Thoughts from the Head

Welcome to our Spring 2016 issue! I have always found this to be an optimistic time of year. For gardeners, our spring flowers are blooming and we are planting seeds in anticipation of a future harvest. For graduating students, this is a time for the celebration of accomplishments and anticipation of the future beyond university. Similarly, for the Sociology Department this is a time to recognize our recent successes and anticipate the fruits of our recently planted seeds.

One of our primary goals as a department is to make notable contributions to sociology and Canadian society more broadly. Our faculty work diligently and our reputation has grown across Canada. This year we are particularly proud that a number of our faculty have been recognized by the Canadian Sociological Association (CSA) for our contributions. Neil Guppy is the 2016 recipient of the CSA Outstanding Contribution Award. Among the many reasons provided, the CSA noted Neil’s commitment to growing the discipline for future generations. We all recognize this here in the Department and at UBC where Neil has made tremendous contributions to growing sociology. Wendy Roth is the 2016 recipient of the CSA Early Investigator Award. Wendy has already made impressive contributions to the sociological understanding of race that the CSA considered stellar for this stage of her career.

The CSA also awards the best article published in the Canadian Review of Sociology. This year two articles were awarded, both published by UBC Sociology faculty and graduate students. Sylvia Fuller and Natasha Stecy-Hildebrandt were recognized for their article “Lasting disadvantage? Competing career trajectories of matched temporary and permanent workers in Canada” and Neil Guppy and Nicole Luongo for their article, “The rise and fall of Canada’s gender-equity revolution.” We are particularly proud of this recognition as it draws attention to the important contributions we are making to Canadian sociology and to the strength of our graduate students who will build the future of Canadian sociology.

I am pleased to announce that we have successfully recruited one of the brightest stars among young scholars studying the sociology of marriage and family. Yue Qian is an expert on marriage and relationship formation, and conducts research in fundamental physics: The rise of the science empire was largely completed in the last century and most intellectual contributions are in a piece-meal fashion. As this finding was recently published at Physical Review Letters, we may somewhat understand how this major breakthrough in physics became possible from its long list of authors. To solve this fundamental question in physics, physicists, mathematicians, statisticians, engineers, astronomers, and computer scientists worldwide have been deeply involved in this project.

One month later, the Go matches between Lee Sedol and AlphaGo again pushed boundaries of imagination. When a chess-playing computer Deep Blue defeated a world champion Garry Kasparov in 1997, people shrugged and pointed out that no computer could beat a professional Go player.

Gravitational Waves, AlphaGo, & Social Science Research

On February 11th 2016, scientists from the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) announced successful detection of gravitational waves, which was deemed as a breakthrough moment in science. One possible reason why this fantastic detection attracts so much attention is that nowadays scholars, and even the public, may not really expect any major breakthrough in fundamental physics: The rise of the science empire was largely completed in the last century and most intellectual contributions are in a piece-meal fashion. As this finding was recently published at Physical Review Letters, we may somewhat understand how this major breakthrough in physics became possible from its long list of authors. To solve this fundamental question in physics, physicists, mathematicians, statisticians, engineers, astronomers, and computer scientists worldwide have been deeply involved in this project.

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Indeed, professional Go playing requires extensive calculation, which was way beyond the capacity of Deep Blue. It is said that these smart professional Go players practice ten hours per day and have no social life. One rising Korean Go player, Han Sang Hong, mentioned that he practiced twelve hours on a daily basis. While very few, if any, social scientists are as hardworking as these professional Go players, their diligence is still dwarfed by AlphaGo’s extensive training from human and computer play. AlphaGo’s secret weapon is a mixture of machine learning and a brutal-force approach. Assisted by 1,920 CPUs and 280 GPUs, AlphaGo learns from top Go players and searches for the optimal solution from the very beginning of a game. As long as AlphaGo’s calculation returns a global optimal decision at each step, its advantage over Lee gradually accumulates in a game as the remaining number of potential solutions decreases.

These two examples show that new methods and ideas from other fields are transforming the rules of the game. Social science research is not an exception to this transformation: the (re)discovery of Gibbs sampling makes Bayesian inference in social sciences possible; computer engineering has been employed to detect the operation of censorship in China; the application of GIS techniques to historical census data helps sociologists to reestablish spatial patterns of residential segregation in American cities since the late 1800s; genetic-environment interactions are shown to be a significant factor in shaping delinquency; and it is expected that economics will be greatly affected by machine-learning techniques (see Prof. Susan Athey’s response to a question posted at Quora: *how will machine learning impact economics?*). In recent years, a new research field in social sciences often came from neighboring research fields. We live in an unprecedented era of innovations, which are often achieved by bridging ideas across disciplines instead of proposing a brand-new invention in one’s own field. The power of bridging ideas can be illustrated by the concept of structural holes in social network analysis. To put it simply, if there is a gap between two entities with complementary resources and knowledge, filling the gap will create additional benefits beyond either entity. No matter whether such benefits could be attributable to network centrality, the advantage of having alternative exchange partners, or returns to prestigious and diverse contacts, social science research, especially these cutting-edge ones, are increasingly collaborative and interdisciplinary.

As predicted by Prof. Leo Breiman in 1994, statistics departments may disappear in the next 25 years and statisticians would be absorbed by other departments; however, he posited that the demise of statistics departments would not weaken the role of statistics in scientific research. Although this prediction will probably not come true and most departments of social sciences still survive, it appears that the next generation of social scientists should dance between discipline-oriented training and interdisciplinary research.

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**“Thoughts from the Head” continues from front cover ...**

much of her research in China. Yue has recently completed her Ph.D. in Sociology at Ohio State University and will join UBC Sociology in July. We will also be welcoming two new Lecturers in sociology in the coming year: Oral Robinson is a recent graduate from the University of Saskatchewan and Elic Chan is a recent graduate of the University of Toronto. We anticipate great things from our new colleagues.

In this issue of our newsletter you will see that our department also continues to making contributions to sociology around the globe. Qiang Fu describes the cutting edge of future sociological contributions and David Tindall is working at the front lines of sociology and climate change. One of the keys to contributing globally is to build relationships through partnership and exchange, as is demonstrated by the contributions of Rima Wilkes and Jiaji Wu.

These are just a few examples of the recent successes we have seen, the seeds we continue to plant and the fruits we anticipate in the Sociology Department. To learn more, I invite you to visit our department’s website (soci.ubc.ca) for updates and recent news. We are on Twitter as well (@UBCSociology).

*By Sean Lauer, Acting Head*
Three CSA (Canadian Sociological Association) major awards...

Outstanding Contribution Award: Neil Guppy

Neil Guppy is this year’s recipient of the CSA Outstanding Contribution Award. This well-deserved award recognizes Neil’s long time commitment to Canadian sociology, his wide breadth of publication across a number of fields of research, and the core venues in which he has made contributions, as well as his commitment to growing the discipline in future generations.

Early Investigator Award: Wendy Roth

Wendy Roth has been awarded the CSA Early Investigator Award. The award recognises research demonstrating high quality, theoretical rigour and/or methodological innovation, and future potential. This major award recognized Prof. Roth’s stellar accomplishments at this stage of her career.

Canadian review of Sociology Best Article Award(s!)

This award goes to the author of an article published in the journal in the two previous calendar years that, in the opinion of the selection committee, makes an outstanding contribution to the advancement of sociological knowledge. This year, the selection committee declared a tie—with two sets of authors receiving the award. Two Faculty members, Neil Guppy and Sylvia Fuller, together with their co/writers, grad students Nicole Luongo and Natasha Stecy-Hildebrandt, have been selected as co-winners of the Canadian Review of Sociology Best Article Award, for 2014. Neil Guppy and Nicole Luongo won for their article: “The Rise and Stull of the Gender Equity Revolution in Canada.” Sylvia Fuller and Natasha Stecy-Hildebrandt won for their article: “Lasting Disadvantage? Comparing Career Trajectories of Matched Temporary and Permanent Workers in Canada.”

These awards - and likely many other awards to Department members - will be presented at the Annual CSA Meeting in Calgary, May 30 - June 3.
Melting Glaciers, Hurricanes, Wildfires, & Climate Refugees

By D.B Tindall

As a result of human activities, greenhouse gases have increased in the atmosphere, and have contributed to global warming. Anthropogenic global warming, in turn, drives global climate change, which is arguably the biggest existential threat to humankind, as well as many other species. Climate change is variable. In some places there will be increased precipitation, in other places there will be increased droughts. We can expect more extreme storms. Sea levels are rising, and the ocean is becoming acidified, which is turn is killing coral reefs and other ocean living organisms. Some observers refer to the current era as the Anthropocene – an historical period where mass extinctions are being caused indirectly by human activities.

While single events cannot be definitively linked to climate change, in some parts of Canada we can expect a greater number of large wildfires (on average) as a result of climate change. It is very plausible that climate change played an important role in providing the conditions that facilitated the horrific wildfire that has recently led to the emergency evacuation of 80,000 people in Fort McMurray in Alberta.

In B.C., we are already seeing various manifestations of climate change. One of the most visible is that the lack of cold winters has led to the Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB) epidemic. As of 2013, the MPB had affected 18.3 million hectares (equivalent to an area over 5 times the size of Vancouver Island). By 2013 it had killed a cumulative total of 723 million cubic metres of timber (Government of British Columbia). This has had a big impact on the forest industry, and workers in forest dependent communities in B.C. Some other effects that B.C. is expected to experience include rising sea levels (which will threaten various parts of Greater Vancouver), more intense storms (and wind damage), increased risk of forest fires (especially in the interior), reduced snow packs (affecting skiing resorts), melting glaciers (affecting fresh water), and declining salmon stocks (as river levels change, and water temperatures increase).

Climate Change as a Social Construction. While on the surface climate change seems like a natural science problem, a number of the key issues are really sociological. I will briefly describe a few of these. While natural scientists see anthropogenic climate change as a real and urgent problem, from a sociological perspective, one way of thinking about climate change is that it can be viewed as a “social construction”. Most people learn about environmental topics such as climate change through media, institutions such as schools, and through interactions in their social networks (e.g. community, friends, family). In this sense, our knowledge is “socially constructed”. Further, what people believe, depends to a certain extent on their own social characteristics. As Riley Dunlap and his colleagues have documented, in the U.S., conservative white males are much more likely to be climate change skeptics or deniers than the rest of the population. In some ways, this seems strange, because anthropogenic climate change is a basic scientific fact – like the fact that gravity governs the motion of the planets in our solar system. But this is an example of where social forces also matter.

Social Inequality and Climate Justice. Issues related to social inequality are another obvious link of sociology to climate change. Climate justice (CJ) refers to the idea that some groups make greater contributions to greenhouse gas emissions than others, and that some groups are more greatly affected by climate change than others. The geographical coincidence is that the wealthy countries of the (mostly) north have historically made greater contributions to GHG emissions, while the poorer countries of the (mostly) south are more adversely affected by climate change. Indeed, this divide was a major focus of the recent COP 21 negotiations in Paris.

CJ also refers to a number of different social dimensions beyond geography. These include: income – people with higher incomes, consume more, and have a larger carbon footprints. Yet, they are also better able to adapt, than lower income people, and have more power in political arenas; Age – older cohorts have contributed the most to the problem, while youth will be disproportionately affected by climate change; Gender – throughout much of the world, a gendered division of labour, and gender inequality persists. Men tend to be disproportionately economically advantaged, but in many gender-typed roles, especially in developing countries, women bear a greater share of the burdens. And women in these roles disproportionately face the negative consequences of global warming; Aboriginal Peoples – in
Canada because they have been dispossessed from their traditional lands and resources, and have historically been substantially excluded from the economy. Aboriginal people have not benefitted to the same degree as non-Aboriginal peoples by the economic development that has spewed greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Yet, Indigenous peoples will be disproportionately affected by climate change.

**Involvement in the Sociology of Climate Change.** I have worked on the sociology of climate change in a number of ways including through teaching, service, and several ongoing research projects. This past academic year, for the first time, I taught a course entitled “An Introduction to the Sociology of Climate Change”. The first version of the course was delivered in Reims, France, as part of the UBC-Sciences Po Dual Degree program. This past term, I also taught a fourth year version as a special topics course at UBC-V.

As a service activity, I also regularly give talks to the general public on climate change for the Climate Reality Canada Project (an organization founded by former U.S. Vice President, Al Gore). Anyone who is interested in a CRCP presentation, can make a request at www.climatereality.ca

I have been working on four different but interrelated SSHRC sponsored research projects related to climate change, involving: 1) media, 2) policy networks, 3) social movements, and 4) climate justice and public opinion.

**1. Media.** For several of these projects, my co-investigator is Mark Stoddart, a former UBC Sociology Ph.D. student, and now an Associate Professor at Memorial University. Mark led a project where we examined trends in national newspaper coverage of climate change issues in Canada. We utilized an approach known as discourse network analysis to analyze these data. We found that the Globe and Mail more often frames climate change through debates over government responsibility, while the National Post is more likely to focus on debates over the reliability of climate science and on economics. This trend parallels developments in the U.S. Another finding is that these outlets consistently interpret climate change through a focus on national and international policy scales. However, this focus under-emphasizes some of the advances that have been made at the provincial and city level.

**2. Policy Networks.** For our policy network study, Mark, I, and several colleagues conducted over 70 interviews with individuals and organization reps who have been involved in discourse about climate change policy making. The theoretical framework underpinning this research, is that climate change policy differences are shaped by the network linkages amongst policy actors and the types of frames used to interpret climate change problems. We are now analyzing these data. Our Canada case study is part of a larger international comparative study involving about 20 different country cases as part of a later project known as COMPON. Information about the larger project can be found at: www.compon.org

**3. Social Movements.** As part of my research on the environmental movement in Canada, I have conducted nation-wide surveys of the general public, and of members of environmental organizations (ENGOs). Recently, UBC Sociology Ph.D. student Georgia Piggott and I published an article in *Nature Climate Change* investigating the effects of social networks between the environmental movement and the general public. Our main finding is that amongst members of the general public who did not themselves belong to an environmental organization, the greater the number of ties to environmentalists one has, the more likely an individual is to have a plan to deal with climate change. We argue that this is a “social influence” effect, whereby ENGO members disseminate information and moral suasion. In other words, talking with others can make a difference.

**4. Climate Justice.** Another project focuses upon climate justice. To gain insights on this topic, Jodie Gates, a former UBC student, Shannon Daub at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and I conducted a survey of BC residents to examine public understanding of the social aspects of climate change and to gauge public support for climate policies on a provincial level. Results suggest a number of ways of framing policy initiatives to address climate change that may benefit from understanding the perceptions and values of the public, and also from the fact that some policy initiatives can address several different objectives at the same time, and policy makers can leverage these facts. For example, increased investment in public transit tends to decrease overall carbon emissions. At the same time, it helps to address issues of social inequality, as lower income people are more likely to utilize public transportation. And, because they are more likely to utilize public transportation, they tend to have smaller carbon footprints. So, public transit is a win-win in terms of social justice and reducing carbon emissions. Info about the larger Climate

Continues on last page...
During the fall and spring of 2014 year UBC had the pleasure of hosting Dr. Arly Luo, a visiting scholar on sabbatical from ECUST. Dr. Luos’ good nature and academic interest in survey methods was appreciated by many of us in the Department of Sociology, not least of which are the members of the daily lunch “club” (also including several Anthropologists!). The next year as part of this partnership, Dr. Luo invited Wilkes to ECUST and this year UBC is hosting Jiaji Wu a doctoral candidate from ECUST.

By Rima Wilkes (Professor, UBC Sociology)
While at ECUST I taught several classes in survey methods, social movements, and also gave a talk about my work and about academic publishing in English-language journals to the faculty. The students were so nice and really interested in the material. It was definitely the start of a great partnership.

The back story is important however, because it seemed crazy to go all the way to China for only a short time and because I didn’t want to be away from my family for very long. I also brought my then 10-year old twin sons Ben and Zach along with my 79-year old mother! For all of us it was our first trip to China. We were unprepared for the amazing hospitality from Dr. Luo, his department and university, and especially from Ms. Jiaji Wu, a doctoral student in sociology at ECUST. Because I was teaching all day for several days Ms. Wu kindly came every day and took my family out sightseeing. My kids and my mom adore her. China was the most amazing and interesting place we had ever been, even though Shanghai (and later we went to Beijing) is a pretty small slice of China and we were only there for 3 weeks.

Now Ms. Wu is a visiting student here at the UBC department of sociology. Already she is taking several courses and getting adjusted to life in Canada. But most importantly is that the collaboration continues. Ms. Wu is studying trust in China and we have been working together on this work.

By Jiaji Wu (Doctoral candidate, ECUST)
I joined the Ph.D. program in Sociology at East China University of Science and Technology during 2012. I have published 4 papers/book chapters focusing on Chinese administrative reform and rural sociology and am currently working with my home supervisor, Prof. Fuxiang Yang, on Chinese country governance.

At UBC, I am auditing two courses. One is Analyzing Quantitative Data in Sociology which is instructed by Prof. Beth Hirsch (SOCI514-001) and the other is Quantitative Methods in Political Science which is instructed by Prof. Owen Andrew (POLI380-002). I am also continuing my research on trust in China under the guidance and support of Prof. Wilkes. Cary Wu, a doctoral student in the UBC sociology department, is also helping me a lot as well.

To me, being a visiting student at UBC in Sociology is the best part of 2015. I like it here so much as UBC has wonderful academic resources, beautiful scenery, and good quality recreation. The most important part is that I have met a lot of wonderful people here. Thanks to my dear Rima, Cary, Prof. Sean, Prof. Hirsh, Matteo, Kristin, Jorden, and Joyce.

I am really enjoying this academic year! Thanks you guys. Here I am with Ben and Zach Hawthorne at the Steveston Dock in Richmond a few weeks ago.
The SSA was so grateful to have an excellent executive team that produced quality programming to the club this year. Although we are a small club, we have provided opportunities for socializing through our movie night and coffee house events and we have given information on academic opportunities within the department. All of which was suggested at the beginning of the year as something members would like to see from the SSA. We managed to accomplish holding events, advocating for required Indigenous content within the department, organizing the undergraduate journal, and coordinating the first Sociology and Anthropology (ANSO) Gala.

As a department cub, the Sociology Students’ Association has an inherent responsibility to maintain the three visions of the club: Building, Empowering, and Connecting. One goal of Building was to ensure academic opportunities were not only available, but accessible to students. We made a point of organizing a Sociology Outside the Classroom event, where we organized a panel of both professors and students to talk about the Ethnographic Field School, Go Global, Honours, and Mentorship Program. This format inspired the mindset that academia is not only found within the walls of our classrooms. Similarly, at our Grad Info Session we added an element so that students who are writing any kind of application would be able to connect with the workshop. We filled up every spot. Finally, in our Big Talks we added a social aspect to each academic conversation. For example, our upcoming academic discussion on mental health on campus will be half discussion and half a yoga session in order to put our discussions of self-care into action.

The third vision of the SSA, Empowering, plays a large part in the academic format of our club. One of our larger projects was lobbying for required Indigenous content in the department. We spent months individually meeting with 11 Sociology faculty members to ask for their perspectives on the proposal. Using that feedback, we presented a formal proposal at our department’s meeting to encourage action to recognize UBC’s unceded Indigenous lands. Since the presentation there have been partnerships, committees, and commitment to measure Indigenous content in Sociology classes that will guide curriculum-based recommendations to ensure consistent Indigenous content. We are also proud to host the first undergraduate, peer- and faculty-reviewed Sociology publication in North America, called Sojourners. For seven years, the journal has showcased exemplary papers written by students with a sociological perspective. Contributing to the journal affords students an invaluable opportunity to have their work published early in their academic careers.

Thank you so much to staff, faculty, and students for supporting the SSA this year! We hope that you continue to engage with the SSA in this coming year. Stay in touch via our Facebook page (UBC Sociology Students’ Association)!

_By Cecilia Federizon, Emily Chan, 2015/16 Co-Presidents_

_Photo credits for this piece: The SSA_

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**UBC Dean of Arts Student Leader Awards**

Each year, the Dean of Arts hosts a special reception to recognize Arts undergraduate students who will be graduating in 2016 (May or November) and have dedicated themselves as leaders that have made an impact during their time at UBC.

Two graduating students, Emily Chan and Skyler Wang were honoured as student leaders this year. At the Deans Reception for Graduating Student leaders, Chan was honoured for her community contribution to UBC and beyond while Wang was honoured for his academic contribution to the Faculty of Arts. Congratulations to Emily and Skyler for representing sociology so well!

*Photo credit: Amanda Kurek*
Justice Project can be obtained at: https://www.policyalternatives.ca/projects/climate-justice-project/academic-publications

**Other Contributions.** Other sociologists affiliated with UBC (and elsewhere) have also been busy working on climate change issues.

Georgia Piggot, is studying the way organizations collectively respond to new pressures to reduce their carbon footprint. Her dissertation, titled "Getting to zero: A field-level perspective on organizational transitions towards carbon neutrality", examines the way organizations responded to the introduction of a carbon neutral policy in British Columbia. This work was supported by a Graduate Fellowship from the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions.

Mark Stoddart (former UBC Ph.D. student) is working on SSHRC supported projects examining linkages between the oil industry, tourism, and climate change in Atlantic Canada; he also served as a member of the Sustainable Canada Dialogues, a network of scholars who have worked to articulate and publicize sustainability options for Canada.

Nathan Young, another former UBC Sociology Ph.D. student, and now an Associate Professor at the University of Ottawa, has been actively researching different aspects media coverage about climate change issues in Canada, including the importance of images in media communication.

For those eager to learn more about sociology and climate change, a new book has been published recently by the ASA Task Force on Sociology and Global Climate Change, *Climate Change and Society: Sociological Perspectives*, edited by Riley E. Dunlap and Robert J. Brulle. Oxford University Press.

**The COP21 Paris Agreement.** This past December, the countries of the world met in Paris for the United Nations (UNFCCC) meetings on climate change, known as COP 21. I attended these meetings as an observer, and did some writing for media outlets such as the Vancouver Sun. I often get asked, was the Paris agreement on measures to curb climate change a success or failure? My short response, is that if you are an optimist, you will note that it is the first major international agreement on climate change in 18 years (since the Kyoto Accord in 1997). As such, it provides a starting point for countries to act. If you are a pessimist, you will note that the commitments regarding temperature/emissions reduction targets that have been made by countries are only about half of what is needed to avert disaster (for example, based on current trajectories, a number of island states will sink under the sea during this century). Further, the temperature/emissions reductions targets themselves, are not legally binding. In other words, the commitments aren't enough, and there are no legal consequences to a country for failing to live up to its commitments. Evaluating the success of COP 21 is a classic case of whether you think the glass is half full, or half empty.

On climate change, perhaps it is time to commit sociology.

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*Photo Credits for this piece: D.B Tindall*