



On top of the world

The Victoria region is a hot spot for world-leading, Nobel-winning climate research

Clockwise from left: Denman, Flato, Weaver, Prowse, Fyfe

It's not every day you wake up to find out that your work has been recognized with the most coveted award on the planet. That's what happened to several University of Victoria-based scientists on the morning of Oct. 12.

As is now widely known, the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize is shared by environmental activist Al Gore and the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) for their efforts in alerting the world to human-induced climate change and its consequences.

More than a dozen researchers associated with UVic were contributors to the IPCC. In fact, the Nobel is being shared by more researchers based at the University of Victoria than at any other university in Canada.

"It's an amazing affirmation of the climate science expertise at this university and in this region," says Dr. Howard Brunt, UVic's vice-president research. "We're very proud that our scientists, and the students they're training, are leaders in the global effort to understand climate change and deal with the huge challenges that lie ahead."

The IPCC publishes summaries of the latest scientific information on global climate change, known as assessments, every five or six years. Assessments are based on peer-reviewed scientific literature and are

written by teams of authors from around the world who are recognized experts in their field.

"It's a huge amount of work," says Dr. Ken Denman. As one of two coordinating lead authors of a chapter that includes the global carbon cycle and changes in land vegetation, he organized the work of 13 lead authors and 60 contributing authors.

Denman is one of a handful of climate scientists in Victoria with a foot in the door of more than one research institution. He's an adjunct professor at UVic, but is employed by the Institute of Ocean Sciences (IOS) and seconded to the Canadian Centre for Climate Modelling and Analysis (CCCma), located on the UVic campus.

His colleagues along the CCCma hallway include Drs. Greg Flato and John Fyfe—also adjunct professors at UVic and both lead authors in the IPCC's 2007 assessment. Flato studies Arctic sea ice, while Fyfe's expertise is climate modelling.

"The CCCma is very involved in collaborations with universities across Canada," say Flato and Fyfe. "Being located at UVic helps integrate our research with university colleagues. And being part of a large 'concentration' of climate researchers in Victoria helps foster joint work."

CCCma researchers work closely with UVic's

nearby climate modelling group, which includes Dr. Andrew Weaver, the Canada Research Chair on Climate Modelling and Analysis and lead author of an IPCC chapter on climate prediction. Collectively, the UVic and CCCma researchers lead one of the most sophisticated climate modelling facilities in the world.

"Universities have an education-oriented mandate and CCCma has a mission-oriented mandate," says Weaver. "By blending the two and bouncing ideas off one another we get the best of both worlds. Everybody wins."

That includes UVic students who get to rub shoulders with world-leading climate scientists. "Our students are exposed to ground-breaking results as soon as they're released," says Dr. Terry Prowse, a UVic geographer and a scientist with the federal-UVic Water and Climate Impacts Research Centre (W-CIRC).

Prowse was a lead author of an IPCC chapter on polar regions. "I'm only a small cog in the IPCC assessment team," he says, "but it's gratifying to know that much of the world is now paying attention. All problems become more manageable the more you understand them. Education is the key and this is what we try to offer to all."

EDGEwise

The five UVic-based researchers featured here are all members of BC's new Climate Action Team, a blue ribbon panel announced Nov. 20 by Premier Gordon Campbell. The panel also includes Dr. Fred Wrona, a UVic geographer and a scientist with W-CIRC, and Naomi Devine, a UVic student from the Common Energy Network. The team will offer advice to the government on reducing the province's greenhouse gas emissions by 33 per cent by 2020.

The final report of IPCC's 2007 assessment, released earlier this month, states that global warming is now unequivocal and that human activities are clearly implicated. The report is targeted at policy-makers from 180 countries who meet in Bali in December to discuss a new international climate change agreement.

The CCCma is an Environment Canada research centre. W-CIRC is a joint initiative of UVic and the National Water Research Institute of Environment Canada. IOS, situated in Sidney, is part of Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

UVic is a Canadian leader in climate change research. To find out more visit www.uvic.ca/research/oceans.html.

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