signs from the Soviet empire, including the replacement of colonial street names and the removal of monuments to imperial Russian figureheads.

Like most Ukrainians, Yekelchyk’s identity as a citizen of Ukraine was formed during this post-Soviet period and galvanized by the twin revolutions, which rejected ethnic nationalisms and crony imperialisms in favour of the rule of law, economic freedom, anti-corruption enforcement and democratically elected leadership.

“Ukraine today recognizes the previously suppressed diversity of its heritage and celebrates the cultural contributions of non-ethnic Ukrainian groups such as the Jews, Greeks, Poles and Crimean Tatars,” Yekelchyk says. “It doesn’t really matter where you come from, as long as you believe in the notion of self-organized society determining the life of the country.”

It is within this context that Yekelchyk learned to engage with the media and translate his academic expertise for a general audience, offering evidence-based perspectives on the country’s recent communist past, the wars and atrocities it has endured, the cultural and historical transformations that have followed since, and now the current invasion by Russia.

“Professors and writers play an important role in Ukraine as public intellectuals. They are often the stars of Ukrainian television because the media approaches us constantly for commentary about current events,” Yekelchyk says. “This tells you something—that Ukrainian society is in an active search for truth and justice and for a better life for ourselves and our children.”

Looking forward

Because travel to Ukraine is restricted for the foreseeable future, Yekelchyk will continue his work on the conflict with Russia from Canada, offering his expertise where possible and writing what he describes as increasingly in-depth, reflective articles as the war drags on.

He has a third article for BBC History in the works, alongside a second edition of his book *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation*, and a third edition of *Ukraine: What Everybody Needs to Know*.

At UVic, he is helping to launch a new emergency fund for Ukrainian students, which will offer doctoral fellowships for students currently enrolled in Ukrainian universities and provide them with an office space and faculty mentor on campus.

More than anything, Yekelchyk looks forward to a time when the invasion ends, things go back to normal, and he can return to his quiet life as a historian and professor of Slavic studies.

“I was on a study leave that I had to end in February because I was giving interviews and speaking at events all the time,” Yekelchyk says. “I had an elaborate agenda to finish several book manuscripts, which for now are waiting to be completed when my duty as a citizen of Ukraine is done.”