INDIGENOUS TAX GAP
REVAMPED COURSE FILLS ACADEMIC VOID

SOLVING BUSINESS PUZZLES
KEIRA TORKKO SPEAKS CAREER GROWTH

PAWSITIVE PERFORMER
DANIELLE LOWE’S CRICKET-BASED DOG TREAT BUSINESS
Collective strengths help us adapt and thrive

As we move through the third summer since COVID-19 disrupted our lives, I am grateful for many things: our local and international business communities which support and sustain the Gustavson School; our alumni, who live incredibly full lives yet stay connected with us; our students who continue to bring open minds and fresh ideas into the classroom during unpredictable times; and our faculty and staff who have made it possible for us to adapt and thrive. These past few years have demonstrated the collective strength in our extended Gustavson family and reinforced the power of our community.

This is a community that is growing all the time. Our first cohort of graduates from our redesigned MBA in Sustainable Innovation converses in June and the second cohort of our new Master in Management begins in September. As our past graduates can attest, sustainability, innovation and design thinking have always been strengths of our program, and we continue to advance our focus in these areas. As more and more businesses are seeing the need to think and act with greater purpose, our graduates are the leaders who will put these ideas into practice and forge change in the world.

In the fall, we are thrilled to be recognizing Ratana and Arran Stephens, the co-founders of Nature’s Path Foods, at our 2022 Distinguished Entrepreneur of the Year Gala. Their dedication to building a hugely successful business, while also serving their community and regenerating agriculture for a more sustainable future, is a shining example of how innovative business practices can have a lasting and far-reaching positive impact.

The world is changing and so too are the challenges and opportunities before us. We need leaders unafraid to try something new. In this issue of Business Class, and among all our alumni around the world, you will find stories of how our grads go on to do just that.

Dr. Saul Klein
Dean, Peter B. Gustavson School of Business
deaanson@uvic.ca

I-ACE receives Economic Reconciliation Award

The Indigenous Advancement of Cultural Entrepreneurship program (I-ACE) has been recognized once again for the impact of its entrepreneurship training, and received the 2022 Economic Reconciliation Award from the BC Economic Development Association (BCEDA).

These awards recognize BCEDA members for outstanding work in supporting their local economies and making a meaningful difference in their communities. 2022 is the first year BCEDA included the Economic Reconciliation award category.

Developed by Tribal Resources Investment Corporation (TRICORP) and the Gustavson School of Business, I-ACE is invited into communities to deliver culturally sensitive and community-tailored entrepreneurship training. Since its first cohort in 2013, I-ACE has seen more than 700 graduates complete the program, and nearly 300 businesses launched.

Gustavson welcomes Mia Maki to new associate dean role

Gustavson is pleased to share that Assistant Teaching Professor Mia Maki has accepted the role of associate dean, faculty outreach. In this new role, Maki works to support and enhance Gustavson’s connections with the community and leads the external relations team. Maki brings deep experience as a CPA, academic leader, instructor, facilitator and consultant, as well as offering extensive knowledge of Gustavson from her 15 years as a faculty member (and MBA alumnus).

“Working with the team at Gustavson has been a pleasure since my first day,” says Maki. “I am very excited to take on this leadership role at the school. I look forward to expanding our connections and creating deeper ones, too, with our community.”

UVic ranks 12th in world in Times Higher Education ranking

UVic is in the top 12 out of 1,406 colleges and universities around the world in advancing and living up to the commitments of the United Nation’s (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as rated by the 2022 Times Higher Education Impact Rankings.

“The work we do at Gustavson is in strong alignment with the UN’s SDGs,” says Dean Saul Klein. “From climate finance to sustainable supply chains and social enterprises, from sustainability-focused co-op work terms to SDG-focused lesson plans and our MBA in Sustainable Innovation, these concepts are a fundamental part of what we do. We are honoured to have contributed alongside colleagues across campus to this recognition of UVic’s impact.”

UVic ranked highly on the following SDGs:
• 2nd for SDG 13: Climate action
• 2nd for SDG 15: Life on land
• 5th for SDG 14: Life below water
• 12th for SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production
• 19th for SDG 1: No poverty
• 25th for SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth
Chris Hildreth, BA ’15, founder and president of TOPSOIL, recalls the moment six years ago that marked the culmination of years of education, miles of red tape and a dream he’d cultivated since enrolling at UVic back in 2011. “I wrote my last university exam in the morning, and that afternoon I moved two tons of soil onto a rooftop,” he says.

His dream was to create the highest-quality sustainable food system without chemicals, single-use plastics or, most notably, any agricultural land. And so, with Hildreth sweating in the afternoon heat, TOPSOIL was born—and the rooftop venture eventually evolved into 3,000-plus geotextile dirt-filled containers on 20,000 square feet of vacant land at Dockside Green (which today provides local farmers and architects. I learned a lot about risks and how I can make decisions of their decision to create a business expansion strategy for TOPSOIL as their capstone project.”

Several months later, the students presented Hildreth with 20 pages of their findings under the title Growing Community Resiliency through Urban Agriculture: a market expansion strategy. “To say Hildreth was impressed would be an understatement. “They did a lot of heavy lifting, and the report went literally nailed it.”

Examples abound of how the report may help Hildreth’s company expand. Case in point: it includes a top-10 list of cities in BC that have the permitting required and many other valuable business details,” he says. “They had a lot of foresight and structure conducive to a TOPSOIL operation. The report also touches on after-sales service. “Our research found that Chris’s clients really liked the service or consulting part of [his business],” Chu says. “I think he’s re-evaluated the importance of that service piece.”

Hildreth has come a long way since the afternoon he spread two tons of soil across a rooftop, and he readily admits he was initially driven more by passion than acumen. “Because we started on rooftops the name TOPSOIL seemed to work,” he says, laughing. “I didn’t even know that topsoil is where you grow the food in traditional agriculture.”

“It took two years to convince a building developer to let me put a commercial farm on top of their building. I had countless meetings with engineers, then building insurance companies, contractors, farmers and architects. I learned a lot about risks and how I can make it work.”

An equal amount of effort went into the development of his mobile farming system, whose infrastructure was refined to make the farming operations as easy as possible. “We want to systemize everything so that we can entice young people to view farming as a real career choice. For example, there is minimal weeding as we grow in containers and the watering can be automated so you can be blocks away and activate the watering system from your phone,” explains Hildreth.

But a great vision and innovative products still need solid business strategies in order to achieve full potential, and on that score Hildreth is indebted to Malik, Mason and Chu: “I was absolutely thrilled with the outcome of the report and will be using it to take the plunge into the next phase of my business. “We can’t solve our water problem by just me becoming a farmer; we need more people to grow more food for more people to make any difference. Now we have the infrastructure, knowledge and experience to give other people the best chances for success.”

“UVic MBA student teams complete a capstone consulting project addressing a real business’s need during the last term of the program. To learn more about these consulting projects, contact mbasec@uvic.ca “
Chatting with Keira Torkko, BCom ’97, you can’t help but feel inspired—empowered, even. Her unique approach to business could be likened to finally taking a camera lens cap off and letting the light stream in. It’s an approach she has honed as a result of an unorthodox 26-year career journey and the experience she has gained working in a number of different roles during that time in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors.

“My job, as I see it, is to solve business puzzles through the lens of people,” explains Torkko, chief people officer at supply chain sustainability management company Assent, where she leads the development of its team. “If we’re not thinking about people first and their contributions to the business, we’re not thinking about our business in the right way.”

Since Torkko joined four years ago, Assent has grown from 300 team members to more than 900 and recently raised $360 million (USD) in venture funding. Torkko credits the company’s great people strategy for this exponential growth.

Business Class caught up with Torkko to discuss how she broke the traditional career journey mould, how understanding the importance of personal branding yielded results for her and what it means to tackle business puzzles through the lens of people.

Keira Torkko solves business puzzles through the lens of people

by Natalie Bruckner
After my BCom degree at UVic, I realized my “brand” was my leadership and management skills, and that and become the leader you are today. KT: After my BCom degree at UVic in 1996, I worked in a few small companies and then entered into the financial sector with TD Bank. Business Class: When it comes to what we consider to be the traditional career path, you break that mould. Where do we tend to go wrong when we view career growth? KT: For many of my roles I was fortunate to have leaders who pushed me. KT: Before joining Assent, I had limited direct experience focusing solely on HR, or in the world of supply chain solutions. I had, however, worked in the business careers office at the university, so it was already coming full circle. But I come from a business background, with the lens of, “How am I supporting our people to ensure that they’re feeling engaged and aligned?” At Assent, we use the word “puzzle” rather than “problem” deliberately, because puzzles are meant to be solved. And we also call our team “Employee Experience”—to demonstrate our commitment to supporting how team members are valued at all stages of the journey. Assent is a fast growing SaaS company, growing at 40 to 50 per cent a year. Andrew Wattman, the CEO, and I agreed that my unique background would bring a different perspective to this growth. I had led all sorts of teams, so I understood what the teams were going through, what they were experiencing and how to solve puzzles.

The University of Victoria Spring/Summer 2022 Business Class 10

BC: What would you say drives you to continue exploring new opportunities and help others on their career growth journey? KT: I believe we should always be reaching higher and that lifelong learning is important. KT: For me, I want to practice directly as an accountant, but I wanted to have that financial knowledge. Even now, in HR, my accounting designation still provides extraordinary value. I ask questions people never expect of me and I get asked to the table to support all aspects of the business. Coaching and mentoring others is also important to me—recognizing the potential in others and how that drives performance. I actually recently hired my first UVic business grad, Somto Odili (MGB ’21), and she is fantastic. She likely teaches me more than I teach her. Ultimately, I want to be a great role model for my teenage boys. I want to show them that career/family/values can live in harmony and that I am supportive and supported. That, and that taking risks which may take you off a predetermined path is rewarding. Be open to the possibilities. KT: I learned early on that a lot of people don’t know how to translate their skills, or how to apply their skillset in non-obvious ways. The first step is to drill down to identify your skills and create your brand. If your brand is being the person who goes that extra mile, or who does the most research, those are the sorts of things that people will remember you for. Those skills translate across roles. You need to ask yourself: How do you context adapt what you have been doing to what you can do? Be true to yourself and your values, because that won’t ever change. I love that a firefighter, for example, knows how to manage things in a crisis. That skill can be applied to so many roles, like customer service issues, for example. I realized my “brand” was my ability to focus on people, to uncover the impact I can have on the team—whether that’s a team of 10 or 300. I learned during my time at the Coaching Association of Canada how foundational leadership and people skills translate across so many different areas. The details really matter.

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BC: Your own career path has been somewhat unconventional and breaks many stereotypical ideas. Can you tell us how you got to where you are today? KT: After my BCom degree at UVic in 1996, I worked in a few small companies and then entered into the financial sector with TD Bank, where I worked in both personal and commercial banking. I realized finance wasn’t my passion, but I loved working with my customers. My husband (also a UVic grad) and I moved to Ottawa and I took a job at the Ottawa Centre for Regional Innovation (OCRi) where I was able to take my business banking experience and help people start small businesses. After the tech downturn, I took a job at the Ottawa Centre (a UVic grad) and I moved to Ottawa. One of the best things I ever did during my degree was take an elective course called Acting J (for non-theatre students). I gave one of my first co-op work terms to the end of my last co-op was immense! I was shy and pushed myself to develop my confidence through the program.

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To say carbon markets are complex is a planetary understatement. With caps, targets and regulations levied by countries, provinces and states across the globe—plus a growing voluntary carbon-offset sector now in the mix—it’s no surprise companies look for help navigating the landscape.

As a Calgary-based analyst for environmental advisory firm ClimeCo, Wilson Fong, MGB ’20, spends his days making sense of it all for his clients.

Most of these clients are heavy-industry players, from oil and gas to cement, glass and fertilizer companies. While some are looking to meet voluntary sustainability goals, many operate in “compliance markets,” where federal and other governments set emission limits. Under this framework, companies can buy and sell emission allowances, and purchase credits to offset their emissions. This sums up carbon markets, in a nutshell. “We have clients who are doing amazing work already, and they come to us when trying to strategize on how they can better approach their emissions-reduction targets,” says Fong.

ClimeCo started out in 2009 as a project developer, coming up with innovative ways to cut greenhouse gases at US bio-digester and nitric acid plants. Since then, the firm has evolved into a global advisor, facilitator, trader and developer of environmental commodities and sustainability projects.

In his 18 months on ClimeCo’s sustainability, policy and advisory team, Fong has earned his Certified International Trade Professional designation and built up encyclopedic knowledge of emission-trading systems and carbon-offset investments. One day, he’s researching a project to buy clean cookstoves en masse for Sudan; the next, he’s prepping a proposal to help protect 40,000 hectares of BC forest from logging—or even digging into the details of new modular carbon-capture equipment. Those projects, once vetted, are offered as carbon offset investments: ClimeCo clients and others can invest in these projects by way of offsetting carbon that is emitted during the course of their industry activities. Carbon offsetting is only a part of carbon pricing, which also requires companies to reduce their carbon emissions.

While some experts are doubtful about carbon pricing and its role in a greening economy, Fong is a firm believer that it has a part to play. “I’d love to see carbon pricing continue. I think it’s an amazing tool to reduce emissions,” he says. “It puts pressure on industry to remove emissions, but also enables industry to deploy new technologies, because Canada’s carbon pricing program for industry is intended to be revenue-neutral. That money goes right back into industry and ultimately trickles down into consumers’ pockets as well.”

Born and raised in Calgary, Fong earned a BBA before heading west to attend UVic, captivated by the Master of Global Business program and its hardwired global outlook. “I really liked the idea of making connections between business units and between value chains,” he says. “This was becoming more and more important at the time, and internationalization and globalization have made it even more relevant.”

While there, he kept himself doubly busy by pursuing a second degree concurrently—a Master of Science in Global Business from Montpellier Business School in France.

One of Fong’s Gustavson’s highlights was working with French and Korean companies on smart-city projects. “A major aspect of smart cities is sustainability, because if the world is so polluted that it’s ultimately destroyed, then there are no cities to live in,” he says. “Carbon-capture technology is a key part of any smart city, as I see it.”

After a post-grad stint at the Canadian Geothermal Energy Association, and a few solo consulting gigs, Fong landed at ClimeCo. The company’s culture of innovation resonated with him, he says, and so did its portfolio of projects. One example is ClimeCo’s work in mangrove protection and restoration: “That really piqued my interest, because mangroves are so important to the world and ecosystems,” says Fong. “It’s just one of the development projects my company is involved in.”

For students on a path similar to his own, Fong is optimistic. “Carbon markets are only going to become more relevant as climate ambition increases across the world,” he says. Canada’s carbon pricing programs are in play, he notes, and the federal government recently announced more stringent benchmarks.

“The industry needs people who are passionate about sustainability,” Fong adds. “It’s definitely a great place to empower young professionals to make change.”
Scott Simpson, MBA ’22, couldn’t be happier with the capstone 596 project that he embarked on two years ago with three other cohort members of Gustavson’s custom MBA program for TELUS (MBA for TELUS). Not only does the outcome of the 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 The University of British Columbia 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 undeterred 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 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, Madeline Baker and Emily McGlenn 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 the community a better place,” says Simpson. “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 acclers 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 probably 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 convocated with his cohort mates in June 2022, 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.
When Doug Stuart, Gustavson BCom ’12, joined the Gustavson School of Business in 2018, he had considerable accounting firm experience under his belt. This enabled him to teach corporate finance, management and taxation, as well as accounting in undergraduate and graduate programs, confident his curricula would support student learning overall.

But that confidence was shaken in 2019, when he participated in the Indigenous Advancement of Cultural Entrepreneurship (I-ACE) program. I-ACE is a collaboration between Tribal Resources Investment Corporation (TRICORP) and the business school, and delivers entrepreneurship training by invitation in Indigenous communities across the country.

Stuart recalls, “I travelled to Hazelton in Northern BC and worked with Indigenous entrepreneurs there who had incredible business ideas and who asked lots of tax-related questions. But when I approached different universities that I thought would have the answers, I realized Indigenous tax matters weren’t addressed in academic circles—and they certainly weren’t a focus of the Chartered Professional

How a collaborative effort created a unique course that addresses the Indigenous tax gap in academic and CPA circles

by Robin Brunet

Filling the Indigenous Tax gap
Accountant program. “I was startled. It had wrongly assumed that tax accounting for Indigenous businesses in Canada was well covered. And since my own curriculum didn’t touch on the issue, students who took my courses were missing out on something big.”

Fast-forward to March of 2022: Stuart, now an assistant teaching professor at Gustavson, has refreshed COM 425 Taxation for Managers, his fourth-year tax course, to include material on First Nations governments with their own revenue systems and how tax rules apply to Indigenous business owners both on and off reserve.

The revamped content was made possible with help from Indigenous tax specialist Mindy Wight and students Emily Salmon (PhD candidate at Gustavson’s Gill Graduate School) and Jordyn Hrenyk (Gustavson BCom ’15 and PhD candidate at Simon Fraser’s Beedie School of Business). “Emily and Jordyn did a lot of the heavy lifting and taught me a great deal about Indigenous ways of knowing, real-life scenarios faced by Indigenous entrepreneurs and research methods,” Stuart says. “This project would not have been possible without them.”

I-ACE strives to help prospective Indigenous entrepreneurs take the first steps towards starting their business. “We say business via workshops, and offers extensive coaching and mentorship. During his time in Hazelton, Stuart gained a first-hand appreciation of how skillful and determined the Indigenous entrepreneurial community is. And his alarm over the lack of Indigenous tax content at post-secondary institutions was exacerbated by the fact that, according to the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, the Indigenous economy contributes $32 billion in annualized income towards Canada’s economy. “So it was imperative to me to prepare students in all my courses, including those I teach as part of the Gustavson BCom degree, to be aware of Indigenous tax issues,” Stuart says. If the I-ACE experience prompted Stuart to realize gaps in the content of his own course curricula, it was followed several months later by an equally eye-opening encounter with Prince George-based Mindy Wight, to whom he was referred by a colleague. Stuart recalls that when he first phoned her to discuss his intention to develop a course, “She struck me as a consummate professional with incredible knowledge of finance, leadership, Indigenous tax issues and First Nation governance and community development.”

Wight, who at the time was a partner at business consulting firm MNP and is now CFO of Ireland Kay Investment Development Corporation, the economic development arm of the Spanish) Nation, was similarly impressed by Stuart’s acumen. But it was his passion that convinced her to make time in her busy schedule to help. “That was so important to me, because it would be a challenge to overcome long-held stigma, such as the prevailing myth about our people not paying any taxes,” she says.

Prior to undertaking the course redesign, Stuart and Wight co-wrote an article for the Canadian Tax Journal on “Supporting Indigenous Canadian Entrepreneurs: Navigating Complex Tax Rules.” The article demonstrated the intricacy of the rules by showing how regulations fluctuate between on-reserve businesses and those off reserve. Stuart says, “Some of the rules are not easily understood even by professionals, and the intent of our paper—as would be the intent of my revamped course—was to give people broad knowledge of the matter.”

Stuart once again consulted with colleagues to find Indigenous students who could help develop reading lists, teaching materials, discussion questions and instructor notes for his new curriculum content. “They would be doing the bulk of the work, and I ultimately reached out to Emily Salmon,” he says.

Salmon is a PhD candidate at Gustavson’s Gill Graduate School, and also a Cowichan Tribes member with experience providing HR, leadership and support within Indigenous organizations. Like Wight, she was impressed by Stuart’s passion. “I was busy with my PhD and I couldn’t afford to waste time with someone who would simply pay lip service to the issue,” she says. “Doug’s intentions were genuine, so I phoned a friend and told her, ‘There’s a really cool project about to happen here; do you want to join?’ Fortunately she said yes.”

That person was Jordyn Hrenyk, a PhD candidate in Business Administration focused on Indigenous entrepreneurship at SFU’s Beedie School of Business, the University of Victoria’s Faculty of Management, and First Nation governance and administration.

“I was startled. I had wrongly assumed that tax accounting for Indigenous businesses in Canada was well covered. And since my own curriculum didn’t touch on the issue, students who took my courses were missing out on something big.”

Emily Salmon

His ultimate goal is for the course to be imitated. “I would love for it to be widely adopted,” he says. “Given the rate of growth of Indigenous business, it’s crucial that Indigenous tax matters be taught in our institutions of higher learning.”

Indigenous and non-Indigenous tax experts should also be learning about specifics in order to support all business owners in Canada.”

For her part, Wight doesn’t rule out further collaborations: “We’ll see how this initial course is received. We have high hopes, and if there’s enough interest then, who knows? There might be opportunities to expand. And I’ll be glad to participate.”
Who do you TRUST?

The Gustavson Brand Trust Index reveals what constitutes consumer trust in 2022

by Venus Tamturk

A beautiful thing usually happens when a company or organization succeeds in building trust. It is inspired to build on that trust, with greater society benefiting in the process. Such was the case in 2022, with the Canadian Automobile Association (CAA)—long recognized for its integrity—once again being named the most trusted brand in Canada, followed by other distinguished brands: Band-Aid at number two, and Costco tying with Lego and Home Hardware Stores Ltd. for third spot. These are just some of the findings of the eighth annual Gustavson Brand Trust Index (GBTI)—the only study done by an academic institution that relies on top researchers in their fields to investigate consumer trust, the factors that affect it and the brands that succeed at it.

The Index highlights the importance of a company standing up for its values through its words and actions. For the 2022 Index, GBTI’s team gathered data from almost 8,200 consumers regarding 412 brands (both national and regional) during the month of January. Key factors considered included consumer perceptions of brand integrity, social responsibility, ability to perform core functions and interaction with consumers.

Top 10 takeaways from 2022

01

Canadian consumers distrust dominant technology brands—and yet use them more than ever.

02

Trust in all information sources is at record lows, but traditional media continues to be more trusted than social media outlets and search engines.

03

Trust in Canadian airlines is declining. Air Canada and Porter Airlines benefited from the short-lived optimism of the early days of the pandemic, while WestJet’s scores have gradually declined since 2018.

04

A&W’s focus on waste reducing packaging, innovations, sustainable food practices, water and energy conservation and giving back to communities has been paying off.

05

Trust in packaged food brands is eroding after a surge in demand last year due to home seclusion and pantry loading.

06

Costco achieved GBTI’s highest employee treatment score, while Uber is at the bottom of the list.

07

Since the inception of GBTI, consumers (especially those in Quebec) have been consistently more loyal to local brands. The trust hierarchy is local brands first, followed by Canadian origin brands and then global brands.

08

Canadians have a strong ability to detect greenwashing, and take it seriously.

09

Grocery stores were found to be the most trusted category, while the media is least trusted in the post-pandemic world.

10

Millennials and Gen Z (aged 16-35) recognized Patagonia as the most trusted brand in Canada.

Alumni Awards Corner

Two new UVic awards recognize alumni achievement

by Lindsay Fitterer

Gustavson alumni inspire others every day, all around the world. It’s no surprise, therefore, to see four of them recognized by two significant UVic awards over the past year: UVic’s Distinguished Alumni Awards and the business school’s Spirit of Ali Award.

UVic’s Distinguished Alumni Awards recognize alumni who have made vast impacts in our communities—leaders in their fields or humanitarian pioneers. These awards honour graduates in three categories: the Presidents’ Alumni Awards, the Emerging Alumni Awards and the Indigenous Community Alumni Awards. At Gustavson, we were proud to see three of our alumni recognized from among the many outstanding nominees: Derek Juno, Cory Stephens and Damineh Akhavan.

DEREK JUNO

Category: Presidents’ Alumni Awards

UVic degree and year: BCom ’11

Derek Juno, social entrepreneur and speaker, is the vice president of business development for the social enterprise Dollar Donation Club, which is a turn-key micro giving program for individuals and businesses. Previously, Juno served as executive vice president of Mealshare, a non-profit committed to ending youth hunger. Juno founded Elysium Retreat, which offers a two-day personal development retreat package.

BC: How did the Gustavson School of Business shape you as a person?

DJ: One of the many things I really appreciated about my UVic commerce education is that it gave me the understanding that you don’t have to put business students into a few narrowly defined boxes. I realized through my studies that I could be a businessman who also fights to make the world a better place. The business status quo should be changed and innovated on.

BC: What do you hope you and your work will ultimately accomplish?

DJ: I hope the work that I do over my lifetime inspires people to live a more impactful, grateful and fulfilling life. I also hope to help change the status quo of businesses so we can protect and preserve our planet for as long as possible.

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CORY STEPHENS
Category: Indigenous Community Alumni Awards
UVic degree and year: BCom ‘96

Cory Stephens is passionate about developing and supporting the growth of local communities. Stephens is program manager and learning enhancement officer for the Indigenous Advancement of Cultural Entrepreneurship (I-ACE), a program co-founded by TRICORP and Gustavson that provides Indigenous entrepreneurs with mentorship, knowledge and skills to successfully launch their careers.

Gustavson’s Spirit of Ali Award recognizes Gustavson alumni who have uncovered their true potential, taken risks, inspired collaboration and conquered significant challenges to achieve their success.

What was the moment you realized your career calling?

DA: In 2007, I had the pleasure of meeting with Dr. Ali Dastmalchian, who was Gustavson’s dean at the time. I was 27 years old, had recently experienced two life-changing, career-path-altering health events, and was trying to figure out if the MBA program was the right fit for me.

We talked about our similar backgrounds, my career path and the events of the past six months. I expected a generic response—instead, he looked at me with a grin and asked: “So in all of that, what is your true calling?” At the end of that meeting, we agreed that the MBA program would be the right fit; however, it took us five or six casual discussions for me to realize that the reason behind most of the work I do as an engineer—and beyond my engineering work in the community—stemmed from a dream I had as a child to be an astronaut and to fly all the underprivileged people on earth to the planet I had discovered on the spacecraft I had built.

What do you hope you and your work will ultimately accomplish?

DA: Life is short, and we are only on this planet for a finite time. I hope during my time here, and with the work I do as a professional engineer and as a champion for the underrepresented in our community, I can inspire others to do better and be better for themselves, others and our planet. We are all in this together.

Both the Spirit of Ali (to be announced in November, 2022) and UVic’s Distinguished Alumni Awards (announced spring 2023) welcome nominations. To learn more about the Spirit of Ali Award, please email tri@uvic.ca; more information about UVic’s Distinguished Alumni Awards is available at uvic.ca/alumni/awards.

DAMINEH AKHAVAN
Category: Presidents’ Alumni Awards, AND Gustavson’s Spirit of Ali Award
UVic degrees and years: BEng ’05; BS ’06; MBA ’11

An advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion, Damineh Akhavan is passionate about the advancement of women and other marginalized groups in STEM fields. Akhavan is a senior engineer at Viking Air Ltd., in addition to being the founder and CEO of Global Women in STEM Inc., a corporation committed to promoting equal opportunities for women and other underrepresented groups. Akhavan received both the Distinguished Alumni Award and Spirit of Ali awards this year.

DA: What is the moment you realized your career calling?

SM: I came to Uvic as an immigrant to pursue my MBA with a decent student loan and an ambition to land a good job. With the exposure that the MBA program gave me to business leaders, mentors and entrepreneurs, my mindset and approach shifted from “job-seeker” to the slightly more adventurous “entrepreneur.”

DA: What does the Spirit of Ali Award mean to you?

SM: All had an ability to inspire others to dream and encouraged me in my time at Uvic. Winning the Spirit of Ali award was extra special for me as Ali’s family was present in the audience and I truly got a chance to absorb the warmth, love and passion with which he lived his life.

DA: What do you hope you and your work will ultimately accomplish?

SM: I’m truly inspired by the stories of successful entrepreneurs and community change-makers. It’s an honour and a privilege to be leading the amazing, diverse team at FreshWorks. I sincerely hope my story of coming to Canada as a student job-seeker immigrant to a job-provider entrepreneur inspires the next generation in Canada and across the globe to challenge the “business as usual” mindset.

SAM MOD
Category: Spirit of Ali Award
UVic degree and year: MBA ‘15

Sam Mod, Victoria-based tech entrepreneur, is the CEO and co-founder of FreshWorks Studio, an award-winning firm that designs and develops custom apps. Their business grew from two employees in 2016 to 105-plus by May 2022, and continues to grow.

DA: How did the Gustavson MBA program affect you?

SM: I had the pleasure of meeting with Dr. Ali Dastmalchian, who was Gustavson’s beloved former dean, Dr. Ali Dastmalchian, who was an integral and dedicated member of the Gustavson community for over two decades and passed away in 2020. The Spirit of Ali Award recognizes Gustavson alumni who have uncovered their true potential, taken risks, inspired collaboration and conquered significant challenges to achieve their success.

The Spirit of Ali Award was established in 2021 in honour of Gustavson’s beloved former dean, Dr. Ali Dastmalchian, who was an integral and dedicated member of the Gustavson community for over two decades and passed away in 2020. The Spirit of Ali Award recognizes Gustavson alumni who have uncovered their true potential, taken risks, inspired collaboration and conquered significant challenges to achieve their success.
Dr. Natalie Slawinski is the director of Gustavson’s Centre for Social and Sustainable Innovation (CSSI). Having joined Gustavson from Memorial University of Newfoundland, Slawinski’s interest in studying social enterprises started in 2011 when she learned of registered charity Shorefast’s work to revitalize Fogo Island—a community significantly impacted by the collapse of the cod fishery.

Slawinski had been studying large corporations in the oil and gas sector and their response to climate change, but learning the story of Fogo Island put her on a different course.

Business Class sat down with Slawinski to hear more about the new Gustavson researcher’s interest in Fogo Island, social enterprises and how exactly a focus on regeneration can change business.

**BC:** What is Fogo Island and how did it load you to where you are today?

**NS:** Fogo Island is a community of 2,200 people, located off the northeast coast of Newfoundland. Like other fishing communities, Fogo Island was hit hard by the collapse of cod stocks and, in 1992, the Canadian government imposed a moratorium on cod fishing that caused many people to lose their livelihoods and to leave the community in search of jobs. In 2006, Shorefast set out to contribute to cultural and economic resilience on Fogo Island. Their first social enterprise, the Fogo Island Inn, is designed to honour the place and create jobs, and to deliver all profits back to the community. I was intrigued by the ambition of this work and its transformational potential, and it was then that I started shifting towards studying social enterprises.

**BC:** What was a big finding in your research?

**NS:** That social enterprises can play a regenerative role in communities. Social enterprises have an incredibly important role to play in addressing sustainability challenges because they pursue a social mission, and they leverage business tools and markets to achieve their social mission. In the case of Fogo Island, the island was hit hard by disaster and yet, a social enterprise came in and did what seemed impossible: It sparked new energy and pride in a community that for years had been experiencing economic and population decline. Shorefast built new capacities, infused an entrepreneurial spirit onto Fogo Island and captured people’s imaginations, attracting visitors from around the world. If that can happen on Fogo Island, why can’t it happen in other places in need of renewal and regeneration?

One research finding that I personally found very interesting was how a paradoxical mindset can create transformational positive changes for people and organizations and, ultimately, for how we interact with natural systems. That means instead of approaching decisions as a choice between either the community or the business, Shorefast looked at ways to serve both the community’s needs and its business needs. I found many examples of Shorefast using a paradoxical mindset in the data that my research team and I collected and analyzed.

**BC:** Can your research from Fogo Island be extrapolated to address how social enterprises can revitalize other communities?

**NS:** Yes. I have been extending this research to other communities in rural Newfoundland. Together with my Newfoundland-based research team, we have been studying five communities across the province, and the findings from that research are being written up in an edited volume titled Revitalizing PLACE through Social Enterprise: It is organized around the PLACE Framework of Community Revitalization—a framework that came out of the research on Fogo Island and a workshop for community leaders that our research team co-organized with Shorefast in 2018.

**BC:** What are the findings of your most recent paper?

**NS:** Social enterprises that work on building stronger communities often confront tensions, such as those between local needs and global pressures. By creating conditions for meaningful exchanges among various stakeholders and taking a patient approach, they can facilitate both the discovery of place-based opportunities and the regeneration of place.

**BC:** What is the difference between regenerative sustainability and sustainability?

**NS:** In the business sense, sustainability focuses on this notion of “doing no harm” and how to make sustainability profitable. While that idea continues to be important, we are still not seeing enough positive societal and environmental impacts to get on a path that effectively addresses our climate crisis and other sustainability challenges, and progress has been slow. The term “regenerative sustainability” pushes us to think more ambitiously about sustainability. Regeneration is about bringing things such as devitalized communities and damaged ecosystems back to life. It encourages businesses to find ways to become net positive instead of just doing no harm. Some people call it a paradigm shift—it’s about pushing ourselves to make things better. Even more broadly, regeneration invites us to think about how our social systems and ecological systems are interdependent. Successful businesses depend on healthy communities and ecosystems, and we must contribute to keeping them healthy, and regenerating those that have become depleted.

**BC:** What role do business schools play in fostering sustainability?

**NS:** Business schools have a huge opportunity to shape what sustainability looks like in the business world by inspiring future graduates to think about regeneration early on. In Victoria, we are lucky to be the home of many sustainable businesses and social enterprises. Our goal would be to incorporate more social enterprises and sustainable business cases into the curriculum of business schools. Another opportunity is to partner with such organizations to create meaningful student experiences that allow students to experience firsthand what regenerative sustainability looks like.

**BC:** What are you most looking forward to accomplishing in your new role as director of CSSI?

**NS:** To contributing to building a community of scholars and practitioners aiming for net-positive environmental, social and economic outcomes on Vancouver Island and beyond.
The Gustavson School of Business’s annual flagship event, the Distinguished Entrepreneur of the Year Award gala, once again celebrated individuals who have demonstrated entrepreneurial excellence, leadership and community contribution.

The 2021 winner, Anthony von Mandl, supercharged BC’s wine industry by pioneering high-end winemaking, putting the Okanagan Valley on the international wine map.

His company, Mark Anthony Group, includes Mission Hill Family Estates and other family-owned wineries, as well as iconic brands such as Mike’s Hard Lemonade and White Claw.

“His creativity and dedication in pursuing his entrepreneurial goals are unmatched,” noted Saul Klein, dean of the Gustavson School of Business.

Anthony von Mandl is recognized for revolutionizing BC’s wine industry.
Danielle Lowe, BCom student, is elbow deep in crickets—quite literally. Lowe is the mastermind behind Victoria-based Doodlebug Pet Food, a company that makes hypoallergenic cricket-based treats for dogs. As we chat, another online order comes in, and that brings her total sales to date to 758 units, which means Lowe has painstakingly created 90,000 cricket dog treats by hand.

Last year, Lowe was awarded $20,000 to help get her business off the ground when she won the inaugural Gustavson Business Start-Up Competition. Her vision, to be the leading sustainable-protein company that enhances dog health and wellness, caught the eye of the judges. (David Chan from Third-Culture Chili Oil came in second and was awarded $10,000.) “At the end of the day, we believed that both ventures were highly doable,” says Brock Smith, Gustavson’s professor of entrepreneurship and marketing who hosted the competition last August. “They didn’t require much to get started and had great growth potential. That, and the passion, enthusiasm and commitment of the entrepreneurs that they will follow through with their venture.”

It was exactly the morale and cash boost Lowe needed. To say the past 12 months have been a bit of a whirlwind would be an understatement. What started out as an idea to create a mealworm burger for humans to help solve deforestation problems has become a quickly-growing business in the highly competitive dog treat market. “I learned about entomophagy [the practice of eating insects] during one of my pre-core electives, and it piqued my interest,” says Lowe, who is in her final year of the program. “My initial focus was on high-protein insects as food for humans, but that changed when my sister’s dog, Billie, became sick and we realized she had a meat intolerance. I discovered that crickets are a sustainable and rich source of protein for dogs, too, and that up to 30 per cent of dogs suffer from meat intolerance.”

Unsure whether or not her idea would be a viable business option, Lowe approached her professors and was pointed in the direction of the Coast Capital Savings Innovation Centre—she joined the centre’s venture incubator, entered a pitch competition and won. “It made me realize this was a good idea,” she says. “I decided to structure the rest of my BCom around the business and took an entrepreneurship specialization a year early.”

Lowe had entered into a growing industry; the cricket market is expected to be worth $8 billion by 2020 (Barclays Investment Bank), and her idea had captured the interest of the entrepreneurship faculty. She was invited to enter the inaugural Gustavson Business Start-Up Competition, which offered $30,000 in seed funding thanks to two donors, Andrew Wilkinson and Ellen Cmolik.

Smith views the Business Start-Up Competition as being extremely important for the entrepreneurship program. “We welcome around 90 to 110 students a year into the program and our role is to get them to the point of being investor-ready with a venture. Typically, however, only one or two ventures a year get off the ground because these students have gone through four years of university, living off co-op work term money and many have student debt. They aren’t really in a position to take a chance and launch a business—which makes them think entrepreneurship isn’t a viable option.”

The competition, however, helps change that: “We are so fortunate to have donors who see the value in this and who have made a commitment to support young entrepreneurs—to have a little bit of assistance during the first six months of a venture goes a long way. It also makes a huge difference for the students to know people value what they are doing,” says Smith.

For Wilkinson, founder of Tiny (a long-term holding company for businesses that specialize in acquiring majority or whole stakes in internet companies), supporting new ventures is something he is extremely passionate about. “I’ve been there and I know how hard the startup phase is, but it really is the most exciting time of any business. I love getting a taste of that and hopefully helping young entrepreneurs avoid a few potholes along the way,” he says.

Those sentiments are echoed by Ellen Cmolik: “Entrepreneurship is an important theme in my own life. This path in life takes incredible drive, passion, hard work and determination. I’d like to support emerging entrepreneurs to create their own legacies in business and better serve our local communities.”

Lowe’s venture fit the bill. She was nominated from the summer entrepreneurship specialization and invited to be one of four finalists to present to a team of judges.

Having observed the competition, Wilkinson says that Lowe’s pitch stood out. “She had clearly been working on the business for over a year, which I felt showed she took it seriously. Sticking with something requires a lot of grit, and she clearly was insanely passionate about what she was doing.”

Lowe has since put the money to good use, investing in new marketing material, packaging, ingredients, farmer’s market tents and a new machine to speed up the process. She is even considering hiring a summer co-op student, as grants are available to cover part of the cost.

For now, Lowe remains extremely hands-on. She tastes every recipe herself before trialling it on a panel of furry taste-testers. When asked what cricket treats like, she describes them as “nutty in flavour.”

Starting a business at 21 years of age can be daunting, Lowe says, but her advice to fellow young entrepreneurs is this: “It’s OK to be worried about starting a business at a young age, but the fact is, there’s less risk because you have fewer responsibilities. Also, you’re eligible for a ton of grant opportunities. Not only has the money helped me launch [at a time] when perhaps it wouldn’t have previously been feasible, but winning the competition and working with Andrew afterwards cemented the fact that this is a good idea and helped me network with other people in the community.”
For as long as I can remember, books have been an important part of my life. They’ve calmed me and helped me orientate myself in the world.

Before starting my MBA and having children, I owned a small retail store and worked as a publicist for authors. After completing my MBA, I wanted to do something that would nurture my values and creativity. Then, when my boys were born, I realized just how important it was to create space for them to nurture their own creativity. The problem was, I had little luck finding resources to do that.

That was until one day when my sister told me to check out 826 Valencia, a social enterprise by author Dave Eggers to increase and inspire literacy skills among urban youth. I did research and thought, “We need that in Victoria!”

However, 826 has a massive operating budget that serves a dense population; it couldn’t be replicated in Victoria. So I spent time with 826 in California and tweaked some of its components to fit our local environment. That’s how the Story Studio was born!

Story Studio’s mandate is to inspire, educate and empower youth to become storytellers via fun project-oriented programs that show them they have stories worth sharing.

Among many other things, my MBA taught me the importance of strategic alignment, and this was useful for Story Studio. Running an organization like this is about always looking for ways to survive, and because of that people frequently want to partner with us. As such, I realized it is critical to remember what our mission is and ensure every opportunity we consider supports that mission.

That perfect strategic alignment happened one day when we were contacted by a teacher at Victoria West Elementary School. After holding a program there, we realized that classrooms were where we could have the biggest impact. The idea also aligned with my current role as a teacher—reinforcing my goal of helping students be their better selves.

So the Story Studio, which began as a workshop model, became a not-for-profit charitable program after we fulfilled the criteria of creating a board and opened up new financing options necessary to make our programming accessible to schools.

Today we run programs to supplement what educators are already doing. This means we are able to work with students with diverse backgrounds and interests, and help them see themselves as participants in literacy, not just observers. The school program brings facilitators and volunteers into the classroom to support storytelling. The stories are illustrated by the students, typed, edited and bound into a book for the students to keep.

Our organization continues to evolve. While the school program is still the main focus, there are many others—from a successful online teen writing club to programs involving refugees.

Today, I’m proud to say that since its inception, the Story Studio has provided programming for approximately 10,000 local youth—40 per cent of these have been at no cost to the participant.

My dream for Story Studio is to be the go-to for youth and those supporting youth who need to develop their relationship with literacy. And I have plenty of inspiration to fulfill that dream, thanks to meeting students who tell me that they participated in the Story Studio and it made a difference, and bumping into parents who tell me how the studio has supported their child.

My eldest son, who participated many times, is now in university and wants to be a writer. I can’t help but think that the Story Studio helped nurture that ambition. These are, for me, the ‘perfect’ outcomes.

Andrus and MGB classmate Ine Vandenwyngaert at the end of the Santa Cruz Trek in Peru. “After our MGB program we went up into the mountains for a three-day backpacking trip. Shortly after our MGB, we started our own business together, World Wild Hearts, where we document destinations around the world and provide inspiration for future travelers.”
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