

# THE DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY & ENVIRONMENT



Our graduates provided video clips that formed the centerpiece of the event and provided photos that allowed us to construct a class composite unique to the conditions of 2020.

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

What a year 2020 has been for us all. Here in the Department we did a quick 'pivot' to online course delivery to respond to the initial COVID-19 lock-down in March allowing our students to complete their courses. We celebrated the achievements of our nine Honours Thesis students virtually and followed that up with a virtual convocation celebration for our graduating class and their friends and family. That celebration doesn't formally take the place of convocation, which only the university can do, but allowed us to recognize their achievements, magnified this year by the difficulties and uncertainties that surrounded the completion of their final term. We then turned our attention to the construction of a brand new timetable for the 2020-21 academic year. There was substantial uncertainty during the summer about whether students would return to London or even return to their studies more generally. In the end, we opted to offer the vast majority of our classes online, with a few select courses having in-person components. Most courses now operate in a synchronous mode with scheduled days and times, typically delivered via Zoom. A smaller number operate in an asynchronous, distant-learning mode where the learning is progressive but not dependent on a particular weekly meeting time. This better serves students in other time zones or with internet access issues that can compromise synchronous delivery modes.

Summer saw a gradual return to research activities for our graduate students and faculty, supported by the development of enhanced safety and cleaning protocols. Our faculty were successful in completing for special COVID-related research support that became available in this time frame. We officially began the era of Geography and Environment and were joined by several new faculty members. We were able to complete renovations to our GIS Lab and we are now embarking on a project to merge two research spaces in the 2400 block to help support our new GIScience faculty and their graduate students with improved research space. So, although the hallways are very quiet now - and adorned with purple stickers directing foot traffic to help maximize physical distancing - we will have some improved infrastructure in place when we welcome back our students and faculty to more in-person activities.

This fall, we were pleasantly surprised to see enrolments increase overall at Western and that trend is also apparent in the courses and modules offered by the Department. As 2020 comes to a close, we look to build on the strategies that have worked this term for the winter term courses. The new mode of operation has been more work for everyone - undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff alike - and we are all looking forward to some downtime over the holidays. On behalf of everyone in the Department I would like to extend my best wishes for a safe and healthy holiday season and to a New Year that we hope will be better for us all.



# WHAT'S IN A NAME?

After 72 years as the Department of Geography, we are now officially the Department of Geography and Environment. This name better reflects what Geography is at Western, the study of the environment from both a social science and physical science perspective. Nearly 40% of our courses incorporate 'environment' in their name or calendar description and thus this name better reflects what the Department is actually teaching and researching. The new name will more clearly communicate to prospective students, many of whom have interests related to the study of the environment - in its broadest sense - but who may have limited or no exposure to Geography in high school. In making this change, we had unanimous support from our Departmental Council and from the recent reviews of our Graduate and Undergraduate programs. We will continue to offer the same range of Honors Specializations, leading to both BA and BSc Honours Degrees, with names of modules that incorporate Geography updated to match that of the Department. At the graduate level, our approved fields of study: Environment, Development and Health, Geographic Information Science, Physical Geography and Urban Geography, remain the same. Coinciding with the name change, we have renamed our [website](#), introduced a Twitter account (@westernuGeoEnv) to provide broader outreach, and are updating our branded materials.



## PHD CANDIDATE NAMED VANIER SCHOLAR

By Jason Winders

Vanessa Ambtman-Smith explores the role of relationships in healing by examining Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples' relationships to traditional healing spaces within a hospital setting. Specifically, this research examines how these spaces are used; what these spaces mean; how people relate to, and with, these spaces; and, how these relationships affect health and healing. The results of this work will provide a useful case from which hospitals and other institutions can draw from to support health and healing, enhance reconciliation efforts, guide future space transformations and identify culturally safe practice to foster improved relationships with Indigenous patients and the land. This research will be framed by an in-depth case study approach that will focus on three traditional healing spaces within one mental-health hospital, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), in Toronto.

## RESEARCH IN THE FACE OF COVID-19

Department members have been active in a number of recent research projects related to COVID-19 and its impacts more broadly on society. In response to two calls for proposals from the Western research community for Research Catalyst Grants, Geography and Environment faculty led three projects:

- Food Retail Environment Surveillance for Health & Economic Resiliency: The FRESHER Futures Project (led by Jason Gilliland)
- COVID-19 rapid response mapping of human-mobility indicators (led by Jed Long)
- Understanding the challenges and resilience among visible minority essential workers: Preparing for future pandemics in Ontario (Led by Isaac Luginaah with Godwin Arku and Geography graduates Vincent Kuire, Donna Kosmack, Carrie Warring)

The Food Retail Environment Survey for Health & Economic Resiliency (FRESHER) project also received significant additional provincial funding from the Ontario COVID-19 Rapid Research Fund. This project will examine the economic and social impacts of COVID-19 in southwestern Ontario by identifying what retail food outlets modified their operations, temporarily closed or permanently closed during the outbreak, and how it has affected businesses and their employees. The study will help inform policies and programs that will maintain Ontario's food security, incentivize economic growth during the recovery period and improve resiliency among businesses during future pandemics and emergencies.

### OGS - Ontario Graduate Scholarship (Masters)

Austin Stastny  
A.J. Wray

### OGS - Ontario Graduate Scholarship (Doctoral)

Vanessa Ambtman Smith  
Haley Everitt Kevin Ng  
Ismahan Yusuf

### NSERC Scholarship (Masters)

David Zilkey

### SSHRC Scholarship (Masters)

Samantha Doris  
Malcom Little

### CGS/PGS (Doctoral)

Emily Beacock Cortney Dakin  
Emmanuel Kyeremeh  
Elana Nightingale

### CAG Award

Sara Wilson

### ESRI GIS Scholarship

Rhiannon Kirton

### Edward G. Pleva Fellowship Award

Vivian Kong Meghan Sauro

### E. G. Pleva Teaching Assistantship Award

Zoe Askwith Samantha Doris

### The Brian Luckman Award

Daniel Kpienbaareh

### The Micha and Nancy Pazner Fieldwork Award

Daniel Kpienbaareh

# A BIG WELCOME TO OUR NEW FACULTY MEMBERS!



Jinhyung (Jin) Lee joined us this summer as an Assistant Professor in the area of GIScience and Urban Environments. His research interests are in the areas of GIScience, spatial data analytics, urban transportation and mobility and accessibility analysis. He comes to us from The Ohio State University where he completed his PhD with Professor Harvey Miller. Jin earlier completed his BA and MA in Geography at Korea University in Seoul, South Korea. While finishing his

PhD, Jin recognized a research opportunity provided by the change in transportation behaviors due to COVID and undertook a study of traffic speeding patterns before and after the COVID-19 pandemic in Columbus, Cincinnati and Cleveland OH. His analysis showed evidence of increased speeding in all three cities, a behavior that was also noticed by many here in London.

Since his arrival in London, Jin has been busy getting ready to launch a new course in Transportation and GIS and developing several collaborative research proposals. These include development of a new framework for measuring and comparing the accessibility and impacts of new public transit services in Winnipeg and Ottawa and a study to investigate the relationship between spatial accessibility to dental clinics and children's oral health outcomes in London, Ontario. He is also joining the new ParkSeek project led by Prof. Jason Gilliland funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada that seeks to better understand the access and quality dimensions of parks and recreational facilities in Canada and how these facilities support the social and environmental determinants of health for Canadians.



Professor David Goldblum will join us as a full time faculty member on July 1, 2021. Prof. Goldblum is a biogeographer with research interests related to natural disturbances and anthropogenic impacts on plant communities. Prof. Goldblum completed his PhD and MA at UC Boulder and earned his BA from UCLA. He currently serves as Department Head for the Department of Geography at the University of Calgary.

Lewis Williams has joined the Department of Geography and Environment as an Associate Professor. Lewis is cross-appointed with the Indigenous Studies program. Lewis researches Indigenous resurgence and socio-ecological resilience. For her, this means respecting and re-centering Indigenous connections to land, as well as the knowledge systems that focus on the relationship between humans and the rest of the ecological system. Lewis is interested in pedagogies, community development practices, and policy developments that will facilitate the resurgence. Lewis is Director for Alliance for Intergenerational Resilience, a Canadian-based not for profit and previously held an academic appointment at the University of Saskatchewan. Lewis is of Ngāi Te Rangi and Scottish (Isle of Arraine) origins and has most recently been based in New Zealand. We look forward to having Lewis join us in person when travel conditions permit.



Professor Lesley Rigg was appointed July 1, 2020 as the new Vice President of Research for Western with Geography and Environment as her home department. Professor Rigg came to Western from Calgary where she held the position of Dean, Faculty of Science. Her academic background is Geography - she received degrees in Geography from York, UC Boulder and University of Melbourne for her BA, MA and PhD respectively. Lesley's area of research interest is forest ecology and she has also written on the role of gender in academic careers.



**Allen K. Phillbrick Scholarship  
Cultural Geography**  
Cortney Dakin

**Elaine Bjorklund Award**  
Yat Ho Cheung  
Runzi Mu

**Imran Jaffer Memorial Award  
in Urban Development**  
Amy Xu

**McIntosh Prize in  
Geography**  
Naythan Ryse Samuda

**Michael J. Troughton  
Graduate Students Bursary**  
Meghan Sauro

**Faculty Association Scholarship**  
Zhiqing Chen

**Jim Kennedy Scholarship  
Award**  
Ronald Bodik

# DISTINGUISHED LECTURE AND PANEL DISCUSSION



Our Distinguished Lecturer for 2020 was climate scientist Professor Katharine Hayhoe. Professor Hayhoe holds the position of Endowed Professor in Public Policy and Public Law in the Public Administration program of the Department of Political Science and also co-directs the Climate Center at Texas Tech University. Professor Hayhoe grew up in Etobicoke and earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Toronto. In her introductory remarks, Prof. Hayhoe pointed out the importance of Geography to her own career - she took a new Geography course on climate change from U of T that set her on a path to becoming a climate scientist. She also noted that understanding climate change requires the interaction of many disciplines - an approach inherent in Geography's combination of social and biophysical sciences. The title of her talk "Mitigate, Adapt or Suffer: Connecting Global Change to Local Impacts" was based on a quote from John Holdren, President Obama's former Science Advisor: "The more mitigation we do, the less adaptation will be required, and the less suffering there will be." In her talk Prof. Hayhoe described climate change as a threat multiplier and examined the problem through the concepts of psychological distancing and solution aversion. These lead her to conclude that an important approach to addressing climate change is to talk about it in a way that makes people feel empowered and results in action. Prof. Hayhoe's presentation was followed by a Panel Discussion with local experts moderated by Professor Katrina Moser. The experts included Mike Fabro, Genevieve Langille, Prof. Gordon McBean and Natalie Merchant. Both the Distinguished Lecture and Panel Discussion were recorded and are available from our [events page](#) along with some other links provided by Prof. Hayhoe and the panelists - we invite you to have a look!



Mike Fabro, Sustainability and Resiliency Manager for the City of London



Genevieve Langille, a local student Climate Change Activist

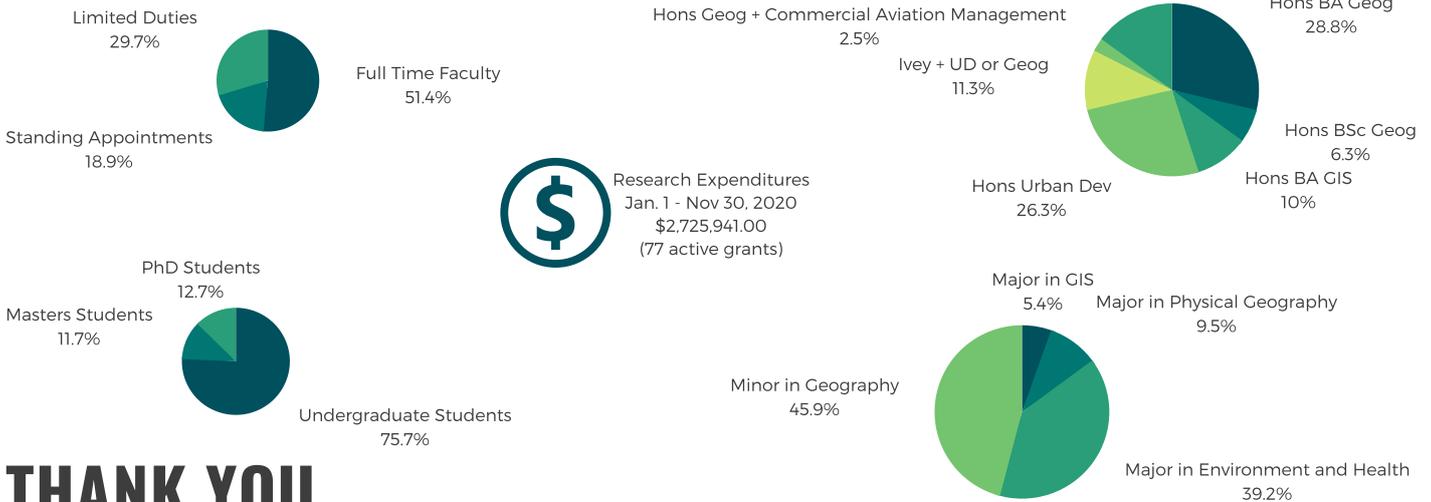


Prof. Gordon McBean, Department of Geography and Environment



Natalie Merchant, Sustainability Coordinator for Green Economy London

## OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS



## THANK YOU

The Department of Geography and Environment is grateful to its alumni and friends for their financial support over the years. Our donors have had a big impact, making a difference not only to the Department as a whole, but also to the lives of many individual students. More than any recent year, there is a real need for funds to support academic departments. As we strive for higher standards and increasingly broader opportunities for our students, we depend on the caring and generous nature of alumni and friends like you to meet these ever increasing financial needs. Your gift to the Department of Geography can take many different shapes. If you're interested in giving a gift that best meets your needs, the impact you want, and the way you want to give, please contact Alumni Relations & Development at 519-661-4200 or 1-800-423-9631 for more information.