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Conversations in a Crisis

How Institutes for Advanced Studies provide the framework for scholarly collaboration that address the big questions of the day.

STORY BY ERIKA THORKELSON
When the 2020 cohort of Wall Scholars with the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies (PWIAS) came together last year, the world was facing multiple crises. A global pandemic was entering its second wave. Protests had erupted around the world in response to police brutality after the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and so many other unarmed Black people. In California, the largest wildfire season in recorded history raged on—evidence, many have argued, of the continuing planet-wide climate emergency.

Against this tumultuous background, ten scholars in fields as disparate as English literature, electrical engineering and constitutional law began a series of conversations on the apt theme of Crises. Though no one could predict the outcome of these conversations, it was clear that a deeper understanding of the extraordinary events of the year would take time, something not normally afforded within the “publish or perish” world of academia.

Indeed, the year-long fellowship with the Wall Scholars Program offers a unique framework for scholars to leave behind their disciplinary silos and work in sustained cooperation with colleagues across the university. According to Dr. Kalina Christoff, interim director of PWIAS (2019-21), who was herself a Wall Scholar in 2017, this period of conversation and collaboration allows for participants’ “thinking to be challenged in ways that it would never be if we were only speaking to others within a field or discipline that shares assumptions that we are already making, consciously or unconsciously.”

This, Dr. Christoff says, is exactly what makes the Institute’s model so powerful: it provides “a space that does not otherwise exist for scholars, artists, and other intellectually-minded members of the academic community to come together and explore freely novel ideas, possibilities, and ways of thinking about questions that are important to society.”

The idea of a free space within a university to ask big questions and pursue wide-ranging knowledge began when the Institute for Advanced Studies opened at Princeton in 1930. Today there are almost 50 such institutes around the world, all offering scholars a unique opportunity to link diverse fields of inquiry to tackle the big questions.

PWIAS came into being in 1991 when property developer Peter Wall donated $15 million worth of shares in his corporation to UBC, for the purpose of establishing an Institute for Advanced Studies at the University of British Columbia. According to Dr. Christoff, this funding is central to the Institute’s continued independence from the pressures of the contemporary university. “It presents an opportunity to run an institute and extend it safely into the future,” she explains. Institutes without such resources must struggle to find funding, which can take away valuable focus from their advanced studies goals.

Dr. Michelle Stack, a 2020 Wall Scholar and author of *Global University Ranking and the Politics of Knowledge*, takes this idea a step further. She has seen the way universities within
capitalism can become competitive both with each other and between disciplines. “Because of the pressures of university rankings, where everything becomes focused on metrics, the real mission of an advanced institute—seeding innovation that might not be quickly measured—gets lost,” she says.

By freeing scholars from that competition, PWIAS lays the groundwork for unconventional interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration. “Knowledge is about interconnection,” she explains. “It’s not about me working alone in my office. It’s about being in communication with other people that have different perspectives. That’s what [the Institute] exemplifies for me.”

Prof. Hoi Kong, a constitutional law scholar who was in the same cohort as Dr. Stack, describes this free exchange of ideas as a kind of generosity, both in scholars’ willingness to share their knowledge and in the humility required to put aside disciplinary conventions and to learn from each other. He sees this exchange as directly benefitting his own scholarship. “It’s important for people who do constitutional law to be aware of other disciplines and understand how, for instance, political theorists, scientists or economists view the kinds of questions that we address,” he says.

That generosity in communication, says Dr. Stack, can extend beyond the university as well. PWIAS offers “an opportunity we desperately need as academics to think about who we are and what our responsibilities are to diverse publics,” she explains.
Indeed, these wide-ranging conversations between scholars that begin at PWIAS can continue to reverberate for years in both research and teaching practices.

Dr. Renisa Mawani recalls how the first event she took part in as a Wall Scholar in 2015 coincided with the release of the shocking images of Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian boy who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea when a raft full of refugees capsized. “I was paired up with my colleague from journalism, Peter Klein,” she remembers. “We had this amazing conversation as we were walking through the woods, and I asked him if there were any ethics around these kinds of photographs that are so difficult and painful to see.”

Dr. Mawani, whose work touches on race, colonialism and legal histories, often brings this conversation into her classes when talking about research ethics and how they differ across disciplines. “Those sorts of moments that are difficult to quantify in terms of collaborations have still been really formative,” she says.

In the short term, those early meetings between members of the 2020 cohort have led to a collaboration on a book project, aptly titled Chromatic: Ten Meditations on Crisis in Art & Letters. In it, each scholar works with an artist to explore an idea that is urgent within their field.

Dr. Stack credits the structure provided by PWIAS as creating fertile ground for this unusual project. “There’s a lot of work that goes into developing the space for a cohort to come to understand each other, and to have the trust to share their work and publish a book together,” she says. The book will be released in the fall with an accompanying public event, assuming COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted.

In the long term, Dr. Stack believes, ideas scholars explore during their time with an institute for advanced studies like PWIAS will be valuable not only for universities but for the planet: “I don’t know of anywhere else that supports the time to do the sort of scholarship that is needed right now to deal with the complex multi-system problems that we’re facing.”
2020 Wall Scholars

The Wall Scholars Program provides support for scholars from all disciplines and career stages to spend a year in residence at the Institute in a collaborative, interdisciplinary environment.

In 2020, the Wall Scholars residency took place during the COVID-19 global pandemic and a time of unprecedented social, political and environmental upheaval. The cohort chose “Crisis” as their theme and came together to explore how crisis, in all its forms, impacts their work and the world we live in.

7 WORKSHOPS & SEMINARS
9 BOOKS & PUBLICATIONS
3 COURSE/TEACHING MATERIALS DEVELOPED
3 PUBLIC POLICY INITIATIVES
4 PARTNERSHIP COLLABORATIONS
5 GRANT APPLICATIONS
LARA BOYD
PROFESSOR
PHYSICAL THERAPY, FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Research focus: Deepening the understanding of the importance of literature and the arts on brain health.

I truly enjoyed the opportunity to learn from the other scholars. Having my own thinking challenged and then being able to refine my ideas was my favourite part of the program. Despite COVID, it was one of the best academic years of my career.

PURANG ABOLMAESUMI
PROFESSOR
ELECTRICAL AND COMPUTER ENGINEERING, FACULTY OF APPLIED SCIENCE

Research focus: Accelerating the democratization of healthcare across urban areas and rural regions through the use of artificial intelligence combined with engineering design.

It has been a truly amazing experience. Being able to discuss ideas in ways that are understandable by people outside my discipline has been a great learning experience which will certainly affect the quality of my teaching and communication skills.

JENNIFER BLACK
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
FOOD, NUTRITION AND HEALTH, FACULTY OF LAND AND FOOD SYSTEMS

Research focus: Non-traditional knowledge mobilization approaches to engage children, schools and the media in more critical discussions about the links between poverty, food insecurity and social justice.

This experience has given me a greater sense of purpose and provided a space that feels like home on campus. PWIAS is a place where my work and contributions feel valued. I found a group of inspiring colleagues to look up to and learn from who have demonstrated ways of being scholars that make meaningful impacts on campus, for students and beyond while also supporting each other’s growth and wellbeing.
CARRIE JENKINS
PROFESSOR
PHILOSOPHY, FACULTY OF ARTS

Research focus: Exploring creative forms, including visual art as a way to develop and communicate about academic research and mentoring other scholars who wish to explore this for their own work.

The interdisciplinary collaborations with other scholars have given me a wealth of new material to think about/with, as well as new concepts and tools for approaching questions that I didn't have access to before.

HOI KONG
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
PETER A. ALLARD SCHOOL OF LAW

Research focus: Constitutional law and constitutional theory, with an interdisciplinary focus that includes political theory and writing on sustainable urban development.

In the past year, I’ve thought a lot about inclusiveness and well-being, in part because of ideas raised by my colleagues, but also because of the pandemic. Being in this setting provided me with opportunities to really think about vulnerability.

M.V. RAMANA
PROFESSOR
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY AND GLOBAL AFFAIRS

Research focus: The political economy of nuclear energy and the various problems associated with conceiving of nuclear power as a solution to climate change.

The whole experience has been unique to me. I can’t say that I have spent a year at a place like this. I feel enriched and greatly appreciate the privilege of spending time with such a brilliant cohort of scholars.

STEVE REYNOLDS
CLINICAL ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE
CRITICAL CARE PHYSICIAN, ROYAL COLUMBIAN HOSPITAL

Research focus: Healthcare advocacy and concepts around positive disruptive change in medicine.

I’ve learned about the value of creativity and pushing my boundaries as an educator. It has definitely increased my personal well-being during this challenging time.
SHEILA TEVES
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
BIOCHEMISTRY AND MOLECULAR BIOLOGY, FACULTY OF SCIENCE

Research focus: How cells determine identity and function, and also how the injustices in society are reflected in who and what is valued in the natural sciences.

*My interactions with the Wall Scholars have made me rethink how to approach disseminating my research to a broader audience, as well as bring in the outside world (through outreach) into my research.*

MICHELLE STACK
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
EDUCATIONAL STUDIES, FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Research focus: Expanding conversations around a networked approach of academics, activists, educators, and students to uncover the values and beliefs behind University rankings, and developing approaches to education grounded in social, environmental, and cognitive justice.

*So much was unique and unexpected. The spirit of learning from each other, the sense of humour and desire to connect across differences. A group of us met to workshop our writing and that was a space that was so generative.*

Y-DANG TROEUNG
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURES, FACULTY OF ARTS

Research focus: War and refugee migration and how literary and cultural representations shape our ideas about the impacts of war.

*I acquired a better perspective on how my work translates outside of my own discipline. I attended several conferences outside of my own usual associations this past year. I attribute this to the influence of the program and my willingness to branch outside of my normal comfort zone.*
“We need places for deep, interdisciplinary, and diverse community conversations that provide a space to disrupt the current norms contributing to climate change and inequity. The model that PWIAS directors, staff and scholars have developed is a gem and should be something UBC expands as part of its commitment to public conversations and policy frameworks to complex problems.”

MICHELLE STACK
2020 WALL SCHOLAR
In their first group research retreat in August, the cohort chose “Crises” as the theme for their residency. An apt theme for a cohort whose time together would take place during a time of unprecedented global upheaval and whose ability to meet, collaborate and host events in person was severely challenged by COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions.

The 2020 Wall Scholars found new ways to work and learn from one another. The results were enriching and enlightening: publishing a book together, hosting a podcast series, establishing writing workshops and developing joint projects and interdisciplinary courses.
Chromatic:
Ten Meditations on Crisis in Art & Letters

Imagined and brought to life by the 2020 Wall Scholars, Chromatic: Ten Meditations on Crisis in Art & Letters features a collection of essays and illustrations as diverse as the subject of crisis itself.

From a precise discussion of a nuclear crisis in Japan, to a satirical listicle about corporate academia, to an ICU doctor’s poetic response to COVID-19, each Wall Scholar takes a profoundly different approach to writing about crisis, yet fascinating and unexpected connections emerge.

“A chromatic scale is one that includes all the accidentals. It is so called because it is colourful, and the original meaning of chromatic is derived from the ancient Greek word for colour. In our collection, the serendipities and synchronicities of the academic year 2020–2021 emerge as a kaleidoscope of responses to crisis in art and letters, words and colours.”

CARRIE JENKINS
2020 WALL SCHOLAR
Art by Carrie Jenkins

Art by Sandeep Johal

Art by Jess Stanley
Podcasts: A New Form of Public Scholarship

The popular PWIAS podcast *Ways of Knowing* hosted by Interim Director Kalina Christoff, invited several 2020 Wall Scholars to have a conversation about their research and important topics of the day.

When COVID-19 interrupted opportunities for public scholarship, the Wall Scholars took over podcast hosting duties and produced a series of interviews for the 2nd season of *Ways of Knowing*.

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1800+ Downloads in 2021

6 Episodes Hosted & Produced by Wall Scholars

5 Wall Scholars Interviewed About Their Work

Subscribe to *Ways of Knowing* through Apple Music, Spotify, Google Play or wherever you get your podcasts.

Listen to episodes here: PWIAS.UBC.CA/IDEAS/PODCASTS
Other Activities

Wall Scholars Writing Group met weekly to workshop and provide feedback on individual and group writing projects. The group continues to meet monthly after the 2020 Wall Scholars finished their term. The group encouraged one another to experiment outside academic writing including opinion pieces, personal essays, fiction, non-fiction and poetry.

The 2020 Wall Scholars also developed a proposal for an interdisciplinary undergraduate course and have plans for future collaborations in the classroom as well as with their research.
In 2020-21, PWIAS continued to help Wall Scholars and Associates develop their research and scholarship through a variety of special projects including videos, podcasts, teaching and learning resources as well as symposiums and online events.
Classrooms are to be safe spaces, we’re told. Yet educators working within complex realms, where the tensions and discomforts of human experience offer no safe havens, know that deep learning often elicits strong feelings. In a brave effort to move us beyond our attachments to making classrooms comfortable, Dr. Tara Mayer created *On Feeling and Knowing*, a series of seven recorded conversations with seasoned educators working at the creative frontiers of their disciplines. Funded by the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies, the series serves as a point of departure for anyone—accomplished educators and graduate students alike—seeking to expand and grow their teaching practice.

The initial idea for the series was conceived during Dr. Mayer’s time as a 2019 Wall Scholar. While connecting with her diverse cohort, she came to realize that, no matter how disparate their fields of research, they all shared a vibrant and time-intensive role as educators. She became interested in how the conversations they were having as scholars might inform not just their research, but also their understandings and practices of teaching.

Dr. Mayer has always been skeptical of the immense schism we’ve constructed between research and teaching. She points to the common experience of introducing conclusions drawn from archival research or the field into the classroom, where student discussions and insights offer us fertile reevaluations or new perspectives on our own work. “Their questions and insights really force us in beautiful ways to reevaluate our own perceptions and assumptions,” she says. “It’s less about striving to secure for teaching the same status and prestige we give to research, as it is about recognizing how these scholarly spheres very obviously inform one another. They exist in constant conversation.”

Dr. Mayer began to think about her own teaching practice as a scholar of race and gender in colonial South Asian history, a field which explores episodes of incredible violence and human tragedy as well as resilience and continuity. Bringing these complex, multi-dimensional histories into the classroom can be a powerful, transformational, yet deeply unsettling experience for students. Her goal is to engage with these difficult histories in ways that help students feel
invested, at times even personally implicated, in the narratives. “These are not just artifacts of the past,” she argues. “These are stories of human experience that continue to shape present day landscapes and realities.”

Yet that deep investment is often accompanied by corresponding emotions, which can put an instructor in a challenging position.

“When you teach about a topic that is difficult, it brings up strong feelings,” she says. “The question becomes, what does one, as an educator, do with the emotional experiences of students in our classrooms? How do you engage with students who feel shocked, guilty, embarrassed, upset, angry, or grief-stricken?”

“Likewise” she adds “how do you harness feelings of wonder, generosity, compassion, and inspiration when those arise?”

Rather than talk past or sideline strong emotions, when they arise in the classroom, Dr. Mayer has come to see them as part of the learning experience. “There’s this idea that has traditionally existed, that if you feel too much, then you can’t know accurately,” she explains. “What if our emotions could be a pathway to deeper, more expansive ways of knowing? What if our empathy could actually be a catalyst for curiosity or connection?”

To further explore this idea, she reached out to seasoned scholars whose own lived and embodied experiences actively inform their research and teaching practices, to speak with them about their pedagogy. The resulting conversations are intimate, candid, and wide ranging, often touching on the realities of teaching fraught material in complex times.

In one interview, Dr. Jasmine Harris an Associate Professor and Director of African-American Studies in the Department of Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Texas, San Antonio, whose research focuses on the impacts of racism and racial inequality, talks about how she chose to speak from personal experience in classroom conversations around the protests in Ferguson, Missouri against police brutality after the murder of Michael Brown. “We could have had this very high level abstract conversation about race in America,” she explains. “That, frankly, isn’t useful for students’ learning because it perpetuates what they’ve already learned about race in the United States as white students, which is to avoid conflict and to talk about it as removed as an individual from it as possible.”

Instead, Dr. Harris chose to speak honestly as a Black woman about her own family’s experiences with policing. She sees this personal connection not as an incidental detail within her research or teaching practice, but as a core asset in that it can help her students connect with these urgent conversations more deeply than theory alone might allow. “Race doesn’t happen in the United States that way,” she explains. “It’s a scary, harmful, traumatic emotional institution, and I think it needs to be taught in that way as well.”

In another interview, Dr. Annette Henry, who holds the David Lam Chair in Multicultural Education at UBC and is a 2021 Wall Scholar, speaks of her experiences in the academy and how student bias can undermine authority in ways that create professional barriers for Black women scholars. “What happens out in society happens in the classroom,” says Dr. Henry. “There are people who just cannot fathom a Black woman being in the front of the classroom.”
Dr. Mayer’s goal in this body of research is to help build an openness and musculature around emotional expression that will prepare educators to support each other and their students through difficult conversations. "What we're saying, many of us as educators, is that deep, transformative learning doesn’t always feel good," she says. "It sometimes feels really difficult, or it feels really painful, but that doesn’t make it less valuable.”

She adds "Very often there's deeper knowledge beyond and behind all these emotional experiences, knowledge of oneself and the world that our students cannot access without educators offering them spaces to move through discomfort and uncertainty.”
What does it mean to think of the ocean not as a space in-between continents, but as a foundational domain where colonial conquest, violence, resistance, survival, and subversion take shape?

The Oceans as Archives symposium (May 6-7, 2021) brought together scholars, poets, artists, and activists to share new work that centres the ocean as a source of knowledge, and a method for thinking and writing about the historical and persistent violence of settler colonialism and capitalism, and anti-colonial resistance.

Funded in part by PWIAS and co-organized by 2015 Wall Scholar, Renisa Mawani, the event brought together participants to explore the critical traditions of Black (diaspora) studies, Pacific Islander studies, Critical Indigenous studies, Caribbean philosophy, postcolonial theory, and decolonial and anticolonial critique.

The plenary panel featured Indigenous scholars and teachers including actor, writer, and director Quelemia Sparrow, acclaimed author Lee Maracle (University of Toronto), award-winning historians, Dr. David Aiona Chang (University of Minnesota) and Dr. Vicente M. Diaz (University of Minnesota). Speakers opened up rich discussions on oceans and islands and the interrelations between land, sky, and more-than-human ecologies that are central to Indigenous/Pacific cosmologies.

Over 400 people registered, including students, faculty, artists, and community members from Canada, USA, South Africa, Australia, and elsewhere around the world.

The presentations, held over two days and across six panels, followed various formats (academic papers, video installations, photographs and art) to make visible the historic and contemporary oceanic connections across space and time, to defy efforts to break up the world’s oceans into regions, and to emphasize their porous borders.

The scholarly and creative works showcased in the symposium will be published in an edited volume, and a follow-up symposium is planned at the University of Amsterdam in 2022.
THE OCEANS AS ARCHIVES SYMPOSIUM WAS ORGANIZED BY:

KIRSTIE FLANNERY
RESEARCH FELLOW | INSTITUTE FOR HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

RENISSA MAWANI
PROFESSOR | DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND 2015 WALL SCHOLAR, UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

MIKKI STELDER
MARIE CURIE POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW | UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM AND DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
PWIAS Highlights

Since its inception, PWIAS has promoted the highest ideals of scholarship, attracting unique thinkers from UBC and beyond.

There is no other institute in Canada that supports this kind of interdisciplinary exploration. The result? Ground-breaking research, influential public policy, artistic collaborations and long-lasting, deep connections between scholars.

Here are just a few examples of the important research and collaborations that would not have happened without PWIAS.

2016

Collaborative Journalism

Peter Klein founded the Global Reporting Centre (GRC)—a concept inspired by his time at PWIAS. The GRC pairs scholars, journalists, students and news organizations to cover neglected stories around the world.

Monique Rodrigues reporting on the fishmeal industry in Lima, Peru. Photo by the Global Reporting Program.
Deconstructing the Financial Crisis through Theatre and Music

Wallie Marshall, Helen Eastman & Janis Sarra, invited judges, economists, scholars and actors to produce a play about global financial markets, encouraging audiences to engage with far reaching financial issues. Performances of Foreclosure Follies were staged around the world, including Vancouver, New York, London, Oxford, and Athens.

Architecture meets Microbiology

Wall Scholars Joe Dahmen and Steven Hallam developed an award-winning design for a compostable toilet—produced from a biocomposite building material made from mycelium (mushrooms)—to be used in refugee camps. The duo won first prize in the Museum of Modern Art Biodesign Challenge in New York.

Outer Space Institute

With PWIAS support, Aaron Boley and Michael Byers created the Outer Space Institute, a network of world-leading experts, to make recommendations to the UN General Assembly on a multilateral agreement on the exploration, exploitation, and utilization of space resources.

Detecting Food Fraud in Canada

Wall Scholar Xiaonan Lu developed a potentially transformative tool for detecting food fraud in Canada – his method to identify unwanted animal products in ground beef can determine within 5 minutes and with 99 percent accuracy whether ground beef samples included other animal parts.

Addressing Burdens on Racialized Faculty

Ayesha Chaudhry led an interdisciplinary roundtable Smiling to Their Faces: Race, Emotional Labour and the University which brought national attention to the disproportionate burden placed on racialized academic faculty, and how universities must change their culture to recognize these experiences.
Biodiversity Framework

William Cheung organized the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Scenarios and Models working group at PWIAS in 2019. These international experts proposed recommendations for a new framework for biodiversity and ecosystem services management.

Tackling Viruses with Engineering and Mathematics

Nelly Planté, Alireza Nojeh and Jimmy Feng jointly proposed a new mechanism by which some viruses can enter cells using propulsive force, and adapted this mechanism to deliver carbon nanotubes into the cell nucleus. Fruitful discussions during their Wall Scholar residency led to this discovery.

Post-Disaster Recovery

Sara Shneiderman expanded her research to a new interdisciplinary project on post-disaster recovery processes around the world. With PWIAS support, she assembled an international team which received a 3-year Partnership Development Grant to build research capacity in Canada and Nepal.

2019

Health and the Built Environment

Michael Brauer attributes the Wall Scholars program for providing the interdisciplinary perspective that pushed his research into new directions, specifically towards the linkages between the built environment and human health.

Taking Action on Climate Change

Wall Scholars Sara Milstein, Ana Casas-Aguilar, Malabika Pramanik and Jessica Dempsey collaborated across the Arts and Science faculties to create the Zero Emissions University Initiative, highlighting the serious impact of academic travel-related air emissions. UBC now includes supporting alternative choices for academic travel related to conferences and research in the Climate Action Plan 2030.
Engineering Solutions through Theatre

Wall Scholars Madjid Mohseni and George Belliveau expanded Mohseni’s crucial research into water treatment solutions by using community-based theatre to enhance dialogue and seek solutions for indigenous drinking water systems. Together they received a $1.6M Network Centre of Excellence Knowledge Mobilization award to further develop a humanized perspective for successful water solutions.

Mentoring Diversity in STEM

Malabika Pramanik created the Diversity in Mathematics Summer School, an outreach student program to inspire young women in STEM fields. She recruited the enthusiastic participation of PWIAS visiting scholar, Malebogo Ngoepe from University of Capetown, South Africa, who returned to UBC in 2019 to take part.

2021

Expanding Neuroscience with Engineering

Guy Dumont and John Steeves, long time collaborators since connecting at PWIAS in 2011, brought the study of brain patterns in functional motor tasks to the ultra-low noise underground research laboratory, Laboratoire Souterrain à Bas Bruit (LSBB) in France, leading to a joint UBC-CNRS Laboratoire International Associé (LIA) research agreement.
Responding to COVID-19

PWIAS adapted quickly to COVID-19, and in April 2020 we pivoted our International Research Roundtables and Wall Solutions Initiative to focus on the impact of the public health crisis and its broader societal implications.

We also created the COVID-19 working group, providing funding to explore the effects of the pandemic on areas such as personal privacy, higher education, epidemiology, and religion.

Designed with an expectation for accelerated outcomes, these PWIAS programs have already resulted in policy recommendations, publications, and a variety of online communications aimed at engaging policy makers in government and the general public.
10 ROUNDTABLES
8 WALL SOLUTIONS INITIATIVES
4 WORKING GROUPS

22 PUBLIC WEBINARS
15 JOURNAL ARTICLES/BOOK CHAPTERS
8 POLICY PAPERS/REPORTS

3 GRANTS AWARDED
3 MEDIA ARTICLES
3 CREATIVE WORKS

3 PODCAST SERIES
2 NEW TECHNOLOGIES TESTED IN CLINIC
1 GLOBAL HOUSING DATABASE
Preparing for the end of the world as we know it: Implications and challenges for education and social innovation

Today we face not only the global health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also the cascading effects of inequalities, racial and colonial violence, climate crises and biodiversity loss, economic austerity, precarity and instability, mental health crises, political polarization, large-scale human migration, and more. While some still see the current pandemic as just a temporary interruption of a recoverable familiar normality, others, like Inuit artist Taqralik Partridge, caution that COVID-19 could be just the "warning shots" of a major storm humanity will need to weather together. Whether the global pandemic will reshape "normality" is no longer in question, more important practical questions are: To what extent? How is this going to exacerbate inequalities? What will be the ecological impact of these changes? And if this pandemic indeed gestures towards more waves of disruption and instability to come, how do we prepare people to engage in sober, creative and responsible ways with the major traumatic disruptions in their cognitive, affective, relational, economic and ecological environments – or "the end of the world as we know it"?

This roundtable brought together a group of 30 collaborators in the areas of education and critical transitions to explore the challenges of preparing different groups in society for the "end of the world as we know it". This group of researchers, professionals, policy advisors, NGO practitioners, and students examined the cognitive, affective, relational, economic and ecological dimensions of social learning and transformation "otherwise". Topics included climate grief, confronting denials, building capacity for addressing volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, and supporting critical forms of alternative engagements with (frameworks for imagining) alternatives.

OUTCOMES

- 6 online sessions, Oct. 2020 – Nov. 2020
- 1 Article: “Preparing for the End of the World as We Know It”, Open Democracy, Aug. 2020
International Working Group on Health System Responses to COVID-19

Dr. Peter Berman and his team developed a conceptual framework to analyze the influence of "upstream" factors on the pandemic response and health outcomes. Researchers term these higher-level governmental contexts the institutional, political, organizational, and governance or "IPOG" factors in the response to COVID-19. The diverse experience of many countries responding to the COVID-19 pandemic suggests that these are critical factors that need to be better understood to increase the likelihood of more positive health outcomes in this and future public health crises.

OUTCOMES

- 3 online sessions, Nov. 2020, Dec. 2020, Apr 2021
- $118,575 CIHR Grant: “Upstream determinants of effective COVID-19 response: tools development and application through a case study in British Columbia"
Advancing Early Childhood Education (ECE) Outdoors Now

The ECE Outdoors Now roundtables led by Dr. Mariana Brussoni aimed to create social, physical and policy recommendations to facilitate children spending as much time outdoors as possible. Attended by over 400 participants, these sessions addressed: 1) the importance of outdoor ECE as a strategy to reduce COVID-19 transmission and support children’s wellbeing; 2) international examples of sustainable outdoor ECE practice, standards and policies; and 3) identification of future policy and research directions towards legislative changes in BC for early childhood educators.

OUTCOMES

• 3 Online Events: Sept. & Oct 2020
• 6 podcast episodes (in progress)
Post COVID-19 Housing Policy Futures

Dr. Penny Gurstein’s research team analyzed the housing policy response to COVID-19 from 14 countries around the world. The Global Housing Policy report and database showed that governments can mount rapid responses to improve housing during the health crisis. “The pandemic is not only a health or economic crisis, it is also a housing crisis that revealed the gaping cracks in our housing supply,” says Gurstein, Director, Housing Research Collaborative. “In Canada and elsewhere, deaths from COVID have been clustered in places where people cannot physically distance because of overcrowding, where they don’t have adequate access to clean water, toilet facilities and even medical services.” Researchers urge governments to turn these rapid responses to long-lasting improvements in the housing supply.

OUTCOMES

- 6 online sessions, Sep. 2020 – Oct. 2020
- COVID-19 Global Housing Policies Database, Nov. 2020

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KATHLEEN SCANLON
LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS, UK
Beyond Broken Chains: Global Inequities in Medical Supply Chains

Prof. Peter Klein and the Global Reporting Centre hosted a forum on global medical supply inequality which has been intensified by the pandemic. Panelists discussed research on COVID-19 co-morbidities, tracking COVID-19 vaccine purchases around the world, and the securitization of supply chains. Researchers hope to shine light on key areas where the pandemic has contributed to global health inequities, including access to medical supplies and vaccination. The team subsequently received a NIHCM (National Institute for Health Care Management) grant to visually trace the complex supply chains of critical medical supplies across the world, through distribution and procurement pathways, to health care providers in the US.

OUTCOMES

- 2 online events, Nov. 2020, Feb. 2021
- $10,000 NIHCM Foundations Journalism Award, “America Unprotected: The Medical Supply Crisis”

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FRANCOIS VENTER
UNIVERSITY OF WITWATERSRAND, SOUTH AFRICA

FATIMA SULEIMAN
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULUNATAL, SOUTH AFRICA

DEBORAH COWEN
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

CHARLES HOLMES
JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

VERONIKA WIRTZ
WHO COLLABORATING CENTER IN PHARMACEUTICAL POLICY
Time for Hope: Developing Innovative Ideas for a Net Zero Carbon Economy in the Post-Pandemic Period

Dr. Janis Sarra and her collaborators hosted interdisciplinary scholars, community activists and policy makers to discuss innovative strategies to decarbonize the post-pandemic economy. Participants aimed to bring climate into the post-pandemic economic recovery dialogue to ensure that investments support society’s ability to address climate change. Policy recommendations for governance, decarbonization, and protection of ecosystems, and how to encourage sustainable long-term shifts in human and economic activity, were submitted to provincial and federal government leaders. An original choral project, “Time for Hope – a song for our planet in the face of climate crisis”, was launched during the roundtable, inspiring people across the globe to act and save the planet.

OUTCOMES

- 3 online sessions, Sep. 2020
- Policy submission to BC Premier, Nov. 2020
- Policy submission to Deputy Prime Minister, Feb. 2021
- Original choral project: “Time for Hope – a song for our planet in the face of climate crisis”
The Great Equalizer? At the Deadly Intersections of COVID-19

Dr. Sunera Thobani and an international team examined how the COVID-19 pandemic interacts with structures and practices of socio-economic and political marginalization in national contexts, namely Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, India, UK and US. Initial measures were based on the premise that the pandemic would be ‘an equalizer’ across the population, but infection and death rates proved to be disproportionately high among marginalized communities. Researchers built a conceptual model to study the overall socio-economic and political effects of COVID-19; map out its intersections with national and global structures of power; and identify and analyze the impact of key pandemic measures.

OUTCOMES

- Online session Mar. 2021
- Policy report, “The Deadly Intersections of COVID-19”

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FARIDA AKHTAR
UBINIG, BANGLADESH

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JAMIA MILLIA UNIVERSITY, INDIA

SUVENDRINI PERERA
CURTIN UNIVERSITY, AUSTRALIA

MEIKA SMART
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY, USA

ZHAO YUEZHI
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY, CANADA
The 5Ds of Redistribution: Policies for Food Systems Sustainability after COVID-19

Dr. Hannah Wittman and a team of food systems researchers proposed that the COVID-19 crisis demands an exploration of radical measures to dismantle the corporate food regime, rather than those that serve to prop up a risky and dysfunctional food system. They explored policy and legal mechanisms for more transformative forms of redistribution in the agri-food system. Future research topics might include transdisciplinary teams of legal scholars to re-engineer legal concepts and institutions; political scientists to design redistributive policies; historians to identify the reparations due in partnership with affected communities; and economists for true-cost accounting of agrifood system impacts and the advancement of alternative economic models. Research should be grounded in relationships with community-based organizations and social movements who are on the frontlines of risk exposure and have long demanded reparations and redistribution.

OUTCOMES

- Online session Sep. 2020
- “Dismantling and rebuilding the food system after COVID-19: Ten principles for redistribution and regeneration” Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development (JAFSCD), Feb. 2021
COVID-19 Vulnerabilities: Asian Racialization, Coalition and Creativity

Dr. Danielle Wong organized this roundtable to address the racialized and racist narratives of the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to the transnational histories that connect Vancouver, and Canada more broadly, to Asia. Vancouver’s geopolitical relationship to Asia and the Pacific makes the city a unique site through which transpacific networks of capital, labour and biological contagion could be examined. Speakers from Canada, USA and Hong Kong, discussed existing and potential anti-racist policies for universities, cultural institutions and governments to address the structural vulnerabilities produced by the global pandemic. Organizers also commissioned artworks and a forum on race, visuality and the pandemic comprising of essays from scholars and artists based in North America and working on research questions in Canada, the US, and Asia.

OUTCOMES

• 2 online sessions, Sep. 2020, Nov. 2020
• “Race, Visuality and COVID-19”, Canadian Literature. (In review)
• 2 creative works commissioned (in partnership with Vancouver Art Gallery): “Charlie Chan and the Yellow Peril” and “Guns ‘N Asians”, by Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries (YHCHI), 2021

Danielle Wong
Asian Canadian and Asian Migration Studies, English Language and Literatures, UBC

Chris Lee
Asian Canadian and Asian Migration Studies, English Language and Literatures, UBC

Christine Kim
Asian Canadian and Asian Migration Studies, English Language and Literatures, UBC

John Paul Catungal
Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice, UBC

Melissa Lee
Education and Public Programs, Vancouver Art Gallery
COVID-19, Women’s Health and the Environment: Developing Policies to Catalyze Well-Being

Dr. Farah Shroff organized this roundtable with international partners to focus on the challenges and benefits of COVID-19 on women’s health in a global context. Negative impacts of the pandemic were unequally imposed on women and poverty-stricken households. Researchers aimed to identify factors that enabled a positive response for health equity for the post-COVID-19 world. Women’s leadership during the pandemic was highlighted, and Shroff was invited to lead a forum at the WHO Assembly #74 on "Women Power, Politics and the Pandemic: celebrating women’s leadership".

OUTCOMES

- 4 online regional focus group sessions, Mar. 2021
- Takemi Fellowship, Harvard T. Chan School of Public Health, Aug. 2021
Immigration Detention in the Age of COVID-19: Moving towards Rights Protection

Dr. Efrat Arbel and Molly Joeck examined Canada’s response to the COVID-19 crisis as it relates to immigration detention. In collaboration with local counsel, service providers, and community groups, they aim to produce a comprehensive evaluation of the government’s response. Law reform proposals will be provided to the Canada Border Services Agency, to assist in the development of a rights-oriented response to COVID-19 for detainees. The project focuses on British Columbia in order to develop region-specific responses for immediate and effective implementation.

OUTCOMES
- Research colloquium, Oct. 2020
- “COVID-19 has led to ‘monumental’ shift in thinking on immigration detention issues, research shows”, The Lawyer’s Daily, Mar. 2021
Antimicrobial Titanium Coating for Reusable Personal Protective Equipment

Dr. Jian Liu is developing a chemical process for layering an antimicrobial coating onto textiles used in manufacturing personal protective equipment (PPE) such as reusable face masks. The antimicrobial coating material used is titanium dioxide (TiO2). TiO2 has high photocatalytic activity and will generate reactive oxygen species upon exposure to sunlight, to inactivate infectious agents. Parameters for the automated coating process, suitable textiles, and testing of antimicrobial activity is continuing.
A Rapidly Deployable Negative Pressure Enclosure for Aerosol-Generating Medical Procedures

Dr. Zac Hudson and his co-investigators designed a portable enclosure that can be deployed over patients during aerosol-generating medical procedures (AGMPs). AGMPs include procedures like endotracheal intubation and high-flow oxygen delivery. They are required for severe cases of COVID-19, but generate substantial amounts of aerosols to which healthcare workers are exposed. The modular enclosure is placed over the patient’s head and torso, with inlets positioned to accommodate access to the patient. Negative pressure can be applied to draw away harmful aerosols. The device is being tested by hospitals in Canada, USA, Mexico and Poland. Researchers are now studying how aerosols circulate in hospital emergency rooms more generally.

OUTCOMES

- New technology tested in hospitals
Functionalized Soluble Cellulose for use in Personal Protective Equipment

Dr. Parisa Mehrkhodavandi and her research partners are investigating the use of lignin and cellulose for the development of filters for N95 masks. Chemical modification methodology was used to convert soluble cellulose fiber to fabricate a virus-filtering N95 mask body prototype. This technology can be extended to a variety of personal protective equipment (PPE). Lignin and cellulose are waste products from wood processing, but have structural properties used to create lightweight, highly flexible, and durable materials. The modified cellulose technology will be used to create structural components of masks, and the team will develop a prototype of the N95 mask for commercial testing.
Re-opening UBC safely: Critical Interventions for physical distancing and indoor environmental quality

Dr. Adam Rysanek’s team will investigate and recommend interventions for physical distancing, hygiene, and indoor air quality at the UBC Vancouver campus. They have conducted a survey of UBC building types, modelled occupancy scenarios, and will analyze interventions for required physical distancing and indoor air quality. Results should inform and assess the scale to which normal activities across UBC campus can resume in response to various policy targets, physical distancing measures, and building ventilation configurations.

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KAREN BARTLETT, SCHOOL OF POPULATION AND PUBLIC HEALTH
Novel biosensor for screening and early detection of COVID-19 patients in high risk individuals living in long term care homes

Dr. Babak Shadgan and his co-investigators are developing a novel, non-invasive, sensitive and accurate biosensing device for regular screening and early diagnosis of COVID-19 patients in long-term care facilities. Current detection methods, based on clinical features and body surface temperature, are often too late and unreliable. They also have limited ability to impact transmission. Dr. Shadgan’s team is aiming for a multi-parameter sensor to include, body core temperature, arterial oxygen saturation, heart rate, respiratory rate and rhythm, and respiratory effort index. Respiratory parameters will be obtained from NIRS (near infrared spectroscopy) analysis, a method developed in Shadgan’s lab.

OUTCOMES

- “A review of the efficacy of infrared thermography for screening infectious diseases with applications to COVID-19” Journal of Medical Imaging, Mar. 2021
- Presentation, BC COVID-19 Research and Collaboration Symposium, Sep. 2020

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ANTIMICROBIAL STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM, FRASER HEALTH
SURREY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL
Swab-to-PCR: Simple and Rapid Diagnosis of COVID-19 Using Extraction-Free Nucleic Acid Amplification

Dr. Peter Tilley and researchers at BC Centre for Disease Control and the BC Children’s Hospital developed a sensitive and specific diagnostic method for SARS-CoV-2 that is operationally simple and bypasses supply chain bottlenecks. The assay utilizes a self-collected gargle sample, is cost effective, and can be readily adopted by other laboratories. This method can also be applied in other SARS-CoV-2 testing scenarios, e.g. by sample pooling, and would facilitate large scale SARS-CoV-2 testing, a crucial tool for the control of the COVID-19 pandemic.

OUTCOMES
- New assay tested for clinical use at BC Children’s and Women’s Hospitals
Addressing the pandemic democratically: Communications strategies for better public health outcomes through democratic legitimacy

Dr. Heidi Tworek assembled a team of international experts to research and produce the first international comparison of communications as a medical intervention and the first to consider how democratic COVID communications can increase compliance with public health measures. The report generated significant interest among the media and policy-makers around the world. Tworek was invited to join #ScienceUpFirst, a Canadian academic and civil society initiative to disseminate high-quality information around COVID-19 and vaccinations, and to work with the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, UK, to explore the online abuse of health communicators.

OUTCOMES

- Extensive media coverage

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PARTNERS
EUROPE PROGRAMME, CHATHAM HOUSE, UK

GERMAN MARSHALL FUND OF THE UNITED STATES, BERLIN OFFICE
Distant Prayers? COVID-19, Religion and Conflict

The COVID-19 Working Group led by Prof. Michelle LeBaron explored instances of conflict, dissent and civil disobedience in religious communities following state-mandated social distancing practices due to the pandemic, culminating in the Distant Prayers podcast mini-series. Podcast topics range from the assumption of secularity that hindered communications with religious communities in some regions to the internal struggles within religious communities about how best to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

OUTCOMES

• The Distant Prayers Podcast Series – 7 episodes
COVID-19 Response: Building Higher Learning Resilience in the Face of Epidemic

Dr. Michelle Stack organized a series of webinar discussions on co-operatives, what they are and how they could make for more equitable and accessible campus communities. She and her collaborators argue that universities emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic should "promote and encourage co-operative ventures as one way to contribute to a more resilient society in the face of multiple global crises.”

OUTCOMES

- Webinar: Building equitable, accessible and affordable campuses, Feb. 2021
- Webinar: Housing Co-ops and Campuses, Mar. 2021
- "Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic: University rankings or co-operatives as a strategy for developing an equitable and resilient post-secondary education sector?" International Review of Education, Mar. 2021
- "With campus co-operatives, universities could model new ways of living after COVID-19", The Conversation, May 2021
- Podcast – Elvy Del Bianco, Co-operative Partnerships, Vancity Credit Union, May 2021
- Podcast – Josh Graham, Community Development Coordinator, Neill-Wycik Co-operative College, May 2021
Mathematical Modelling to Understand COVID-19 Epidemic Dynamics in British Columbia

Drs. Daniel Coombs, Sally Otto, and Caroline Colijn led the BC COVID-19 Modelling Group. The researchers used mathematical modelling to develop a quantitative and predictive understanding of the COVID-19 epidemic. Models are based on BC epidemic data from the BC Centre for Disease Control, international data and additional information such as transit usage and cell phone or Google location data. COVID-19 model projections have been issued every 2-3 weeks during the pandemic.

OUTCOMES

• “Quantifying the impact of COVID-19 control measures using a Bayesian model of physical distancing”, PLOS Computational Biology, Dec. 2020
• Regular website updates on BC COVID-19 Modelling Projections
• Video: Real Time Modelling of the 2020 Coronavirus Epidemic, Mar. 2020
Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Can Governments Respond to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Still Respect Personal Privacy?

Dr. Vicki Lemieux brought together experts on ethical, legal, and social implications of public health technologies to explore the challenges, risks, and benefits of deploying novel technologies in the response to COVID-19, and to open a dialogue with health officials and the public.

OUTCOMES

- Witness Webinar: Can Governments Respond to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Still Respect Personal Privacy, May 2020

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