Fed budget backs postsecondary sector

BY ADELA TALBOT

Although the 2017 federal budget, tabled last week by Finance Minister Bill Morneau, makes no specific provisions for postsecondary institutions, it nevertheless presents a number of opportunities for Canadian universities, said Peter White, Executive Director, Government Relations and Strategic Partnerships at Western.

"From our standpoint, there was no surprise with what the budget provided. Given the support we had last year, from the designated funding for the Canada First Research Excellence Fund (CFREF), and the fact there was a significant bump to the research councils, which was maintained, we had a fairly good understanding of how this budget was going to operate," White said.

“Nothing in the budget went to individual universities, but for the sector, there were still, actually, some good items.”

The first opportunity for universities lies in the announcement of $950 million for the Canadian Innovation and Skills Plan. The government has allotted $800 million over four years to develop innovation networks and clusters – an initiative that will be led by the private sector, but with university partners. Projects will focus on advanced manufacturing, agri-food, clean technology, digital technology, health and biosciences and clean resources and, given some of Western’s strengths, the university is well positioned to benefit from this, White noted.

“The good news is, we operate in a number of those areas. Core for us would be advanced manufacturing and health biosciences. As we move forward, and as (the government) looks at these clusters, they’re thinking more of a regional sector basis, we should be in a good position to participate in that because of what we’re doing with research parks, with engineering, science and health biosciences,” he explained.

Through CFREF and Canadian Innovation Foundation applications in some of these areas, Western has shown it has good strategic plans to grow its research and development base, White added. The university has many private sector partnerships that will work well for future opportunities.

Another key opportunity for universities – and Western, in particular – from the federal budget can be found in the funding allotted to Mitacs. The government will provide $221 million over five years, starting in 2017-18, to provide 10,000 work-integrated learning placements for Canadian post secondary students and graduates each year.

“This is great news for us because we’re always in the Top 3, if not the Top 5 of institutions across the country that utilize Mitacs,” White said.

The federal budget also established the Canada 150 Research Chairs program, which will create approximately 25 research chairs to attract top-tier international scholars and researchers to Canada. The $117.6 million in funding for these new chairs will come from the existing Canada Excellence Research Chairs program. Western has always done well with these types of opportunities, White added.

Two areas of the budget will help universities attract international talent, with almost $8 million allotted to implement a new global talent stream onto the temporary foreign worker program, allowing for exemptions for short-duration work, study-exchanges and academic stays. Some flexibility was needed in this area, White noted. Increased investments in an international mobility program will likewise benefit universities trying to attract top-level researchers.

The 2017 federal budget also:

• Provides $125 million in new money to launch a Pan-Canadian Artificial Intelligence Strategy for research and talent;
• Outlines details of the Work-Integrated Learning Program, featuring $73 million over four years for job-creating partnerships between employers and interested post-secondary institutions;
• Provides an annual $2 million budget for the Chief Science Advisor and related secretariat.
Faculty honoured with teaching awards

Western's Award of Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching, co-organized by the Student Union's Council and the Western Alumni Association, was handed out earlier this week to some of the university's top professors and lecturers in recognition of their stellar work in the classroom. Honoured this year were, from left, Alain Adian (Civil & Environmental Engineering), Raza Khan (Ivey Business School), Anton Afiair (Sociology) and Sarah McLean (Anthropology and Code Biology).

Dystopic Déjà Vu: Trump and the resurgence of cataclysmic classics

ART NOVI PRESENT: VSVSVS

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ARTISK Distinguished Lecture

Retired Canadian General John de Chastelain served an unprecedented two terms as Chief of Defence at the Alliance, alternating with his appointment as Canada’s 17th Ambassador to the United States in 1993. He is currently the only Canadian appointed to the prestigious Order of the Companions of Honour.

DICKIES, CHOLERA AND BIG DATA

The presentation will contrast Snow’s insights with the insights of Charles Dickens in tracing the origins of the cholera outbreak in London in 1854. This timely presentation is free and engaging for fans of scientific inquiry and the now-and-then of literature and culture.

BEST BETS

 Visit the Western Events Calendar at www.events.western.ca for a full look at the week ahead.

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Using modern technology anti-backwards in computer science, data historian Vincent Gray has been working for the past 10 years to extract historical files from more than 100 floppy disks and an outdated laptop. The digital forensics project has turned up detailed logs of 13th and 14th century agrarian practices in Winchester, England.

“It was such an honour to be awarded this Fourth-year King's University College Bachelor of Social Work scholarship,” said Nagy, who is currently interning at the London East Historical Association with Western Libraries. “It's almost an exercise in mindfulness, to reflect and think about things in different ways. It's really brought forward in myself.”

S

With a focus on community development, Nagy has an interest in London's built environment, “It's really changed how I look at London because I see potential and opportunities for people to interact in new and exciting ways. If I hadn’t written these articles, I wouldn’t have even known the potential,” she said. “Exploring these buildings invites people to look at things differently.”

“With my heritage buildings, it’s not just about preserving them, but looking for innovative new uses for them – that’s really important. Not preserving the past, but looking to create exciting opportunities for the future.”

BY KRISTA HABERMEHL

Sylva Nagy doesn’t like to use the term ‘preservation’ when speaking about heritage buildings.

“It sounds like you’re putting something under glass, or picking it up and putting it on a shelf,” said the fourth-year King's University College Bachelor of Social Work student. “With our heritage buildings, it’s not just about preserving them, but looking for new uses for them – that’s really important. Not preserving the past, but looking to create exciting opportunities for the future.”

BY KRISTA HABERMEHL

Looking at old spaces through new eyes

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Student Life

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BY KRISTA HABERMEHL
Music students to play with National Youth Orchestra

BY KRISTA HABERMEHL

O 1,500 eager applicants, only 100 secure a highly coveted spot in the National Youth Orchestra (NYO) of Canada each year.

This summer, Don Wright Faculty of Music string students Anna Grigg, Darren Mak, Dorothy Lin, Jillian Yang and Pan Christian Wrona will join the esteemed NYO as they tour across the country, perform in over 10 cities across Canada and will join hands with some of Canada’s Indigenous artists for a youth-oriented public event in honour of Canada’s sesquicentennial. For the 2017 Edges of Canada Tour, the orchestra will perform specially-commissioned works in 11 cities across Canada.

“The NYO is a pretty highly esteemed summer program throughout Canada. There’s a surprising number of professional orchestra players in Canada who have done the program,” said the Petroleum Music Performance student Grigg, who plays the viola. “She’s thrilled to be a part of the tour.”

“I’m mostly excited to travel and make connections with musicians I may not have been able to by myself” said Grigg. “I would have never been able to travel to Whitehorse, Yukon in Canada’s North and make connections across Canada,” she added. Grigg, whose father plays violin and whose mother is a professional pianist, hopes one day to be among the NYO’s professional orchestra players.

“We are thrilled to be a part of the tour,” said Grigg. “I would have never been able to travel to Whitehorse, Yukon in Canada’s North and make connections across Canada,” she added. According to the NYO of Canada website, 40 per cent of Canadian professional orchestra players are alumni of the program.

It was a viable opportunity for those who are eager to travel and make connections across Canada, said Grigg. “NYO is a pretty highly esteemed summer program with musicians from all over. This is the best time of the year.”

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Astronomers map unique ‘wrong-way’ asteroid

BY DEBORA VAN BRENK

For at least a million years, an asteroid orbiting the ‘wrong’ way around the Sun has been playing a cosmic game of chicken with Jupiter and about 6,000 other asteroids sharing the giant planet’s space, according to a report published in the latest issue of Nature.

Asteroid Bee-Zed (BZ509) zips along like a wrong-way driver on the interstellar speedway that marks the orbital flow of our solar system’s planets and asteroids. Somehow, this odd little chunk of ice or rock manages to dodge traffic with every pass – even as logic suggests it should have been annihilated long ago by the thousands of other vehicles headed in the other direction.

A team of researchers, led by astronomer Paul Wiegert of Western’s Department of Physics and Astronomy and the Centre for Planetary Science and Exploration, has spent hundreds of hours observing and computer-simulating the orbit of Bee-Zed since its discovery in 2015.

In the newly published paper, Wiegert’s team notes a number of curious discoveries about the cosmic outlier that is Bee-Zed. For one, it is the only asteroid among a million or so in our solar system known to travel clockwise around the Sun at the same time as it is also travelling in a planet’s orbital space.

“Everybody knows the Earth goes around the Sun and all the other planets go around the Sun as well,” Wiegert explained. “They all go the same direction – counter-clockwise – when seen from above. And 99.9 per cent of the asteroids go around the Sun in exactly the same direction.”

The remaining 0.1 per cent tend to head off in their opposite (retrograde) paths far from where they might intersect with another planet’s orbit.

But Bee-Zed is different – it is the only one known to jump into the fray against thousands of Jupiter’s Trojan asteroids. To understand how rare that is, Wiegert offers the following analogy.

“If you imagine the solar system as a racetrack, the planets are these monster trucks and Jupiter is the biggest monster truck of them all. Asteroids are like these ridiculously small clown cars going around the sun, all going in one direction … except for Bee-Zed,” he said.

An animation his team created shows Bee-Zed weaving into the Trojan orbit of Jupiter at its 12.5-year orbit, then jumping full speed into Trojan traffic. The asteroid has safely navigated its course many thousands of times, for at least a million years, Wiegert’s team has found.

So how does it avoid colliding with Jupiter? The team’s hypothesis is Jupiter’s gravity actually helps prevent impact.

“Bee-Zed manages to avoid Jupiter by swerving around it at just the right moment and Jupiter’s gravity actually helps it do that. It’s like in the movie ‘Deadpool’ and professor X, ‘into the hoop and both can continue safely on their way,’” Wiegert explained.

As for how it manages to evade head-on hits with other asteroids, the research team is less certain. “Bee-Zed just has to be lucky enough not to hit them,” he added.

Their analysis is based on complex calculations and 300 days of observations through the Large Binocular Camera on the Large Binocular Telescope in Mt. Graham, Arizona.

By the team’s calculations, Bee-Zed’s orbit has been stable for a million years and will be stable for at least a million more.

Little is known about the asteroid, which was discovered in January 2015. It has a diameter of about three kilometres and it may have been a spin-off of Halley’s comet, which also has a retrograde orbit. The team hasn’t been able to determine if Bee-Zed is an icy comet or a rocky asteroid.

Learning more about the asteroid provides another intriguing glimpse into previously unknown and unexplored features of our solar system. “The detective work has just begun,” Wiegert said.

His team brings together researchers from around the globe and includes Martin Connors of Athabaska University Observatories in Alberta, University of Calgary’s Department of Physics and Astronomy and the Institute for Space-Earth Environmental Research at the University of Nagoya, Japan; and Christian Veillet of the Large Binocular Telescope Observatory in Tucson, Arizona.

Their work was supported in part by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Council of Canada.
Western researchers receive $1 million to promote mindfulness in children, parents

By COPY HABERMAN

Western researchers receive $1 million to promote mindfulness in children, parents

T HE INCREASED STRESS levels and social isolation from the pandemic have led many people to seek ways to help themselves de-stress and improve their mental health.

Western researchers have now received a grant to help children and parents develop mindfulness skills, which they say will have long-term benefits.

The $1 million grant is from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

The grant will be used to test a program called MindUP, which was developed by Western researchers.

The program is based on research that shows mindfulness can help people reduce stress and improve their mental health.

The researchers say they hope the program will help children and parents develop skills that will last a lifetime.

The program will be tested in kindergarten classrooms and with parents who are interested in learning more about mindfulness.

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Students nab innovation awards

BY PAUL MAUNE

Three Western students reflected their best work in developing a commercialization strategy for a mirror box used in lower-extremity therapy, winning them one of the top spots in this year’s Proteus Innovation Competition.

The 10-and-a-half-month program includes a five-week boot camp at the University of Minnesota’s Medical Design and Innovation Center. The goal is to help participants identify unmet clinical needs. Fellows shadow clinicians in operating rooms, clinics and imaging suites to identify potential business opportunities in health-care management.

The key learning point is how to define the problem we’re solving. For us, we’re learning what the technology is now, but we have to go back and understand the investor’s mindset as to what they thought, why did they tackle this program and what was their solution to the problem they are trying to help out.”

The principle of mirror therapy is as it sounds, the use of a mirror to create a reflection of the affected limb in order to trick the brain into thinking movement has occurred without it. It involves placing the affected limb behind a mirror, which is situated at the reflection of the opposite limb appearing in place of the hidden limb. Initially intended to deal with phantom pain, this latest application focuses on assisting stroke patients with lower-extremity therapy. The therapy leverages the brain’s plasticity and can be used as a way to rewire the brain, knocking on the doors of physiotherapists and saying, “Here’s a solution.”

Many participants have been talking to physiotherapists asking if they would like to use the mirror to create a reflective illusion of an affected limb in order to trick the brain into thinking movement has occurred without it.

“My path is to have a commercialization strategy that a physiotherapist can take,” said Lau. “We had some really exciting discussions with the physiotherapists at the university to better understand their role and mindset as to what they thought, why did they tackle this program and what was their solution to the problem they are trying to help out.”

Hannon and Lau – only added to their different expertise is always a plus.”

The whole year, our mindset has shifted towards our role as a commercialization partner,” she said. “The key learning point is how to define the problem we’re solving. For us, we’re learning what the technology is now, but we have to go back and understand the investor’s mindset as to what they thought, why did they tackle this program and what was their solution to the problem they are trying to help out.”

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“They said, ‘First of all, what’s the problem we’re trying to solve? What marketable product are people interested in?’”, she said. “We spent a lot of time communicating with physiotherapists.”

A key part of the program is to help participants talk to industry and to network. Participants are also given $7,500 and the opportunity to license the technology and form a startup company, should they choose. While medical device innovation is a pretty risky field, the participants say the program’s goal is to help get a distributor – each milestone is different.”

Along with receiving $7,500, the three have the opportunity to work on this therapy approach with former Western adjunct research professor Dr. Ian Cunningham, who came up with the idea in 2010, but who had to use that approach as a way to validate when it was ready. Cunningham said it was great to see that they had been doing through the fellowship program and put it to the test. He finds that it brings a breadth to the problem set – along with knowledge and medicine from a variety of fields.

The program also tasked the group with developing a viable commercialization strategy for either a hand-held breast scanner, a cloud-based data collection app or a mirror box for lower-extremity therapy. The trio plans to keep an eye on the progression of the mirror box technology, which is still early in the creation process and would need additional funds to move forward.

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Letter to the Editor

Why didn’t I protest

I don’t like our university’s reputation sometimes. This week, I saw at 10c on an insurance agent lecture on micro-inequities and implicit bias to their newly founded women’s caucus and the first question it was asked about John Peterson. Didn’t Western give John Peterson a warm welcome? This old boy got to the floor and gave his best to defend micro-inequities. So what is the reason? I think Peterson’s views about gender are both false and harmful. His future is to recognize the position of his students’ rights to be called to correct disempower all of his students and discrimination of the rights. I am angry. Peterson manager to change himself as the champion of the speech. I also agree Peterson being more critical of Peterson’s lecture as seen as trying to shut him down, rather than as voicing disagreement. It seems to me, there are ways of protesting that make it clear what you are protesting in the context of Peterson’s views, rather than the opposing view. I believe protests can be more effective when the protestor and the target of the protest are not in agreement. This week’s protests were met with both support and condemnation. I’ve learned the lessons of the Toronto protests and we saw at Western, read the National Post headline. The demonstrations were, in my view, effective in raising awareness and encouraging discussion on the issue of gender equality.

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An advocate for language education, Lucie Bartosova, BA’03, BEd’07, MEd’09, works as a project manager for the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks. The centre is leading the development of a national standard in English and French for describing, measuring and reporting second language proficiency. The project involves researchers from 11 universities across Canada.

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Western caps Indigenous Awareness Week with pow wow

The University Community Centre buzzed with excitement as the 11th annual First Nations Student Association Pow Wow unfolded at Mustang Lounge Saturday. The event capped Indigenous Awareness Week at Western.

The pow wow brought together the organizers, audience and participants for a day of “nourishing body, mind and spirit through songs and dances,” as well as local traditional craft and food vendors. All were encouraged to join in the dances, including the Intertribal, Round Dance, Potato Dance and others.

Charging Horse Drum, of Peterborough, shared drumming and singing for the event with three other drums: Stobie Creek, of Sault Ste Marie; Brown Bear, of Oneida; and Little Creek, a local drum group whose members stem from London, Oneida, Munsee and Chippewa First Nations. Head Dancers included Brandon Barberstock, Sabrina Muise, as well as Roger and Laniya.

Two dances highlighted the afternoon – the Smoke Dance, a fast-paced number, and a Potato Dance, where dancers partner up and dance while holding a raw potato between their foreheads.

- Shirley Honyust