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# UBC REPORTS

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## In the news

# The women workers of Mumbai's slums

Jody Jacob

Conditions for women working in the slums of Mumbai are the subject of new research.



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## Highlights of UBC media coverage in November 2012

### Heather Amos

#### Wireless vehicle charging technology

No one likes having to remember to plug in his or her electric car every night. Researchers at UBC have developed a way to wirelessly charge electric cars and trucks, reported *The New York Times*, *BBC*, *Toronto Star*, *National Post* and *CBC*.

— Led by applied physicist and inventor **Lorne Whitehead**, the researchers have produced a safe, efficient method that employs remote magnetic gears. A demonstration system has operated successfully on the UBC campus for about a year.  
— “Since we began testing the system, the feedback from drivers has been overwhelmingly positive—all they have to do is park the car and the charging begins automatically,” said **David Woodson**, managing director of UBC building operations.

#### Veterans' transition to civilian life

One of the most difficult parts of being a soldier is coming home. Since 1999 a program at UBC has helped Canadian veterans move from military life back to civilian life. That program is now expanding into a national non-profit organization, called the Veterans Transition Network, reported *Global National*, *The Canadian Press*, *CBC On the Coast* and several others.

— **Tim Laidler**, the executive director of the Veterans Transition Network, went through the program after he returned from a tour in Afghanistan. “I really wanted to make sure that other veterans across Canada, like myself, got the chance to go through the program.”  
— About 275 vets have already completed the 10-day program. In the program, founded by professors **Marvin Westwood** and **David Kuhl**, troops relive their trauma through reenactments with peers.

#### U.S. election

UBC professors provided expert commentary about the November 6 U.S. election for *The Globe and Mail*, *Global*, *CBC Early Edition*, *Times Colonist*, *Vancouver Sun* and others.

**Paul Quirk**, **Richard Johnston**, **Evan Wood**, **Werner Antweiler**, **Marit Rehavi** and **Kevin Milligan** discussed results, polls, the economic impact, the “fiscal cliff,” the legalization of marijuana and more. “It is worth thinking about why Obama is doing well in the swing states. It means that he has done better than Romney where both have campaigned heavily,” noted Quirk, the Phil Lind Chair in U.S. Politics and Representation in the Department of Political Science, during *The Globe and Mail*'s live blog on election night.

#### Summer babies less likely to be CEOs

A UBC study found that babies born during the summer months are less likely to become corporate CEOs, reported *Time*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *National Geographic*, *CBC The Current*, the *Toronto Star* and others.

The study, co-authored by **Maurice Levi** from UBC's Sauder School of Business, found that children born in the summer months are most likely to be the youngest in their classes. As a result of being intellectually or physically less mature, these students are less likely to excel from the outset—a phenomenon known as the “birth-date effect.”

“Early success is often rewarded with leadership roles and enriched learning opportunities, leading to future advantages that are magnified throughout life,” said Levi.

#### In the slums of Mumbai, millions of women and girls are helping to support their families by working from home in difficult, unsanitary conditions with minimal financial gain.

Their efforts play a surprisingly large role in India's business sector. They produce a vast amount of low-cost products—from electronics, garments and footwear to trinkets, jewellery and food—which are often marketed in shopping malls or exported at high prices. Yet they receive none of the profits.

Kanchan Sarker, sessional lecturer of sociology at UBC's Okanagan campus, is trying to understand, and hopefully improve, civic amenities for the home-based women workers of Mumbai's slums.

The project will also attempt to identify whether organizing women workers would help with issues such

as domestic violence. “For home-based working women, access and quality of civic amenities are a matter of personal as well as professional survival,” says Sarker. “Rights to living space, as well as good quality water and sanitation facilities, electricity and sewage disposal, are important. It is of utmost significance to find what exists, how good it is, and how to improve it.”

Sarker notes that slums provide affordable living places for the urban working poor and play a very effective role in making the city liveable.

“Slums are generators of employment and a source of cheap labour which benefits the urban classes that oppose their existence. Instead of demolishing slums, the authorities should try and upgrade them.”

A significant challenge is combating the community's perception of women's

home-based work, which is often devalued.

“Women's empowerment is at the heart of this project,” says Sarker. “However, since the issues affect men as well, women's collective bargaining on these fundamental needs and services should have a positive effect on the entire community.”

The research will focus on three Mumbai slums, including Dharavi, commonly known as Asia's largest slum settlement. A mapping study will identify each slum's features and settlement patterns. Social factors such as class, nature of home-based work, common contractors, and access to facilities such as water, sanitation and common space will be examined.

Some fifty women in each slum will be surveyed on social and work-related issues; in-depth interviews will be conducted with group leaders, job

contractors and civic officials. Focus groups with female home-based workers are also planned.

“We hope our research acts as a tool for informing civic and government authorities, urban planning experts, academics, students and activists on the issues faced by home-based workers and the slum-dwelling communities in the city,” says Sarker. “The project attempts to encourage home workers to use their collective strength to address issues that affect their work, health and family lives.”

The project, which is Sarker's second on improving life for India's poor, is supported through an Action Research Project Grant from the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute. Partners include Prof. Sharit Bhowmik and Indira Gartenberg of LEARN (Labour, Education, and Research Network), Mumbai. ●

**“The project attempts to encourage home workers to use their collective strength.”**

# Extraordinary doctors for B.C. communities

Creating new opportunities for international medical graduates

Brian Lin

**Kirti Aneja was proud of her achievements when she began practising as an anesthesiologist in a rural community in India's northern state of Punjab in 2007.**

She'd wanted to be a doctor since she was a little girl playing with toy medical kits and was inspired by childhood visits to leprosy hospitals. She was happily married to her medical school sweetheart and expecting their first-born son.

But her family made a gut-wrenching decision: to leave their beloved homeland to pursue a better life for their children. And her passion to use her medical skills turned to serving people in her new country, Canada.

**A long and winding journey**

Dr. Aneja is an international medical graduate (IMG), one of a group of permanent residents or Canadian citizens trained outside of North America who are seeking to practise medicine in Canada.

The B.C. government has committed to increasing funding and partnering with the UBC Faculty of Medicine to expand the IMG program from 26 spaces today to a proposed 58 in 2017 in order to help meet the need for more doctors in underserved areas of B.C.

With an eye on ensuring high quality care in communities around the province, the process of integrating skilled and passionate medical graduates from overseas is rigorous.

While the U.S. and Canada share similar curriculum and accreditation for medical students, systems vary widely around the world. Many do not, for example, demand the same level of training in a clinical setting that is required of Canadian medical education.

In order to ensure the uniform skills and knowledge of medical graduates trained outside of North America, all IMGs are obliged to complete a series of exams.

Those who do best in the exams are then selected for clinical assessment—they work for three months in hospitals alongside experienced physicians—and on successful completion are then eligible to apply to residency training programs lasting two to seven years, depending on specialization, before they qualify for a license to practice.

Aneja had completed three years of residency training in India. But here in Canada, she had to start over.

"I'm a fighter. We came here for a better life for our family and our son, and I don't give up easily," says Aneja. While preparing for exams and looking after her young son, Aneja worked in Wal-Mart to make ends meet.

Aneja passed all her exams and the three-month BC-IMG clinical assessment in two-and-a-half years. She began her residency at St. Paul's Hospital in July.

"I was determined to practise medicine in Canada, but it was definitely challenging," says Aneja, whose husband is still in the process of qualifying for residency training.

Kirti Aneja originally qualified as a doctor in India, before immigrating to Canada.



Martin Dee Photograph

Suzanne Walter had a similar journey. Born and raised in B.C., Dr. Walter decided to be a doctor while traveling in Europe after graduating with a Bachelor of Science from UBC. Walter completed medical school at the University of Freiburg in Germany and returned to Vancouver in 2008.

It took her two-and-a-half-years to complete the required exams and assessments before beginning residency training in 2010.

"In retrospect, I might have been a little naïve about what it would take to come back to practise in B.C.," says Walter, who admitted that at times she felt deserving of special consideration as a natural Canadian.

"But the longer I was in the program, the more I realized that all the IMGs are Canadians—some have been here as long as 10 years and separated from

their partners or children. Most have family and children to support and some are supporting extended families abroad," she notes.

"Many of the IMGs I know aren't here for their own careers—they had a good life in their home countries as doctors. They were well-respected and made good money." "They're here because they want a better life for their children, and as a new mother myself, I get it."

**The challenges: expanding the program for areas that need it**

There is no shortage of doctors like Aneja and Walter—indeed there is a high demand for limited IMG spaces. But the key is to meet the province's needs: identifying what kinds of doctors are needed where, building teaching capacity in the province's hospitals, and increasing funding.

The B.C. government has designated the majority of current IMG spaces for family practice. IMGs are trained in Victoria and in the Fraser region in addition to Vancouver. Additional sites, such as Strathcona and Kamloops are also being considered. And since the last round of program expansion began in 2006, seven IMGs have remained to practise in the underserved area where they completed their return-of-service contract.

Adding more IMG residency training spaces must take into account the teaching capacity in hospitals, community clinics and individual practises and the safety of patients, says Dr. Willa Henry, director of UBC's Family Practice Residency Program.

While undergoing training, residents take on primary responsibility for patients under the watchful eye and guidance of preceptors—senior physicians who serve double-duty

as teachers. Training IMGs requires preceptors who are experienced with a wide range of cultures and clinical backgrounds, says Henry.

"All residents must have experience providing care from cradle to grave, and a variety of demographics and socio-economic status. We're increasingly exposing them to different geographic regions and health care settings."

Of course, there are limits to the number of senior physicians who can provide this level of training in underserved areas. And teaching capacity has already been stretched to accommodate the doubling of UBC's medical graduates in the last decade.

**Doubling homegrown doctors**

"For many years, we did not produce as many doctors as needed, and relied mainly on recruiting internationally educated

## Rapid growth of medical training in B.C.

Working with the provincial government, UBC has more than doubled the number of doctors it trains over the past decade, and is expanding spaces to bring in doctors trained outside of North America.

Completed expansion of spaces in UBC's medical school



Planned expansion of spaces for the international medical graduate program



## Pressure on B.C.'s teaching capacity

**Much of MD undergraduate training, and most post-graduate training occurs in hospitals and clinics. Rapid growth in medical school spaces has put a premium on teaching sites that meet these criteria:**

**Appropriate case mix**  
To meet learning objectives set by Canada's accreditation body, a teaching site must have a variety of patients and health issues.

**Case volume**  
Sites must provide a high volume of general and specialized cases for students to practise skills and learn procedures.

**Clinical faculty**  
Teaching is done by clinical faculty who are practising doctors. There must be enough doctors willing to provide bedside teaching and participate in faculty development. Rapid growth in medical school spaces has increased the number of clinical teaching physicians from 2,500 in 2004 to 5,000 in 2012. Shortages in family physicians create challenges for further rapid expansion.

## Who decides how many doctors are needed?

**The B.C. Ministry of Health works with regional health authorities and UBC to determine the health and human resource needs of the province, and determine the**

**number of trainees it can fund. The government has put a priority on access to care for people in mid-sized urban centres and rural and remote**

**communities. The most urgent need is for family physicians, pediatricians, psychiatrists and internists.**

doctors who were eligible to practise in Canada independently," says Dr. David Snadden, executive associate dean of education in the Faculty of Medicine.

Answering the challenge to not only educate more doctors, but also increase the number of family physicians in underserved areas, the province and the UBC's Faculty of Medicine doubled the number of medical student spaces—from 128 prior to 2004 to 288 this year—and distributed their training across the province to Victoria, Prince George and Kelowna. After spending the first semester at the Vancouver campus, one third of the class complete their studies at a distributed site. The aim is that many will establish practices around the province.

The Northern Medical Program (NMP), first of the distributed sites, is particularly successful in this regard, with almost

two-thirds of fully licensed graduates now practising family medicine in the Northern Health Authority.

For Aneja, the prospect of practising family medicine in an underserved community and working with a range of health professionals in Canada's universal health care system fulfills her childhood ambitions in ways she'd never envisioned.

"India has a two-tier, public-private system, with the public system catering mostly to the poor and the private system operating much like a commercial industry—if you have money, you shop around for doctors who give you what you want," she says. "The health care system here is much more collaborative. As a family physician, I'll get to work with people from all walks of life and act as a gatekeeper to ensure my patients get the best care possible."

Walter says her interactions with IMGs have highlighted the rigor of the system and importance of diversity in the medical profession.

"IMGs go through a very intense process in order to be qualified to practise here," says Walter, who points out that many IMGs were specialists in their home country before entering into family practice in B.C.

"They have a lot of specialized knowledge and are able to provide culturally sensitive care that's especially important in today's multicultural society."

Despite a detour in the Wal-Mart photo department, Aneja says the journey has been well worth it.

"Looking back, if I had never come to Canada, I wouldn't have learned what I'm capable of," she says. "I wasn't unhappy with my own world, but I would have missed this world." ●

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# Creating an oasis in the Downtown Eastside

Lorraine Chan



Martin Dee Photograph



Photographs courtesy of UBC Learning Exchange & Kim Villagante

UBC graduate **Kim Villagante** helped neighbours and tenants create a mural over three days.

**It's artwork in the most unlikely of places. In the alley behind 40 East Hastings near Main Street in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, a large vibrant mural covers three garage doors.**

Playful themes of nature, rest and ocean offer passersby a visual respite from the garbage bins and ubiquitous graffiti in one of the most high-traffic alleys in the area.

The mural is the handiwork of UBC graduate Kim Villagante and the residents at the Oasis, an affordable housing building. It has drawn kudos and interest from neighbours and nearby businesses who also want to beautify their section of the alley.

"Every single person who walked or drove by would stop to interact," says Villagante who, with Oasis tenants and other volunteers, completed the mural over three days in September.

"There was so much positive uplift. Residents and strangers would come by and say, 'hey that's awesome' or 'it looks great!' I thought that was really cool," says Villagante, who recently graduated from UBC with a BA in visual arts and art history.

Sponsored by UBC's Learning Exchange, the mural project has been successful in building community and connecting students to the community, explains Dionne Pelan, who coordinates

the Learning Exchange drop-in and computer programs.

Located on Main Street in Chinatown, the Learning Exchange supports residents' learning initiatives through free programs. "We also provide UBC students with leadership and community-based learning opportunities," says Pelan.

"When I heard that the Learning Exchange was looking for a community artist, I jumped on it right away," says Villagante. "I liked how it was about reclaiming the alley space for the tenants and creating bonds between people who wouldn't have otherwise connected."

Villagante facilitated the creative process, brainstorming ideas with Oasis tenants. While waiting for city permits, she held monthly workshops over the summer.

"Tenants would drop by and I'd sketch the mural. People gave input. They wanted themes of an oasis, nature, sun, killer whales and cats, since the Oasis is full of cats."

Adrienne Macallum has lived at the Oasis for the past 10 years. An artist and digital storyteller, Macallum contributed a sketch for one of the mural panels depicting a woman holding a parasol and looking out to sea.

"Tenants here generally tend to keep to themselves," says Macallum. "But the mural gave people a chance to get involved."

Villagante and two artist friends first traced the design onto the garage doors with chalk and black felt markers. Painters then laid down thick layers of colour according to the master sketch.

"It went really quickly once we got

started," says Macallum. "Tenants who wanted to paint did. Others got involved by making the food or hanging out with us."

Villagante says, "I came into it thinking I'd just be contributing my art skills. But I'm walking away with the love and stories shared with me by the tenants at the Oasis. I have a renewed respect for the real community that is so evident here in the Downtown Eastside." ●

To see a video of the mural project visit: [learningexchange.ubc.ca/mural](http://learningexchange.ubc.ca/mural)

**It was about reclaiming the alley space for the tenants and creating bonds between people.**

# From human sacrifice to Santa Claus: UBC researchers study the evolution of religion

Basil Waugh



UBC's Edward Slingerland and colleagues are leading the world's largest study on how religions have evolved.

**Even if December 25th is more about Santa Claus than Jesus Christ in your family, UBC's Edward Slingerland says that Christmas and other religious holidays remain crucial for society.**

"Holidays help us express and affirm our cultural values," says Slingerland, who recently launched the world's largest study on the evolution of religion with colleagues at UBC and SFU. "So as culture changes, whether through immigration or evolution of attitudes, our holidays will evolve as well."

"That time spent strengthening bonds with family, friends and community, has real meaning for people and is important for social cohesion," says Slingerland, who is a professor in UBC's Dept. of Asian Studies and Canada Research Chair in Chinese Thought and Embodied Cognition.

Slingerland is primary investigator for one of the largest research grants ever awarded to a Canadian social science and humanities scholar, a \$3-million award to establish the Cultural Evolution of Religion Research Consortium (CERC), centered at UBC. Slingerland calls religion one of the least studied and most misunderstood aspects of human life.

"While recent literature has positioned religion as something dangerous or disposable, our hypothesis is that religion has been key to the evolution and success of large-scale societies," says Slingerland. "As our world becomes more diverse and interconnected, understanding people's deeply held religious beliefs is increasingly important for reducing conflicts and grasping the dynamics that make societies more cohesive."

The project brings together more than 50 top researchers from around the world—including Oxford and Harvard—and fields such as religious studies, anthropology, linguistics, psychology, biology and economics. It is likely the first time that scholars from such a wide variety of disciplines have been brought together on a single research project, says Slingerland.

CERC has a number of flagship projects. Researchers are working to create world's largest database of human cultural history—from the earliest archeological records to today—organized by historical time, geography, ecology and a host of social variables that will allow researchers to test sophisticated and detailed hypotheses about the evolution of religious culture.

Another project will trace the cultural evolution of religious rituals, from human sacrifices to pilgrimages to holy sites, and explore the underlying social conditions that caused these rites to appear, persist and change. "These studies will help to understand how cultural beliefs and rituals have mutated over time, just as genes have evolved."

One of the key questions Slingerland and his collaborators are exploring is the evolution of conceptions of supernatural beings from largely amoral beings, typified by the Greek gods, to the morally concerned gods of the world's major world religions, such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam.

The UBC-led team believes the cultural evolution of these sorts of beliefs and practices helped groups transform from subsistence to urban societies with large populations. According to Slingerland,

**"These studies will help to understand how cultural beliefs and rituals have mutated over time, just as genes have evolved."**

these include costly displays, which signify commitment to group values, rituals that bring people together with movement and song, and the grounding of values in ideas such as God's will or the law of karma.

"If God cares if you are being honest in your economic dealings and being faithful to your spouse, and a good person to your neighbor, you are more likely to be good," he explains.

"Our hypothesis is that groups that hit upon this package of religious beliefs and practices were able to bind people in a powerful way that has helped them to flourish and expand, at the expense of less cohesive groups."

In addition to a historical team led by Slingerland and SFU's Mark Collard, the

Ethnographic-Experimental team, led by UBC psychologists Ara Norenzayan and Joe Henrich, will conduct studies on populations around the globe, including more than 10 ethnographic field bases in North American, Asia, Europe, and Africa, including small-scale societies in Fiji, the Congo, and Tanzania.

"Right now, more than 90 per cent of social psychology research is being done on North American college students, which are poor representatives for the global population," says Slingerland, citing research by Henrich, Norenzayan and UBC psychologist Steve Heine.

"By testing our hypotheses across a wide variety of cultures we will gain a better understanding of cross-cultural differences, gain greater certainty concerning claims about psychological universality, and provide much greater understanding of how religion functions in society today." ●

# Boom times for Young Adult fiction

Lorraine Chan



Kristen Stewart and Robert Pattinson in a still from The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn-Part 1.

**Teen fiction is no longer just for kids. A recent industry survey shows that 55 per cent of those who purchase Young Adult (YA) fiction are adult readers between their late 20s and mid 40s. With more than 4,000 titles and \$600-million in sales during 2011, youth literature is the fastest-growing category in publishing. Bestsellers like *The Hunger Games*, *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* leap easily onto the big screen, spinning box office gold.**

**UBC Prof. Judith Saltman researches and teaches children's and youth literature at the School of Library, Archival and Information Studies. Teen fiction is so much more than glittery vampires and adolescent angst, says Saltman who reflects on what's hot, why and what's next.**

**How do you explain the YA fiction boom?**

The first reason is raw storytelling. The writing is transparent and unselfconscious.

People who are writing for teens are more direct. They're writing faster-paced material that explores a time of intense self-discovery and the heroic quest, which leads to the second reason: intense emotion.

A third reason is the diversity of genres. There's something for everybody. You can have fantasy, science fiction, contemporary realism, historical realism, graphic novels and verse novels.

Marketing is a factor. Before, the YA category used to be age-level writing, targeting 12- to 18-year-olds. Now publishers are also marketing down to tweens as well as up toward adults.

But a big reason for the huge rise of YA fiction is that these books, especially fantasy and science fiction series, invite you into a mystical world which Tolkien termed the "secondary world" with its internal consistency and truths.

**Why do YA novels seem tailor-made for Hollywood?**

The stories are incredibly filmic. They're so lean and propulsive and have such momentum. They are novels with characters, scenes and action that read like screenplays.

Two recent examples are in the dystopian science fiction genre: *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, by the amazing U.K. writer Philip Ness, and *Red Blood Road* by a wonderful Canadian writer, Moira Young. Both conjure a *Mad Max* setting that's stark and dramatic. Both have been optioned to be filmed.

**What lies at the beating heart of teen fiction?**

There's often a Manichean battle in YA fantasy and science fiction in which a never-ending struggle exists between good

**"It goes back to Tolkien, Lewis and writers of the 19th century. That will be with us forever."**

and evil, between young people and exploiters who are usually adults and often of supernatural species.

There's a child who's evolving through adolescence and is looking at a false, immoral and corrupt adult world. Similar to Joseph Campbell's writing on myth, the hero must leave the known world and go out into the unknown to battle evil in any form.

The adolescents are upholding values of compassion, courage, stability, faith, and trust. They carry a burden on their shoulders to save the world.

**Why do adults want to write about teens?**

Although some of these books are tragic, most of the writers feel they are writing for the future, for the next generation, for growing people. They show harsh truths but they want to offer hope and redemption.

I think that it's quite different in adult writing. There's more cynicism, bitterness, a sense of the endgame that you don't find in quite the same way in writing for teens.

**Is dystopian angst here to stay?**

The human race is so anxious about the future of our planet that these stories serve as cautionary tales. In this literature, we see imagery of apocalyptic collapse, a futuristic hellscape, a landscape of poverty, collapse of the environment and the social order, an ongoing struggle for survival and a frightening totalitarian state.

For teen readers, this genre offers something fresh and new, and for adult readers, it has energy and a moral compass not always found in adult writing of dystopia. These stories almost always end up with groups of teenagers acting with courage in political rebellion.

**Where is youth literature going?**

I think people are getting really tired of paranormal romance and vampires, shimmery or not. I am, and I think the publishers are.

New genres include YA urban fantasy and the character-driven novel. High epic fantasies such as those created by Rowling and Pullman will never dry up because we have a huge need for mythology and archetype. It goes back to Tolkien, Lewis and writers of the 19th century. That will be with us forever. ●

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A daily aggregation of content from the University of British Columbia

# Inclusive U

Students with developmental disabilities attend and graduate from UBC

Heather Amos



Martin Dee Photograph

Students with developmental disabilities can attend UBC supported by a program called Steps Forward. Just like every other student, they take classes, write exams, and graduate.

**Register for classes, get involved in clubs, make friends, study, write exams, find a part-time job, pursue a passion, and graduate—it's the typical university experience.**

And it's now an experience accessible to students with developmental disabilities who attend UBC, thanks to a B.C. organization called Steps Forward.

"It's the things you'd want for everyone at this stage: the chance to develop lifelong friendships and build a network, exposure to different fields and career paths, and awareness of what is available to you," says Tamara Hurtado, executive director of Steps Forward.

Steps Forward works with universities and colleges to allow people with developmental disabilities could experience university or college life.

This fall, the provincial government awarded Steps Forward \$400,000 over two years so that 25 students with developmental disabilities could attend a postsecondary institution.

The organization currently works with both of UBC's campuses, the University of Victoria, Emily Carr University of Art + Design, Simon Fraser University, and the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology.

"I'm so happy that more students will be able to take advantage of this program," says UBC professor Diana French, who has had UBC students supported by Steps Forward attend her classes.

Students identify the courses that interest them and staff at Steps Forward work with UBC professors to customize the curriculum requirements and evaluations.

French is an associate professor of anthropology and head of Community, Culture, and Global Studies at UBC's Okanagan campus. Steps Forward students have taken her first-year introduction to cultural anthropology class and her fourth-year applied anthropology class.

"When I find out there is a student who wants to take my course, they're in," she says. French is a big supporter of the program because she has seen its

impact on the students.

"Students can be shy at first but participating in classes and events outside of the classroom really helps build self-confidence," she says.

Steps Forward encourages students to get involved in campus activities, like sports or student-run clubs, and find a summer job. One of French's students was very involved in the anthropology student society and attended an undergraduate research conference in Alberta.

"Steps Forward helps students find a passion for something and allows them to continue to pursue it," says French. According to Hurtado, one student who took a lot of earth science classes got a job in a mineral store preparing the kids' area for activities. Another student loved music and got a job at a radio station's music department.

A group of parents formed Steps Forward in 2001 after looking around the UK, US and Canada for examples of best practices supporting youth with developmental disabilities to transition to adulthood. The group modeled their organization after inclusive postsecondary initiatives in Alberta.

"In the 1950s, kids with developmental disabilities were separated from other children in elementary and high school. In the 1970s and 1980s, things changed and they began to be included in the classroom. We wanted their postsecondary education to reflect the inclusive learning environment that our kids had experienced from K-12," says Hurtado.

"This full experience does more for building self-esteem, the ability to self-manage, and develop the soft skills needed for employment than any segregated program," notes Janet Mee, director of UBC Access and Diversity.

Mee says the program is also important because it exposes students and professors to the capabilities of young adults with developmental disabilities.

Since Steps Forward was formed, four students have graduated from UBC's Vancouver campus and one student has graduated from the Okanagan campus. ●

Don Ehardt Photograph



Melania Alvarez is helping improve math education for Aboriginal students.

**When Melania Alvarez's son was placed in a lower-level math class in junior high school, she was caught off guard. The Mexican-born mathematician, then working in Wisconsin, knew that Rodrigo had an aptitude for math.**

It turned out he had been placed in the low-level course because he had a Hispanic name. Later on in high school—after being placed in appropriate classes—he scored a perfect 800 on his standardized math test for college admissions.

"Living in the United States made me empathetic to some of the issues Aboriginal students face," says Alvarez, who now works at UBC to develop programming for those students in local high schools.

"There are certain stereotypes and patterns, even some that are meant well, which can harm Aboriginal students."

Alvarez is of Spanish and Purépecha (an indigenous people from the state of Michoacán) descent. Her interest in math led her to a bachelor's degree in actuarial science, even though her conservative family expected her to marry and follow a more traditional path.

Math, she says, expanded her horizons and allowed her to travel the world.

Alvarez's love of numbers and her personal insight into the barriers some communities face also made her a fierce proponent of improved math education, a passion that eventually brought her to UBC, where she works as coordinator for the outreach programs at UBC Mathematics and the Pacific Institute for the Mathematical Sciences (PIMS).

Aboriginal students make up more than 10 per cent of the school-age population in B.C., with that percentage increasing steadily. But only two per cent of those students complete Principles of Mathematics 12, a prerequisite for many post-secondary programs and a requirement for admission to UBC Science.

For Aboriginal students interested in the sciences, poor performance in math can rob them of personal potential and career options.

In 2007 Alvarez helped start two math summer camps hosted at UBC and at Britannia Secondary School in east Vancouver. (Britannia has twice the proportion of Aboriginal students as the provincial average.) She has developed training materials for Aboriginal teachers, promoted mentorship opportunities and created specialized programming, often in partnership with the First Nations Education Steering Committee, the Vancouver School Board and UBC.

While Alvarez is proud of her work, she's even prouder of the students.

"These are capable young people. Many times they are classified as learning disabled when they are not. After being told they can't do something, they start to believe it. We need to change our attitudes."

Alvarez believes that the problem may also lie in insufficient math training for teachers. She hopes events like the PIMS annual Changing the Culture teacher development conference will help. Programs that support the expansion of pre-service training, like UBC's Native Indian Teacher Education Program, could also improve math delivery.

**"After being told they can't do something, they start to believe it. We need to change our attitudes."**

Alvarez would also like to provide more support for parents to expand the reach of the programs geographically and involve more disciplines.

But at this point the funds to achieve an expansion aren't there, she says. The program scrambles every year to find funds for programs such as the Emerging Aboriginal Scholars program, mentorship programs, and the math workshops for teachers and students that take place in more than 45 schools across the province.

This winter, Alvarez will be presented with the Canadian Mathematical Society's 2012 Adrien Pouliot Award in recognition of her contributions to mathematics education in Canada. ●

For more info: [science.ubc.ca/support/giving/math](http://science.ubc.ca/support/giving/math)

# Mexico's insidious drug war

Basil Waugh



A forthcoming book by UBC's **Shaylih Muehlmann** details how the U.S.-backed war on drugs has failed Mexicans.

**A UBC researcher who was first drawn to Mexico to study water shortages has turned her efforts to putting a human face on that country's bloody drug war.**

While media focus on sensational stories of drug violence, for the last decade, UBC anthropology Prof. Shaylih Muehlmann has been looking into the lives of people working on the lowest rungs of the drug trade in rural northwest Mexico.

In her forthcoming book, *When I Wear My Alligator Boots: Life at the Edges of the War on Drugs*, she details how the U.S.-backed war on drugs has failed Mexican society: 70,000 deaths since 2006, skyrocketing addiction rates, and widespread social problems, including a generation of drug orphans—children who have lost parents to drugs and violence.

Muehlmann, Canada Research Chair in Culture, Language and the Environment, is among a growing chorus of policy experts to conclude that drugs prohibition does not work. "Criminalizing drugs is supposed to reduce their availability and keep communities safe," says Muehlmann. "But drugs are more available than ever and drug violence is an everyday part of life in northern Mexico—so something clearly isn't working.

"Part of my book is an attempt to understand why people generally support drug prohibition, in the face of the overwhelming evidence that it doesn't work."

Muehlmann initially went to Mexico in 2003 to study the impacts of the Colorado River basin water shortage on rural fishing villages. "I was aware of the drug

issue, and the danger, and fully intended to completely ignore it," she says. "But I quickly realized that would be impossible, because the drug trade is everywhere."

Fishing boats, passenger vehicles and trucks were used to transport drugs, she says. Medals featuring the folk saint of drug dealers, Jesús Malverde, were hanging from people's necks. Many villagers were addicted to crystal meth. Unkempt drug orphans relied on the charity of strangers.

The book follows the stories of a few key individuals. One is Andreas, a former drug runner whose mother paid guards to protect him from beatings in jail. Another is a taxi driver whose passengers are primarily *halcones* ("lookouts") working for the cartels. Others made sandwiches for mafiosos or

laundered mob money. Muehlmann says that poverty, unemployment and a lack of social mobility offer few alternatives for villagers.

"People ask me how anyone could be crazy enough to become involved in Mexico's violent drug trade," she says. "But for many people in Northern Mexico, it is actually riskier not to get involved—the drug trade is implicated in every aspect of life."

The killings increased dramatically when Mexico's military was brought in to fight the cartels in 2006, Muehlmann says. "This has caused the drug related violence to escalate." She says the government's strategy of targeting cartel leaders is failing also. "Removing leaders has only succeeded in bringing more violence, as gangs and factions

**"It is actually riskier not to get involved—the drug trade is implicated in every aspect of life."**

attempt to fill the power void."

She disputes the official claims that the staggering number of killings are restricted to the drug community. "There is this popular notion, which the government is happy to foster, that anyone killed was involved with the cartels. But police investigate less than 10 per cent of murders, so it is impossible to know if these claims are true."

According to Muehlmann, the only way to address the problem is to focus on the root issues that make the drug trade attractive: prohibition policies that make drugs lucrative, and poverty. She points

to recent Washington and Colorado state decisions to legalize marijuana, adding that many Latin American countries now favour decriminalization.

"The sooner we decriminalize drugs, the faster we can start addressing the problem in a meaningful way," she says. "Instead of guns and enforcement, we need to invest that money on education, jobs and treatment programs for addiction." ●

# 'Tis the Season: A survival guide

UBC expert tips on making it through the merrymaking

Heather Amos

# outtakes

Making economics sexy

Marina Adshade



Martin Dee Photograph

believes economics helps us understand topics related to sex and love.

I have a confession to make. I have a Hollywood agent—or to be more precise, my research has a Hollywood agent. It's surprising, I know. As an economist, I don't see myself sitting on a film set, shouting "No, no, no! Demand shifts to the left and supply shifts to the right!" But at least one person in Los Angeles thinks my work is "Hollywood gold."

How could this research, originally intended for an academic audience, ever attract the interest of an agent?

There is a perception that economics is all about money and wealth creation. However, saying that economics is about money is like saying that engineering is about centimetres, and to argue that the role of economics is to create wealth obscures the power of economic reasoning to explain the human experience.

In 2008, as the economy was crashing and taking the reputation of economics with it, I was thinking of new ways to teach students the tools of my trade in a way that convinced them that economic theory has real life applications beyond forecasting GDP growth rates.

I needed to encourage students to apply economic thinking to their personal lives. And so, with the help of hundreds of published academic papers, the economics of sex and love was born.

When this led to my blog (originally hosted on the university website and later picked up by an influential platform, *Big Think*) I was able to reach a much wider and more academically diversified audience. That exposure (and, I should say, the learning that goes along with researching and writing for a heavily trafficked blog) led to a book deal and, apparently, the need for a Hollywood agent.

It has been a long time since I thought about my work simply as a fun way to engage students in learning. Topics related to sex and love, such as the effects of free access to contraceptives, the increase in births to single women and the change in the way we think about marriage, have become an important part of the public discourse in recent years. Economists are among the academics who bring an important and at times quirky perspective to that conversation.

In 2008 UBC economist Marina Adshade started a popular new course called the *Economics of Sex and Love*. She is a blogger, media commentator and will soon launch her first book, *Dollars and Sex*. You can find more about her work at [marinaadshade.com](http://marinaadshade.com).

## Stay grounded in nature

Maxine Crawford is a PhD student at UBC's Okanagan campus who researches how nature impacts our wellbeing.

"The holidays are a busy time of the year. We already have hectic lives, so holiday parties, gift-giving, travel, and family expectations add a lot of stress.

"Exposure to nature recharges your battery in a way that other things don't. Ideally get outside. But even if you only have 20 minutes, look out a window. Exposure to nature reduces blood pressure, heart rate, cortisol levels—all of which are linked to stress. Even little pieces of nature—like putting a poinsettia on your desk—can make a difference."

## Shopping 101: stick to the plan

Darren Dahl is a Senior Associate Dean and the Fred H. Siller Professor in Applied Marketing Research at UBC's Sauder School of Business.

"It's important to have a plan when we go into a store. Often at Christmas we just want to buy things. It's better to know who you're shopping for and what you have in mind for them so that you're not vulnerable to a store that is going to try and get you to impulse buy.

"When you go shopping, you don't want to be too tired or hungry, and you don't want to be having a bad day. Those feelings are going to make you more prone to spending too much money. You want to make good decisions so that on your way home, you're going to be happy with your purchases and you're not going to have what we call cognitive dissonance—that sinking feeling of 'I've made the wrong choice.'"

## Food, food and more food

Gwen Chapman is the Associate Dean of the Faculty of Land and Food Systems and professor of Food, Nutrition and Health.

"Food has many roles in our social lives—it is not just about nourishing our bodies, but it helps us define who we are socially and culturally. Food is important!

"To help balance the social and cultural roles with health concerns, one of the main things to watch for is how much we eat. Keep portion sizes small, and fill up on the healthier foods like fruit and vegetables.

"Fortunately, many of the 'feast' foods that we make and eat over the holidays are local, seasonal products—look for B.C. turkey, potatoes, carrots, cranberries, squash, turnip, and pumpkin. And remember that choosing more vegetables and fruits and cutting back a bit on animal products helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

## Oh Christmas Tree

Steve Mitchell is an associate professor in UBC's Faculty of Forestry. He likes the smell of a real tree and grows his own.

"There are four types of Christmas trees to choose from: an artificial tree, a wild tree, a farmed cut tree or a farmed living tree. The most sustainable Christmas trees are wild trees harvested (with a permit) from under power lines or next to roadways. About 75 per cent of the trees produced commercially in B.C. are cut from natural stands.

"Growing trees in Christmas tree farms requires fertilizer, weed control, shearing and shipping. Transport of farmed trees accounts for 50 per cent of the carbon emissions so buy from local producers. After Christmas, cut trees are typically chipped and composted or used as biofuel; farmed living trees can be replanted if they are a native tree species that can grow in our local climate.

"Artificial trees need to be kept for 20 years for the carbon emissions to be equivalent to using natural trees, according to a life cycle analysis. The average life expectancy of an artificial tree is six years and most end up in landfills."

## Make the most out of your holiday party

Karl Aquino is the Richard Poon Professor of Organizations and Society at UBC's Sauder School of Business.

"The holidays are a good time to reflect on how you might try to reconcile relationships with co-workers with whom you might have had conflicts in the past, or where hostilities are impairing your ability to work well together. Research shows that being able to forgive past wrongs can reduce the emotional distress that people often feel when they ruminate on the harms they might have experienced from their co-workers.

"In the midst of the stresses of the holiday season, it might be helpful to take a step back and contemplate forgiveness and its capacity to promote healing and restoration."

## When a cold catches you off guard

James McCormack is a professor in the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences.

"Caught a cold but planning to entertain? Unfortunately there are no quick fixes. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) can help with pain and fever. But if you're really sick, cancel your dinner party.

"When it is cold outside we tend to spend more time indoors and therefore we get exposed more to viruses that other people have. Avoid contact with people who are ill—wash your hands regularly. Eat well and stay active." ●



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