



Multiplicity

A newsletter from the Adviser
to the Provost on Equity and Diversity

Spring 2013



**University
of Victoria**

Vice-President
Academic & Provost

RETHINKING REALITIES: The value of social justice discourse

By Alannah James

Welcome to this issue of *Multiplicity*. I am honoured to have been asked by Grace Wong Sneddon, Adviser to the Provost on Equity and Diversity, to compose the preface to this issue. I sit on the planning committee for the Provost's Diversity Research Forum, and I am one of two student representatives. We also engage with other students, faculty and community members via social media. This year's conference featured the theme "Rethinking Realities" and traced historical linkages through the past 50 years (as UVic celebrates its 50th anniversary) of social justice and activism. I had the absolute pleasure of sitting on the judging panel for the Diversity Writing Contest, and volunteering with one of the conference sessions, entitled "Sound Solutions."

Helping to organize and eventually attend this conference was beneficial in two ways. First, it enabled me to bridge the gap between academia, and what I study in the classroom, and "real-world" activism. The conference provides opportunities to hear from community leaders in Victoria and beyond who enact positive social change through activism and outreach. Second, I had exposure to unique and challenging viewpoints. I truly did have to rethink my own reality. I embraced the opportunity to move outside my comfort zone, and as a student, I did so with intellectual curiosity and with further academic research in mind.

The opening reception for the conference featured an interview-style discussion with UVic's Dr. Peter Keller, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, and Dr. Reeta Tremblay, Vice-President Academic & Provost. Dr. Tremblay spoke to the issues epitomized by the conference: combatting

prejudice and discrimination based on race, gender and other categories of identity, working towards social justice goals, and uniting across borders in the pursuit of knowledge.

I highly recommend attending or volunteering with the forum. As a student, I was exposed to concepts and activists who challenge the status quo in their everyday lives. This is critical for me personally as I navigate the inherent duality of scholarly research: reading about social justice while simultaneously trying to enact it myself. This conference is critical for community members as a way to build networks of united, concerned citizens. Observing people bond through association with various issues both during the opening portion of the conference and the next day in sessions was wonderful to see on a campus that prides itself on inclusivity and social awareness. I thank Grace and the other organizers for the opportunity to take part, and I urge you to take the opportunity to challenge your reality.

The feedback from students, faculty and staff and the broader community is still coming in on the 2013 diversity conference. Participants found the forum space to be "welcoming," "exciting" and "energizing." The slam poetry contest was a great addition (see p. 3).

Grace Wong Sneddon,
Director, Academic Leadership Initiatives
and Adviser to the Provost on Equity and Diversity



Alannah James is a fifth-year honours student in the Department of Political Science at UVic, studying international security with a gendered lens. Her thesis focuses on rape culture in contemporary American society, including the policing of women's bodies, and explores how racism, sexism and misogyny support this culture. She is President of the Undergraduates of Political Science, Senior Deputy Electoral Officer for UVSS Elections Office, and Vice-President of 2013 Graduating Class.



Vice-President Academic and Provost Reeta Tremblay with Dean Peter Keller at the opening reception of the 2013 Provost's Diversity Research Forum

EMPATHY vs. hate

By Boma Browne, student



Boma Browne

The Honourable Jim Munson, a Canadian senator (Ottawa-Rideau Canal, Ontario) and retired journalist, spoke at the opening reception of the Provost's Diversity Research Forum. His speech, entitled "Empathy versus Hate in a Diverse World," touched on the challenges of diversity facing Canada as a nation. His speech focused on groups who usually feel these challenges, like children living with disabilities. He said that although it comes with challenges, Canada's diversity can be its strength if properly nurtured. The senator shared some of the work he does as a member of the Senate Aboriginal Committee and a "promoter and protector of minority rights" while elaborating on pivotal moments that have defined the work he does today.

One of these moments was his trip to Cambodia in 1991 when he was assigned to cover a story on an orphanage created by a Canadian woman named Naomi Bernstein. Bernstein was a children's aid worker and humanitarian whose life's work was to protect the safety of thousands of vulnerable children. Most of the children in the shelter were severely disabled and watching the care provided by Naomi and other volunteers led to a revelation. He realized that he could also help children who were most vulnerable to discrimination and hate. He said being able to give those in jeopardy a voice and bring attention to their struggles is the greatest gift a journalist can give.

Munson's appointment to Senate in 2003 enabled him to continue this role on a different platform. An encounter with a young father whose son had autism opened his eyes to the difficulties faced by people living with autism. Since then, he has advocated for the rights of children and specifically children with autism. The senator said that he wasn't an expert but served as a "bridge-builder" who guides people on how government works and specific ways in which they can present their causes to national decision makers.

He added that it was important to make sure that children living with disabilities have access to the right services. He spoke about Bill S-211, designating the second day of April every year as "World Autism Awareness Day." Senator Munson said that although public awareness of autism has heightened and social realities continue to change, the rate of children living with autism spectrum disorder is increasing. He elaborated on Section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act, which plays a crucial role in promoting tolerance and respect among Canadians. It also protects against discriminatory practices on the internet and other telecommunications devices likely to expose a person to hatred or contempt on the basis of race, ethnic origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, disability and more.

He spoke about empathy, which is a driving force in his life and more than a tool for conflict resolution. He said empathy has powerful implications for justice, business, education and social advocacy. Empathy helps us understand what it feels like to be an object of discrimination and what it feels like to be excluded. Finally, he challenged everyone to do their part in creating an environment where diversity can help define and create a better Canada.



The Honourable Jim Munson

DIVERSITY on page and screen

The winners of the 2012-2013 Diversity Writing Contest and first annual UVic Diversity Slam Poetry Contest were announced at First Peoples House during the opening reception of the Provost's Diversity Research Forum: Rethinking Realities.

In the fiction category of the Diversity Writing Contest, third-year French student Jin Kyung Yeo took first place for her story *Kintsugi*, while chemistry master's student Brian Coleman was second for *8 Down and Out*. In the personal narrative category, there was a tie for first place between Natasha Clark for her piece *Loving Genderqueer*; *Loving, Genderqueer* and graduate student Sepideh Heydari for *Born 23-year-old*. First-year student Jordan Konyk placed second with *Returning*. In the poetry category, third-year social work student Frances Woodcock placed first for her piece *Niger Delta Dirge*, while Erin Cotton (*Sensing Femininity*) and Adrian Southin (*The first thing you do when lost is build shelter*) tied for second. All the winning entries are available at <http://library.uvic.ca/events/writingcontest/>.

In the first annual UVic Diversity Slam Poetry Contest, participants created three-minute videos of their slam poetry on a topic or theme relating to diversity, equity and/or inclusion. The contest was open to all University of Victoria students as well as youth in the Capital Regional District. Of the entries submitted, a piece entitled *Blood Lines* by Gautham Krishnaraj, a student at Lester B. Pearson United World College, received the most Facebook "likes." Krishnaraj won \$150 and also took home the jury award with an additional \$250 prize. View his winning video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55MgYzeSgwA>



Participants enjoyed the opening of the 2013 Provost's Diversity Research Forum in First Peoples House

Mrs. Olivia Barr, an alumna of the first University of Victoria graduating class and the first woman elected as a student council president in a co-ed Canadian university, presented a keynote address at the 2013 diversity conference.



Sociology professor Aaron Devor was one of four UVic faculty members and activists on the closing plenary panel of the 2013 Provost's Diversity Research Forum, "Rethinking Realities: 50 Years of Activism."

Excerpt from *Loving Genderqueer;* *Loving, Genderqueer*

By *Natasha Clark* | *Personal narrative, 1st place (tied)*

I'm not gay. But my girlfriend is.

I married a man. I had children. I breastfed. I wear sexy skirts and dresses. My hair is long and I dye and curl it. I shave my legs. I own at least ten lipsticks. I bake the best milk chocolate chip cookies ever. I can knit. I still get lost in my own neighbourhood. I own thirty different shades of Martha Stewart-brand craft glitter. Sometimes I'm as soft and vulnerable as a hernia.

My girlfriend married a woman. She owns pets. She bound her breasts. She wears ties and dress shirts. Her hair is cut short at fancy barbershops. Her legs are unshaved. She wears cologne. She barbeques. Got a small engine that needs repair? She loves football. She sails boats like a boss. She has a good uppercut. She keeps an eye on public bullies and she's ready to pounce.



For the second year in a row, the University of Victoria was named one of Canada's Best Diversity Employers for 2013. Accepting the award in Toronto on behalf of UVic were Grace Wong Sneddon, Director of Faculty Leadership Initiatives and Adviser to the Provost on Equity and Diversity (second from left), and Nancy Pye, Human Rights Complaints Advisor in the Equity and Human Rights Office (third from left). Also in the photo are (l-r) Lynn Roger, Senior Vice-President & Chief Talent Officer, BMO Financial Group; Trevor Wilson, CEO, TWI Inc.; and Kristina Leung, Editor, Canada's Top 100 Employers.

Excerpt from *Born 23-year-old*

By *Sepideh Heydari* | *Personal narrative, 1st place (tied)*

As time passes you become more aware of the deep diversity between you and others. Now you are you and everyone else is others. You want to make sure that every attachment and friendship you have is because you like it to be that way. Not that you need it to be the way it is. Because any needed thing can be thrown away when the necessity is obviated. All of a sudden you feel like detaching every tie you had and begin everything from scratch. You want to lock all doors to yourself to see who bothers to find a key to your life. You become tired of being strong. You are sick of fake smiles you wear in front of others. You are sick of dealing with problems but dancing when Skyping with parents. You are tired of trying and yet getting more distant from friends. You realize the differences.

Excerpt from *Returning*

By Jordan Konyk | *Personal narrative, 2nd place*

Then it occurred to me. Belonging isn't something you rationalize. There is no formula that makes you feel at home. And as you grow, you expand and spread your reach. Your home has no choice but to do the same. Home is plural. Home isn't limited to one place, one bed where you first slept or one kitchen where you first learned to bake. Home is an element contained within you, a grounding that fills anywhere you go with a sense of familiarity. Home, when experienced from the inside, leads you through foreign crowds and guides you through unknown mountains. Home snaps into place the moment you touch down in a new, a foreign, or a familiar city. Home is what washes over you and tells you that you've finally returned.



Excerpt from *Kintsugi*

By Kin Kyung Yeo | *Fiction, 1st place*

The straw that broke the proverbial camel's back wasn't the new telling haircut, or the decision to get a tattoo and hide the thing until it was discovered. (It was found when mom decided to walk into the bathroom while I was blissfully unaware that I was, in fact, nude as I showered.) On the day of a special bi-weekly dinner night, she saw me give a quick but very persistent series of smooches on my girlfriend. It was also the day my mom decided to surprise visit me at school to pick me up. If you think about it, the probability of my mom just happening to be in the area, pulling up specifically at my building, and then me being in the front of the building with my girlfriend at that precise moment in a compromising position, is astronomical.

I remember the half scream, half shout ("Jessica!") call of my name (the frightening sound of my English name, the one my mom only used when she was either shocked or angry, or in this case, both), me looking back to see her with the passenger side window rolled down, and her blank expression giving away nothing. The gasp from my girlfriend had me snap my head back towards her as she breathed out, "Is that your...?"

"Yeah, that's my..."

She seemed a little afraid to let me go all alone, but I had known my mother all my life. I was her daughter, and I had this unconditional motherly bond/love going for me, she wouldn't kill me. The same couldn't be said for my girlfriend, however. So I played it safe and told her to stay with my eyes, while I collected my bag from the ground to climb into the cobalt blue SUV.

Excerpt from *8 Down and Out*

By Brian Coleman | Fiction, 2nd place

He'd met Sarah in his final year of high school. At that point Jack had kept the diagnosis secret, but his symptoms often led to strange looks and exclusion from the other students. She had just moved in from a nearby town and for one reason or another they had struck up a friendship. They both enjoyed doing the crossword and worked together on them during their lunch period. He didn't know what to make of it at first, but over time Jack began looking forward to seeing her at lunch every day. When high school was over, she'd gone off to a college in Chicago, while he'd remained behind. The next few years he'd worked a job or two, but wasn't able to hold one down as his symptoms grew worse and worse. His thoughts became more and more jumbled, he found it harder and harder to sleep, and the voices circled him like a vulture waiting for its prey to succumb. Sarah would call every once in a while to say hi and they would ask each other about a crossword clue they couldn't figure out. He always found her voice soothing because he knew that she was real. While his head was always swirling with disembodied sounds and taunts, she was his path back to reality, like a lighthouse in a fog.

"Too bad she's not coming."

Jack gave his head a shake and looked down at his watch. 11:55. Sarah had told him to meet her at this park at noon, so she wasn't late yet. As he counted the seconds along with the timepiece, his eyes fell to the scars that adorned his arm. He'd made sure to buy a large watch in order to avoid the stares of onlookers, but he never forgot they were there. The voices had gotten progressively worse, to the point where he could stand in an empty room and not hear himself speak. His first attempt ended up with him in a hospital, his mother in hysterics. The doctors patched him up and shipped him off to the local shrink. A new round of meds and some therapy sessions were the order of the day, but the effects were minimal. He became more withdrawn, his insomnia reaching lengthier stretches. One particularly bad bout led him to try again, yet he was interrupted by the ringing phone. Sarah was stuck on a particularly difficult puzzle. 8 down, "the writing on the wall", starts with a G? They spent the rest of the night going over the rest of the problems and chatting like they were back in high school. His previous plans forgotten, he rolled into bed and slept peacefully.

Niger Delta Dirge

By Frances Woodcock | Poetry, 1st place

*Dugout canoes slip
through Delta waters
once pristine,
now slick with oil.
Mangrove roots choke
on thick black sludge.*

*Flares belch fumes.
Acid rain falls,
rusting iron roofs.
Snakelike pipes slither
through foliage erupting
from bloodred dirt.*

*Bittersweet black crude,
sucked from soil and sea,
spews into tanker bellies
slaking carbon hunger.
Stolen inheritance of
barefoot Delta children.*

*Lush green coast
raided and robbed again.
The age old trade in
human flesh and palm oil
replaced by petroleum.
Empire's new slave.*

*Verdant villages disgorge
black masked men
demanding justice and
payment for pillage.
Protectors of land,
branded terrorists.*

*Delta dwellers display
restraint and courage
in their struggle against
state and corporate violence.
Calling upon allies
to counter annihilation.*

BUILDING COMMUNITY

The Community Building Fund, sponsored by the Vice-President Academic and Provost, provides sponsorship for projects and events that focus on enhancing equity, diversity and inclusion at the University of Victoria. The following projects were recognized with grants in fall 2012:

- **Ubuntu: A Global Citizenship Celebration**, organized by the UVic African & Caribbean Students' Association, celebrated the university's rich cultural diversity through food, music, dance and a fashion show. African and Caribbean food was provided by the Victoria African & Caribbean Cultural Society (VACCS) and the evening included a Japanese Taiko performance by Uminari Taiko. Moussa Magassa, UVic's Human Rights Education Advisor, gave a presentation about the concept of Ubuntu and how it relates to global citizenship, and campus advocacy groups provided information.
- On Nov. 21, in honour of the 14th annual Transgender Day of Remembrance, UVic Libraries screened the documentary film *Trans*. The screening was followed by a panel discussion.
- Dr. LillAnne Jackson, Faculty of Engineering, coordinated a first-year student diversity and equity survey.
- Atsuko Umeki, Advancement Services, coordinated workshops for The Immigrant Employee Support Network (IESN). The IESN is a support network of UVic employees from an immigrant background to Canada.



Community Building Fund recipients (l-r) Julie Laliberte, Brittany Bernard, Jin-Sun Yoon, Jess Knowles, Lara Wilson, Boma Brown and Ruth Emode

The next call for project proposals
for the Community Building Fund
will be in October 2013.
For more information, visit
[www.uvic.ca/vpacademic/faculty/
diversity/index.php](http://www.uvic.ca/vpacademic/faculty/diversity/index.php).

Please send your comments and feedback to multi@uvic.ca.

