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Board: Presidential search to kick off in New Year

BY ADELA TALBOT

Western will soon begin the process of finding the university’s 11th President and Vice-Chancellor after President Amit Chakma announced last week he will not seek a third term. Given roughly 19 months remaining in the top post, however, Chakma stressed there is still much to be accomplished during his tenure.

“I have long believed all great institutions benefit from periodic renewal and rejuvenation at the leadership level,” Chakma said, as he announced his plans at the Board of Governors meeting Nov. 23. “It is a healthy and time-honoured practice. It has always been my intention to serve two terms as president.”

The Board will establish a committee in January to conduct an international search for Chakma’s successor, announced Hanny Hassan, Board Chair. In accordance with Western’s appointment procedures, the committee will be comprised of five members of the Board and five members of Senate, including one student.

Throughout the process, there will be opportunities for both internal and external stakeholders to comment on what skills they believe need to be a priority in determining who should be Western’s next president.

Chakma is looking ahead at possibilities after his term is up, but has not made any firm decisions, he noted.

“Between now and June 2019, I will continue to focus on moving forward with my strategic priorities. I look forward to working together with the Western community as we continue to improve the Western Experience for our students, and advance the university’s standing on the world stage,” he said.

Chakma arrived at Western in July 2009 as the university’s 10th President and Vice-Chancellor after serving the University of Waterloo as Vice-President, Academic & Provost, and as a professor in the Department of Chemical Engineering. Prior to that, he served as Dean of Engineering and then Vice-President (Research) and International Liaison Officer at the University of Regina. He began his academic career as a professor of chemical and petroleum engineering at the University of Calgary.

On Nov. 22, 2012, Western’s Board re-appointed Chakma to a second term as President, extending to June 30, 2019.

Chakma’s commitment to research has been vital to much of the progress Western has seen in recent years, Hassan added. That has included the creation of two Associate Vice-Presidents of Research positions, raising the profile of research done in both the STEM and humanities disciplines, and the recruitment of several top international faculty and researchers, including neuroscientist Adrian Owen, global women’s issues researcher Bipasha Baruah and communication sciences and disorders researcher Ingrid Johnsrude.

Chakma’s priorities of creating a world-class research and scholarship culture, seeking educational excellence and a renewed emphasis on internationalization and fund development, have strengthened Western’s profile, he explained.

“Western is now home to more than 4,300 (international) students from 127 countries, and has established exchange partnerships with institutions in 60 countries, providing 2,000 Western students the opportunity to gain international experience each year,” Hassan noted.

“The Western community as a whole contributed to its success, Chakma added, noting his work is not finished.”
Message from the chair

New Chair touts vision, role clarity for Board

Be Extraordinary – and with that comes accountability

“IT starts with having a vision of the clarity of roles and responsibilities – and with that comes accountability.”

— Paul Jenkins

A Board of Governors member for seven years, Economics alumnus Paul Jenkins was recently named Board Chair. He steps into the role in January.

As a more granular level is the funding model; it’s going to be a critical issue for all universities. More of us should understand the resources that are available. But when you project out the Board point of view, the importance of being mindful of the fines of a level of scrutiny – the sustainability and stability from a financial point of view – is something important to me.

— Paul Jenkins
New chair looks to ease pain for millions

By Michele Crites Battié

Michele Crites Battié has dedicated her career to searching for the right diagnosis and treatments for back pain.

And despite decades of study and research, no one knows for sure what causes back pain. Causes range from diseases, trauma, and injury to our modern lifestyles, such as sitting at a computer or lifting heavy weights.

So if you have back pain, what can be done? That’s the question Crites Battié is trying to answer.

On digital pills: humans and beasts

Repair human shortfalls, before evolving into post-human world

By Juan Luis Suárez

One of the most intriguing and disconcerting aspects of the digital age is the rise of computational and digital enhancements.

As human beings, we are constantly trying to improve ourselves, and digital pills are the latest attempt to do so.

Digital pills are tiny devices that can be ingested and release medications over time, allowing for more precise dosing and reduced side effects.

But what happens when we start to rely too much on these pills? When do digital pills become a substitute for other forms of self-improvement?

These are questions that we need to consider as we move into a post-human world where digital enhancements are becoming more common.

In a moment in which we embrace technologies that allow us to become more efficient, how do we find the balance between enhancing ourselves and preserving our humanity?
Young scholars score hat trick with Rogers honour

BY PAUL MAYNE

First-year Medical Sciences student Sanjae Mahmud recently received the inaugural Ted Rogers Scholarship, alongside her fraternal triplet siblings Sajin and Samin. Her membership soon became a mentorship, as it was suggested she become part of a new initiative the YMCA was suggesting called Next Stop Canada, offering soon-to-be immigrants the opportunity to learn about the country before they arrive. Mahmud played a strong role in getting the program going.

“We launched the website for newcomers, allowing them to access whatever they needed to know even before they get to Canada. And we let them know it’s not just Canada, there are so many other countries,” said Mahmud. When time permits, she’s a mentor for the YMCA.

She is a first-year Medical Sciences student at Western and her membership soon became a mentorship, as it was suggested she become part of a new initiative the YMCA was suggesting called Next Stop Canada, offering soon-to-be immigrants the opportunity to learn about the country before they arrive. Mahmud played a strong role in getting the program going.

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Detecting tornadoes faster

A new radar network, one of the largest in North America, is able to detect tornado precursors, allowing people up to 10 minutes to take cover.

By Debora Van Brenk

A

n Hocking was high atop a metal ladder near Harrow, Ont., and there was an eerie stillness to the air. Anna Hocking was high atop a metal ladder near Harrow, Ont., and there was an eerie stillness to the air. She was studying a small orange ball on a computer screen, a radar signature showing the wind speed and turbulence that could be used to predict a tornado. It was a perfect day for radar, with 90 per cent accuracy.

Tornadoes are a rare and unpredictable occurrence, with less than a 15 per cent likelihood of observing a tornado formation. However, in recent years, there has been a growing interest in developing more accurate and timely tornado warnings.

Lead author Anna Hocking, PhD'98, and Physics and Astronomy professor Wayne Hocking said: "We have found signatures in wind speeds plus an overshoot, a dome-like structure. We couldn't have done this without this network." The network is intended to detect tornadoes faster, allowing people up to 10 minutes to take cover.

The network is called the O-Q Net of 10 radar arrays, and it uses advanced technologies and differing methodologies to detect tornado precursors. It is designed to be a reliable tool for forecasting, with an accuracy within a 100-kilometre radius.

The network consists of 10 arrays, built on a 50-kilometre network in the Province of Quebec, and it is the second array in Canada to detect tornadoes.

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By Debora Van Brenk
Western News

Pillar honours CEL program for community impact

Community Engaged Learning (CEL), a program that integrates community engagement with a specific course curriculum at Western, was recognized with a 2017 Pillar Community Innovation Award in the category of Community Service.

The program integrates community service with a specific course curriculum to provide students the ability to strengthen their sense of civic responsibility and understanding of social justice, while giving them hands-on experience connecting them with the classroom to what happens outside of it. There are 302 CEL courses offered at Western beyond The Ollie, the number continues to grow.

Faculty members approach the SSC CEL program with a course they are teaching, or students who are better human resources in the broader community is a Psychology Pillar honours CEL program for community impact. Faculty members approach the SSC CEL program with a course they are teaching, or students who are better human resources in the broader community is a Psychology Pillar honours CEL program for community impact.

For every 10,000 patients undergoing a surgical procedure, one or two will wake up during the procedure, unable to move, speak or receive information. Do they know who they think they are? If they don’t, they get a diagnosis as vegetative.

To prevent this, researchers at Western are studying the brain activity of unconscious patients to determine how brain activity is altered when a person is conscious. This research is helping scientists understand the limits of unconsciousness and how to better care for patients who are in a vegetative state.

The research is being conducted by a team of researchers at Western led by Dr. Adrian Owen, a professor of psychology and director of the Western Psychology and Brain and Mind Institute (BMI). The team is collaborating with Western’s Rotman Institute of Philosophy and the University of Oxford, UK.

The team used a method called functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to study the brain activity of unconscious patients. The fMRI is a safe and non-invasive imaging technique that can be used to measure brain activity in real-time.

The researchers studied patients in a vegetative state and compared their brain activity to that of healthy participants. They found that the brain activity of unconscious patients is similar to that of healthy participants when watching a movie or engaging in a task.

The research is helping scientists understand the limits of unconsciousness and how to better care for patients who are in a vegetative state. It is also helping researchers learn more about the brain and how it functioned in the past.

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Coffee leads to award-winning collaboration

BY EMILY LEIGHTON

Robarts Research Institute trainees John Baxter, left, and Dante Capaldi turned morning coffee into an award-winning collaboration focused on developing a new image-processing technique to better detect lung function using magnetic resonance imaging. Capaldi is a Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry PhD and MCIsc candidate supervised by Medical Biophysics professor Grace Parraga. Baxter recently completed his doctorate at Schulich in Biomedical Engineering under Medical Biophysics professor Terry Peters.

The partnership unfolded in 2016 from improvements Capaldi was considering for the work he was completing under Medical Biophysics professor Grace Parraga. Baxter recently completed his doctorate at Schulich in Biomedical Engineering under Medical Biophysics professor Terry Peters.

When they first met, they were both intrigued by the notion that people with asthma or COPD are unable to hold their breath during imaging, prompting Capaldi to consider other ways to measure lung function.

“Using MRI, you acquire images at different phases of the breathing cycle, then pull out aggregate signals to detect changes in volume within the lung during tidal breathing, which provides information about lung function,” Capaldi said. “Because we’re using techniques that already exist, our approach is not only more accessible for settings that don’t have a hyperpolarizer readily available, but also allows us to process patients who wouldn’t otherwise be capable.”

The trainees credit the environment at Robarts for supporting a collaborative spirit and facilitating trainee research.

“An informal social opportunity, given the environment, science and collaboration, often comes up,” Capaldi continued. “When you’re stuck on something, that’s the best time to collaborate,” Baxter said.

Capaldi’s work focuses on developing a non-contrast enhanced method to identify and measure lung function using MRI. “It’s difficult to image the lungs using MRI because they’re imaging a void,” he explained. “But hyperpolarized gases are expensive and availability can vary across research and clinical settings, prompting Capaldi to consider other ways to measure lung function.”

Using MRI, he acquires images at different phases of the breathing cycle, then pulls out aggregate signals to detect changes in volume within the lung during tidal breathing, which provides information about lung function. However, the algorithm Capaldi was initially using to align and process image sequences was not optimized for high throughput patient data, making it difficult to translate this approach clinically.

The clinical advantage of this work is people don’t have to hold their breath during imaging, they can naturally free breathe over the period of time,” Capaldi said. “Because we’re using techniques that already exist, this approach is not only more accessible for settings that don’t have a hyperpolarizer readily available, but also allows us to process patients who wouldn’t otherwise be capable.”

This is where Baxter’s expertise in image processing came in – and their collaboration grew from there.

“The collaboration really took off, and we started presenting the research findings at the RSNA’s conference Friday in Chicago,” Baxter said. “The clinical advantage of this work is people don’t have to hold their breath during imaging, they can naturally free breathe over the period of time,” Capaldi said. “Because we’re using techniques that already exist, this approach is not only more accessible for settings that don’t have a hyperpolarizer readily available, but also allows us to process patients who wouldn’t otherwise be capable.”

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“The clinical advantage of this work is people don’t have to hold their breath during imaging, they can naturally free breathe over the period of time,” Capaldi said.
When former Western staffer Alan Noon started to wonder about the disappearance of Harry Hines, an iconic London photographer, he had no idea the hunt for that story would last half a century, ending only recently in a clearer picture of the man and of life in London in the early part of the 20th Century. This week, Noon writes of his journey of discovery that started in the basement of a Western professor’s home nearly 50 years ago.

...
Quinn tapped to lead RSC College

BY PAUL MAYNE

Just two years after Joanna Quinn was named to the College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists of the Royal Society of Canada (RSC), the Western Political Science professor will move into the organization’s top post. Quinn was recently named President-Elect of the College, to be followed by a two-year term as President beginning in November 2018.

“Upon being elected in 2015, I decided I wanted to engage in a meaningful way with the Royal Society and, in particular, with the College, rather than just take the election as an honorific,” said Quinn, who was nominated for the role by fellow Western faculty members who are also members of the College. “It is a real vote of confidence to know they think highly enough of my abilities to think I could serve the national body that is the College. And since we only have seven short years (College membership) to make that happen, there’s no time to waste.”

Members of the College are scholars and artists, who, at an early stage in their career, have demonstrated a high level of achievement. The organization elected only its fourth cohort of members this past weekend in Winnipeg, which included Western’s Laura Huey (Department of Sociology) and Sharon Siwiwsk (Faculty of Information & Media Studies). Western now has 14 members as part of the College.

“We’re extremely proud of not only professor Quinn’s research at Western, which examines how societies acknowledge and cope with past crimes, but of her leadership within the College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists,” said Capone. “It comes at a time when Western and the RSC alike are taking great strides to increase scholarly connections and promote excellence in research.”

Established in 1883, the RSC recognized it was in danger of becoming somewhat fossilized. At the same time, the organization accepted the fact groundbreaking work was being conducted by mid-career scholars who were not quite ready for induction as Fellows into the RSC. Looking to the emerging generation of scholars, many of whom were working on important new ideas in interdisciplinary and innovative ways, sought to inject new life into the RSC, Quinn explained.

“Many of us have chosen to dig in and that engagement is paying big dividends already.”

WESTERN NEWS FILE PHOTO

Western Political Science professor Joanna Quinn has begun her one-year term as president-elect of the College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists of the Royal Society of Canada, which will be followed by a two-year term as president beginning in November 2018.

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