Indigenous health training hits home

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Indigenous health training hits home

BY DEBORA VAN BRENK

Western has become the hub of a provincial network for Indigenous health training that is both culturally relevant and scientifically rigorous. Launched last week, the Indigenous Mentorship Network Program of Ontario includes 13 research institutions and a team of 70 researchers, trainees and community collaborators.

The program represents a fundamental reorientation in how health research takes place in First Nations communities, said Geography professor Chantelle Richmond, the network’s program leader.

“For the first time, we are connecting the networks of the Indigenous community with the networks of academia,” said Richmond, who holds the Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Health and the Environment. “We are putting communities in the driver’s seat on health research that matters to them.”

The new network will support research by Indigenous people for Indigenous people, with emphasis on the health and social issues that matter to them. It is intended to help communities identify and prioritize their health needs; to enable meaningful, measurable and relevant study; and to train the next generation of Indigenous health researchers.

“Never before has there been such a concentration of Indigenous people doing Indigenous health research,” Richmond said. “I don’t think we have had so many Canada Research Chairs in one group, all working on the same issues.”

Richmond, an Anishnabe scholar from Pic River First Nation, is trained as a health geographer, exploring the relationship between people’s health and the environments in which they live, work and play.

While health research in Indigenous communities in previous decades centred on issues such as hospital location and the spread of disease, it led to little lasting, measurable change, she said. Challenges still include higher disease rates, morbidity, chronic infections, social inequity, inadequate housing and food insecurity.

“Despite an increase in research on Indigenous topics in Canada, inequities are growing and outcomes are not improving,” said Richmond. “The only way to change that landscape is to work with the community, through diverse, interdisciplinary teams of trainees who know intimately the landscape of the communities.”

What’s needed is to recognize health is infused with cultural, social, political, geographic and environmental context, she said. Studying Indigenous health must then include a deep understanding of traditional knowledge about the land and the people’s place in it.

The driving force behind the network can be exemplified by the Anishnabe phrase Mno Nimkodaddig Geegi (We are all connected). That includes, Richmond said, the inter-relationship between youths and elders; health and environment; cultural practices; institutional policies, and many more.

For someone in the Far North, the research might mean a focus on the inter-relationship of mental health and addictions. For another community, it might explore how environmental degradation has affected traditional hunting practices; and still another community

INDIGENOUS HEALTH // CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Hair samples provide window into stress levels of refugees

story // page 7
In 1984, Gerson was doing to develop a vaccine for Chinese encephalitis when he became a member of the research team. The virus is transmitted by mosquitoes and can cause a severe encephalitis that can be deadly. The vaccine was developed with the help of a Canadian company, Développement de Biotechnologie de l'Université de Montréal (DBU). The vaccine was launched in 1985 and became available for public use in 1986.

When Gerson joined the Gates Foundation in 2008, he started working on developing a vaccine for the most common childhood diseases. The foundation provided him with the resources and infrastructure to develop a vaccine for pneumonia. Gerson's team worked on developing a vaccine that would be effective against more than 100 strains of pneumococcal bacteria. The vaccine was developed in partnership with GlaxoSmithKline, a large pharmaceutical company.

The vaccine was launched in 2010 and has since been used in more than 100 countries. It has helped to reduce the number of deaths caused by pneumonia by more than 80% in some countries. Gerson's work has been recognized with numerous awards, including the 2010 World Health Organization Director-General's Award for Research and Health Development.

Gerson said that his work has been made possible by the support of his family, especially his wife, who has been his partner in both life and work for more than 30 years. He also credits the support of his team and collaborators at the Gates Foundation, as well as the support of the Canadian government and other partners.

"I think the biggest challenge is that we are not doing enough to reach the last mile, especially in the most remote and hard-to-reach areas," he said. "We need to continue to develop new products and technologies, and to find new ways to deliver vaccines to the people who need them most."

Gerson is now a senior fellow at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, where he continues to work on developing new vaccines and treatments for children.

By Adela Talbot
Global university collaboration key to fighting nationalism

BY AMIT CHAKMA

The accelerating pace of technological progress is ostensibly shrinking our planet and connecting us in ways that were difficult to imagine just a few decades ago. Less than 20 years after the intro-
duction of the first BlackBerry, we now take for granted our ability to carry in our pockets a single device that not only enables us to commu-
nicate by text, voice or video with practically anyone, anywhere, at any time, but also empowers us to engage in the expanding universe of social media, while broadening our virtually unlimited access to the exponentially expanding universe of news, informa-
tion and entertainment.

And yet, while our world is becoming increasingly interconnected, the same technological progress is also creating barriers between people and nations alike. The U.K.'s Brexit vote and the U.S. administration's recent decision to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement offer examples of a wake-up call for all institutions of higher learning, urging us to recon-
cider how we contribute to building bridges among nations and improving the human condition.

For centuries, universities have existed to create, disseminate and apply knowledge through the teach-
ing and research activities of their faculty and students. In pursuit of the mission, academia has been effective in educating the citizenry, contributing to the progress of society and advancing the common good. Historically, research universities have been particularly instrumental in performing these noble duties and solving many of the world's problems, including the eradication of many endemic and infectious diseases.

But in these times of frenetic change, the overwhelming pace of disruptive innovative capacity to adapt to meet the scale of the modern challenges we face. Meanwhile, human activity continues to contribute to a growing pool of taken-
away resources. Today we live in an increasingly unsustainable world. The accelerating pace of climate change, environmental de-
gradation, health epidemics, weapons proliferation and massive destruction, is finite and a planet of severe political im-
balance exacerbated by the widening economic disparity between the rich and the poor.

Such immensely complex chal-
ge requires the participation of a broad spectrum of disciplines or single institutions. Even conventional international partnerships tend to lack the necessary capacity to address the trans-
national development challenges that nations have been unable to address in isolation. The idea of making sense of the peoples of the world through the creation, dissemination and application of knowledge, and through the promotion of talent mobility on a global scale. The times demand we move more quickly pursue multidisciplinary frameworks and international support-
ning networks to make our collective intellectual and physical resources to address the problems that threaten our future.

In fact, we should view our universi-
ties as part of a dynamic, global ecosystem whose mission is to create more pathways for sharing ideas for student and faculty exchanges, for teaching and research collaborations, and for the development of cross-industry-competencies – all with the aim of drawing benefit from the best practices and the knowledge that comes from our richly diverse global community.

Indeed, we should see our universi-
ty campuses as part of a vibrant, dynamic, global ecosystem whose mission is to create more pathways for sharing ideas for student and faculty exchanges, for teaching and research collaborations, and for the development of cross-industry-competencies – all with the aim of drawing benefit from the best practices and the knowledge that comes from our richly diverse global community.

Global university collaboration

The following is the first of three profiles of Western-based technologies in the Proteus competition.

Proteus Innovation Competition

The Proteus competition is a four-month challenge, as part of the Times Higher Education website.

The spin on spit

Dentistry and Biochemistry professor Walter Siqueira, one of the few dental clinician-scientists in Canada conducting saliva proteome research, has created a new technology that can test for the Zika virus more than six times longer after infection than current testing methods.

Siqueira's research is currently part of the Proteus Innovation Com-
petition, part of Western's Propel accelerator program, an intense four-month competition that will challenge the best U.S. tech.

Siqueira added his research is one of three new technologies.

Siqueira said his latest spin on spit may have worldwide impact with better detection of the Zika virus.

Siqueira has subsided and symptoms have largely vanished, leaving the woman and her baby to deal with the effects of Zika.
Research

Exercise can combat ‘bird legs’ in space, fainting on Earth

BY PAUL Mayne

Six astronauts took part in a study by wearing devices that measured social pressure, heart rate and physical activity pattern during waking hours and sleep phases before, during and after space missions.

Shoemaker found heart rate and social pressure differed significantly among astronauts. These could point to a need for new social norms for exercise or other steps to help protect their blood pressure response on return to Earth.

CAI researchers have been working on a space flight project for more than a decade. They are working on a way to collect and analyze the data that can help them understand how to best design a mission to avoid fainting on Earth.

The study aim was to get a better understanding of the role of exercise in the cardiovascular system and to adapt to conditions on the International Space Station (ISS).

Six astronauts were in the study: three were on the first mission, three were on the second mission. The study was led by Dr. Kevin Shoemaker, the vice chairman of the Cardiovascular and Critical Care Medicine Department at the University of California, Los Angeles. Shoemaker led the study, which was funded by NASA.

Ten astronauts were in the study: three on the first mission, seven on the second mission. The study was led by Dr. Kevin Shoemaker, the vice chairman of the Cardiovascular and Critical Care Medicine Department at the University of California, Los Angeles. Shoemaker led the study, which was funded by NASA.

Dr. Kevin Shoemaker, Associate Dean of Research at the Faculty of Health Sciences, explained that the lack of gravity for astronauts affects normal circulation and distribution of blood inside the body, and the problems it can cause when they return to Earth. Some of the findings could prevent fainting among frail elderly people.

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Western once again played host to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as Alumni Hall was the setting of a London Town Hall meeting last week. Trudeau was visiting London as the Canadian government held its winter cabinet retreat in the Forest City. 

The meeting had been planned for months but the venue of Alumni Hall was last confirmed just days before the event. The Prime Minister was also joined by the Premier of Ontario, Kathleen Wynne, who had been invited to attend. 

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau visited London Town Hall for a meeting last week. 

BY ADELA TALBOT 
PHOTOS BY PAUL MAYNE AND FRANK NEUFELD

The meeting, which was announced by the PMO on Jan. 15, took place in Alumni Hall and drew a huge crowd of supporters. 

Two disruptions occurred during the event, with one woman interrupting the question-and-answer period to protest Liberal MP Iqra Khalid’s Motion 103, which calls on the federal government to battle Islamophobia. Trudeau tried to engage the woman in conversation and she left the auditorium of her own accord. Later in the evening, a man interrupted – on two occasions – with shouts and claims of a corrupt justice system and was escorted out of the room after throwing sheets of paper.

Trudeau kicked off his Town Hall Tour in Nova Scotia, then traveled to Hamilton for a second event. Following London, Trudeau took a break before holding another meeting in Quebec City. Later this month, he will head to Winnipeg and Edmonton.

The Prime Minister’s visit came almost one year to the day after Trudeau brought his London Town Hall to campus in 2017, after overwhelming demand from the community forced a late change of venue.

Below is an edited selection of the questions Trudeau fielded at the London Town Hall, as well as the answers he provided.

What are Canada’s plans to react to the emerging field and investments in artificial intelligence (AI)? How will it take a proactive stance, rather than reacting?

We don’t have to react to emerging AI trends because Canada has actually been one of the countries that has led in the development of the latest area of AI, which is deep learning.

Canada has always shown leadership in this. One of the things we did last year was launch an AI strategy, investing well over $100 million dollars specifically for AI research in Canada. It’s paying off as people from around the world are coming to study and develop AI. We have big companies like Facebook and Google investing in Canadian researchers, making us have great hubs here they want to be part of. We’ve created a real positive model in Canada. Formerly an AI researcher would have to pick one of three paths – a pure academic one and hope someone takes your inventions and turns them into practice; trying to start on your own as an entrepreneur; or being brought into the fold of a big company. In Canada, you

Prime time

Trudeau returns to campus to host Town Hall

TRUDEAU // CONTINUED ON PAGE 10
Historic 18

Volume 43

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Honorary Degree Nominations

The Senate Honorary Degrees Committee will meet in April to select candidates for honorary degrees to be awarded at Western’s Autumn convocation scheduled in October 2018. To ensure that historically underrepresented groups are represented on the senate, nominations are invited from any member of the university community.

Nominations forms may be downloaded from the following website: www.uwo.ca/univsec/senate/honorary_Degrees.html

Deadline: March 30, 2018, for consideration by the Honorary Degrees Committee.

Western News

TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING

by Paul Mayne

Mechanical and Materials Engineering professor Hamidreza Abdolvand has discovered new-before-heat deformation and stress levels in two technologically important materials – titanium and zirconium – used in the aerospace and nuclear industries.

I want my daughter to not face the kind of systemic barriers that I have faced in my life. I faced times when I thought ‘You’re not good enough for this, or that.’ I faced times when I was told ‘She can’t do this. She can only do that. She can’t do this because of her gender. She can’t do this because of her age. She can’t do this because of her race.’ It’s all these things, and I want to push back against these things for my children.

You have a younger daughter. As she grows up, what values do you want to pass on to her as she prepares for life?

I want my daughter to not face the kind of systemic barriers that I have faced in my life. I faced times when I thought ‘You’re not good enough for this, or that.’ I faced times when I was told ‘She can’t do this. She can only do that. She can’t do this because of her gender. She can’t do this because of her age. She can’t do this because of her race.’ It’s all these things, and I want to push back against these things for my children.

We have a functioning democracy and that democracy can always improve. There is opportunity for this government to show incredible leadership in this portfolio. I’m disappointed we are not moving forward to make sure every vote for every citizen in this country counts.

There are always problems with these materials,” Abdolvand said.

“It was a challenge to understand the way in which very different stress levels in two materials – titanium and zirconium – were related to each other. It was a challenge to understand how these stresses interact with each other in the load distribution. It was a challenge to understand how these stresses can affect the mechanical and physical properties of these materials.

We have a process that leads to failure on different scales, and there was a number of strong ideas put on paper as to what was most important. I had to make a decision – and in my opinion – the other grains around it are now carrying a lot more of the load. This is because they are sharing the load in a very specific way,” he explained.

A few of the challenges with this is a symptomatic behavior of materials. In order to move from one drinking water to another, in remote communities, we need investments in infrastructure to maintain and maintain that infrastructure. You need to make sure that the life cycle costs are taken into consideration.

For more information, contact Dr. Hamidreza Abdolvand, professor of mechanical and materials engineering, at hamidreza.abdolvand@uwo.ca.

Decoding stress loads in new ways

BY PAUL MAYNE

Mechanical and Materials Engineering professor Hamidreza Abdolvand has discovered new-before-heat deformation and stress levels in two technologically important materials – titanium and zirconium – used in the aerospace and nuclear industries.

If you have a strong grain, located in the middle of a hard or softer grain, like the hard or soft grains released because of the other grains around it, only carrying a small amount of load, this deformation and stress levels is less than in another material, and the material will be of fundamental importance and it will also just about being good and doing what it was designed to do. It will also be more predictable and the life cycle cost is going to be lower.

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Vanessa Ambtman-Smith, a Geography master's student at Western, is the first Indigenous person to sit on London's Police Services Board.

“I am an Indigenous woman; I am raising an Indigenous daughter and statistics tell me I’m more likely to be murdered or to be a victim of violence than any other woman in Canada. I am an Indigenous woman; I am raising an Indigenous daughter and statistics tell me I’m more likely to be murdered or to be a victim of violence than any other woman in Canada.”

Vanessa Ambtman-Smith

Remind and Board and Senate Elections - 2018

Call for Nominations

Distinguished Service

ät April 8, 2018. Nominations for Senate undergraduate student (Academic) constituencies are also accepted until 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, January 25, 2018.

Nominations for membership on the Senate in the faculty, administrative staff, graduate student, and undergraduate student (Academic) constituencies are also accepted until 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, January 25, 2018.

Nominations for membership on the Board of Governors in the administrative staff and graduate student constituencies are now accepted until 4:00 p.m. on Friday, January 26, 2018.

Full information on the Board and Senate elections (including the election procedures and schedule), the nomination form and voting procedures for each constituency can be found at:

Board elections: uwo.ca/alumni/board/elections.html
Senate elections: uwo.ca/alumni/senate/elections.html

Senate has established the President's Medal for Distinguished Service to recognize those individuals who have provided exemplary service to the university, over a sustained period of time, and over and above the normal requirements of their positions.

The award is intended primarily to recognize staff, but faculty may also be considered for work or achievements that would not already be recognized by the professor emeritus/distinguished professor or Service awards (such as teaching awards) in place.

Nominees must have been retired from the university in any capacity (including Board or Senate membership) for at least one year prior to consideration and have no ongoing formal relationship with the university.

A nomination form and additional information about the award can be found at:

uwo.ca/alumni/senate/convocation/service_award.html

The deadline for nominations for 2018 is March 14th.

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Research links head trauma, CTE and ALS

Western researchers have uncovered a unique neurological pathway between traumatic brain injury and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), which could lead to faster diagnosis and access to clinical trials for patients with ALS. The research, published in the journal Neurology, provides evidence that while CTE and ALS are distinct conditions, some patients with CTE may eventually develop ALS.

Researchers from Robarts Research Institute, the University of Western Ontario, and Boston University have identified a common underlying mechanism involving the protein tau, which is critical for maintaining proper cellular function in the brain. Tau phosphorylation, an abnormal modification of the protein, is associated with both traumatic brain injury and ALS.

The study involved an analysis of brain tissue samples from individuals who had CTE and ALS, as well as controls. The researchers found that tau phosphorylation was significantly increased in both CTE and ALS samples, suggesting a common pathologic process. Importantly, the study also showed that tau phosphorylation was more pronounced in patients with both CTE and ALS compared to those with either condition alone.

“This is the first study to show a link between CTE and ALS, and it opens up new possibilities for understanding the progression of these conditions,” said lead author Dr. Michael Strong. “Our findings suggest that tau phosphorylation may be a key factor in the development of ALS in patients with a history of head trauma.”

The researchers are now working to develop new diagnostic tools and treatments that could help identify patients at risk for ALS, potentially leading to earlier intervention and improved outcomes.

“The identification of a common pathway between CTE and ALS could have significant implications for the prevention and treatment of both conditions,” said Dr. Alex Mozyakin, co-author of the study. “Our results suggest that targeting tau phosphorylation may be a promising therapeutic strategy for patients with either condition.”

The study was supported by the National Institutes of Health, the ALS Association, the National Science and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.
Kent Hehr, Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, visited Western last week, making a number of stops around campus. Hehr started the afternoon by checking out the Vanier Cup at TD Stadium, and had a chance to talk with head coach Greg Marshall and several of the Mustang players, even posting the conversation to Facebook Live. Hehr also spent some time at the International Centre for Olympic Studies and the Fowler Kennedy Sport Medicine Clinic. The minister was in London where he was part of the town hall meeting with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau at Alumni Hall.