

Curiosity and Connection: An Undergraduate Perspective on Community Research

Debra Andrews

Faculty of Arts, Directed Studies

Supervisors: Tina Block and Ginny Ratsoy

Abstract:

In this paper, I will explore the effects of experiential undergraduate research and subsequent conference participation on my self-identity as a scholar and contributing member of the university community and its surrounding urban centre. In particular, I will examine the impact that participation in undergraduate research and conferences has had on my perception of student engagement and learning outcomes. For the past forty years, extensive research into the goals of undergraduate education has generated much discussion about student retention, student engagement in the process, and learner outcomes. The consensus appears to be that independent undergraduate research is an essential component to providing a comprehensive education in conjunction with traditional lecture hall and seminar session teaching practices. A review of research literature written by faculty members and undergraduate students in diverse disciplines, as well as by administrators providing support and program underpinnings for innovative undergraduate research, reveals several common threads within post-secondary institutions. As well, I will analyze how my particular research projects and the dissemination of my findings connected my two communities: Thompson Rivers University (TRU) and the small city of Kamloops. The opportunity to disseminate the research process and subsequent findings of my research to undergraduate students in-class and to students, faculty and the general public at two undergraduate conferences held annually at TRU intertwine the history of our small city with the academic community of the university, thus emphasizing the symbiotic relationship

between the two. Community-based undergraduate research, in particular, oral history research, reveals the voices of people engaged in the building of the Kamloops community, thus connecting stories of personal accomplishment to the sphere of academia within our small city. Reflective consideration from an undergraduate student's perspective on research and conference presentation will add to the knowledge-base of student engagement in research, the learning outcomes of the conference forum, and the impact of community research within and outside of the university campus.

"Learning is based on discovery guided by mentoring rather than on the transmission of information. Inherent in inquiry-based learning is an element of reciprocity: faculty can learn from students as students are learning from faculty."¹

Introduction

When I enrolled in post-secondary education at the University College of the Cariboo (UCC) in 2004, I was comforted by the brick façade of the buildings on campus, metaphoric of the staid and somber learning experiences I anticipated—orderly and layered, representing a solid grounding in the truths of academia. I intended to be attentive to the professors' teachings, and began to methodically work my way through to a baccalaureate degree in English, three credits at a time.

In 2005, the University College of the Cariboo transitioned into Thompson Rivers University (TRU), and, at the same time, the images I held of university education transformed into possibilities more attuned to my creative and inquisitive nature. I was encouraged by my Canadian literature instructor to present my term research paper, an essay on Canadian poets Archibald Lampman, F. R. Scott, and Irving Layton, at the inaugural TRU Research and Innovation Undergraduate Conference (URIC) in the spring of 2006. With my professor's guidance, I prepared a fifteen-minute oral presentation, and, though I was nervous, my experience was decidedly exciting, and it was gratifying to share my insights with others in the TRU community.

¹ Shirley Strum Kenny et al., *Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Research Universities*, Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University, Shirley Strum Kenny, Chair, (New York: State University of New York Stony Brook, 1998), 15. Available at http://www.niu.edu/engagedlearning/research/pdfs/Boyer_Report.pdf.

Since that first introduction to undergraduate research and conference presentation, I have enjoyed several research opportunities, and in most instances, I have presented my findings at conferences on the TRU campus. In particular, I have been involved in oral history research examining the underpinnings of the development of Kamloops, the small-city community in which the university is situated. Situated in the southern interior of British Columbia, Kamloops shares the regional histories of the fur trade, mining, forestry and ranching, all enmeshed in economic, political, and social transformations. Oral history speaks to the lives inside big histories, weaving the intricacies of personal contributions into the social fabric of community development. Dissemination of this research informs us of the relevance of academia to our fundamental understanding of the context of our own place and time.

In this paper, I will explore the effects of experiential undergraduate research and subsequent conference participation on my self-identity as a scholar and contributing member of the university community and its surrounding urban centre. In particular, I will examine the impact that participation in undergraduate research and conferences has had on my perception of student engagement and learning outcomes. As well, I will analyze how my particular research projects and the dissemination of my findings connected my two communities: TRU and the small city of Kamloops. Reflective consideration from an undergraduate student's perspective on research and conference presentation will add to the knowledge-base of student engagement in research, the learning outcomes of the conference forum, and the impact of community research within and outside of the university campus.

Undergraduate Research

Participation in two annual undergraduate conferences held at TRU, the Philosophy, History and Politics Conference (PHP) and the Undergraduate Research and Innovation Conference (URIC) begins in the realm of research. Research starts with a big idea, the research site, encompassing many abstractions about scientific, social, economic, and political issues. For example, a research site may be volunteerism in small cities, or mental health care in British Columbia, or the influence of undergraduate conferences on Canadian university students' learning outcomes. Each of these sites offers insightful possibilities about issues such as culture, class, race, and gender, depending on the focus of the research. From the germination of an idea, a proposal is made to create new knowledge; a forum is initiated to develop an investigative

strategy; intention and expectation are melded; and the work becomes an entity on its own. Each researcher's discovery becomes a part of the whole. This is motivating and rewarding work, albeit a little intimidating at first, as each participant moulds a distinctive place within the collective. Any trepidation dissolves as curiosity assumes control of the opportunity to be part of unexplored landscapes of knowledge. Whether the project involves discovery of new species on the planet or explication of historical events from different perspectives, academic research results in something learned or found that builds on past knowledge.

For the past forty years, extensive research into the goals of undergraduate education has generated much discussion about student retention, student engagement in the process, and learner outcomes for those holding a baccalaureate degree in their hands at the end of a long and winding path to scholarly enlightenment. The consensus appears to be that independent undergraduate research is an essential component of providing a comprehensive education in conjunction with traditional lecture hall and seminar session teaching practices. A review of research literature written by faculty members and undergraduate students in diverse disciplines, as well as by administrators providing support and program underpinnings for innovative undergraduate research, reveals several common threads within post-secondary institutions.

Since the mid-twentieth century, there has been an obvious trend towards increasing undergraduate research opportunities in North American universities. Most data is available in US published journals and reports, although Canadian research contributions are also recognized in these journals. In particular, the 1998 Boyer Commission Report, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Research Universities*,² sent ripples through higher education by advocating that faculty and administrators reconsider the role of undergraduate research in student retention, engagement and successful learner outcomes beyond baccalaureate degrees. Boyer stressed that undergraduate research was not only important for advancing students along the higher education path, but also to for promoting critical thinking and analytical skills outside of university environments.

A consideration that is prevalent in the literature is identifying undergraduate students as willing and able to participate in research projects. Seeman (1973)³ considered only graduate

² Kenny et al., *Reinventing Undergraduate Education*.

³ Julius Seeman, "On Supervising Student Research," *American Psychologist* 28, no. 10 (1973): 900-906.

students. However, Garde-Hansen and Calvert (2007) and Gonzalez (2001) present arguments for creating resonant research culture in the early years of post-secondary education, advocating that the ultimate mission of research universities is to teach students how to do research and to instill an enthusiasm for discovery.⁴ Palladino et al. (1982) emphasize that experiential opportunities in the research process should be given to the best undergraduate students; they ask the question: “Are all . . . students capable of completing (or even interested in) the full research process from library research to final write-up and presentation?”⁵ In answer to this question, and in opposition to Palladino’s opinion on selecting undergraduates for research participation (assuming that “best” refers to high academic standing), Haave and Audet (2013) advocate for disregarding GPA considerations and increasing availability of research opportunities for lower division undergraduate students to promote student engagement and to provide meaningful learning outcomes. Their findings indicate that participation in collaborative research projects has the “greatest impact on academically weaker students and accelerates academic maturity,” thus challenging the prevailing practice of undergraduate research opportunities being offered to “upper-year students who have proven themselves academically.”⁶

In support of undergraduate research as an essential aspect of undergraduate education, Carsrud (1975) determined that “undergraduates are less biased” in their inquiries, and less inhibited in asking questions than faculty and graduate students. This extends an insight offered by Seeman (1973) in his conclusion that an “optimal learning climate [involves] considerable latitude of students to go off into unconventional cognitive byways, along with a support system that provides them with occasions for doing so.”⁷ Considering that Seeman’s work was concerned only with graduate students, Carsrud’s opinion, two years later, indicates a leap, as it recognizes the value of undergraduate research work, not just to attain results, but to advance

⁴ Joanne Garde-Hansen and Ben Calvert, “Developing a Research Culture in the Undergraduate Curriculum,” *Active Learning in Higher Education* 8, no. 2 (2007): 105. Note that “collaboration between academics and undergraduates on ‘live’ research projects is a relatively recent phenomenon in the UK.” Also read Cristina Gonzalez, “Undergraduate Research, Graduate Mentoring, and the University’s Mission,” *Science* 293 (2001): 1624.

⁵ Joseph J. Palladino et al., “Undergraduate Research in Psychology: Assessment and Directions,” *Teaching of Psychology* 9, no. 2 (1982): 73.

⁶ Neil Haave and Doris Audet, “Evidence in Support of Removing Boundaries to Undergraduate Research Experience,” *Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching* 6 (2013): 105. Also read Wendy Katkin, “The Boyer Commission Report and Its Impact on Undergraduate Research,” *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 93 (2003): 25-26.

⁷ Alan L. Carsrud, “Undergraduate Psychology Conferences: Is Good Research Nested Under Ph.D.s?” *Teaching of Psychology* 2, no. 3 (1975): 112; Julius Seeman, “On Supervising Student Research,” 900.

students' scholarship goals by involvement in the process of learning how to do research in their formative post-secondary years.

On the topics of undergraduate research and conferences in relation to student engagement and learner outcomes, it is necessary to assess the prevailing circumstances of undergraduate research opportunities found in universities, and to recognize the relationships among three university community constituents—students, faculty, and administration. An analysis of the roles of these participants in research culture reveals a central consideration of the tenuous relationship between faculty motivation and administrative policies regarding undergraduate research activities. In particular, the incentive-driven research versus teaching effectiveness issue is seen as a barrier to innovative undergraduate teaching practices. In most universities, career advancement and increased remuneration is tied to publication of research results, while effective teaching practices are not considered.⁸ Schroeder (2013) offers the premise that institutional processes affect undergraduate enrollment and degree completion.⁹ Merkel (2003) notes the criticism directed at universities “for their emphasis on research over teaching and for not committing enough of their vast resources to the education of undergraduates.”¹⁰ The contentious issue of faculty commitment and institutional support for undergraduate research is evident in these studies and is explored by several other researchers.

To mitigate this situation, several teacher-scholars, including British researchers Garde-Hansen and Calvert (2007), have encouraged their fellow faculty researchers to implement curriculum-based research opportunities for their undergraduates, intimating that administration support is not imperative for this implementation.¹¹ Some, such as Carsrud (1984),

⁸ The Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University promoted rethinking the reward system for faculty: “In 1895, the first president of the University of Chicago, William Rainey Harper, asked each new faculty member to agree in writing that advancements in rank and salary would be governed chiefly by research productivity. His stipulation, novel in its time, would raise few eyebrows in most research universities a century later. They might claim otherwise, but research universities consider ‘success’ and ‘research productivity’ to be virtually synonymous terms.” Their report recommends that “reward systems in the modern university need to reflect the synergy of teaching and research – and the essential reality of university life: that baccalaureate students are the university’s economic life blood and are increasingly self-aware,” in Kenny et al., *Reinventing Undergraduate Education*, 31-32. Also read

⁹ Charles C. Schroeder, “Reframing Retention Strategy: A Focus on Process,” *New Directions for Higher Education* 61 (2013): 43.

¹⁰ Carolyn Ash Merkel, “Undergraduate Research at the Research Universities,” *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 93 (2003): 39.

¹¹ Garde-Hansen and Calvert, “Developing a Research Culture,” 108. For further insight into curricular undergraduate research strategies, also read Kirk and Hanne, “An Alternative Approach,” 839; David F. Lancy, “What One Faculty Member Does to Promote Undergraduate Research,” *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*

Galbraith (2012), and Lancy (2003), offer templates for organizing curricular research and successful undergraduate conferences. Lancy asserts that undergraduate students are more than willing to participate, “especially if the research project has a stipend attached.”¹² Merkel (2003) revisits the issue of research versus teaching, noting that “tutorial interaction between mentor and student around a problem of mutual interest is an ideal bridge on the teaching-research continuum” and that there is evidence that “discussions about undergraduate research [are] evidence of institutional conversations” between administration and faculty to develop a common understanding about issues.¹³

My experience as an undergraduate student has demonstrated that independent undergraduate research provides a most satisfying pathway to acquiring the baccalaureate degree, and considerable support from teacher-scholars at TRU has guided my work. Since 2004, I have researched, among other topics, Vietnam War recruitment practices and its consequences for infantry personnel, and Canadian poets and their contributions to the understanding of our country in their time. One of my most cherished research works was tracking nine Bella Coola Nuxalk men who traveled from their home on British Columbia’s northwest coast to Hamburg, Germany in 1885, to become participants in Carl Hagenbeck’s ethnological tours to several other German cities where they performed their traditional dances and songs for one year. This investigative journey began when a fellow student in a Canadian Studies classroom gave a brief presentation about the story of men travelling from her community of Bella Coola to Europe in the late nineteenth century. She knew some of the story, but not the context. Several years later an opportunity came to me to explore the circumstances of this journey, and my research culminated in an undergraduate research conference presentation—an opportunity to share this extraordinary story.

93 (Spring 2003): 87-92; Patricia Anne Mabrouk, “Survey Study Investigating the Significance of Conference Participation to Undergraduate Research Students,” *Journal of Chemical Education* 86, no. 11 (2009): 1335-1340; and Ronald L. Dotterer, “Student-Faculty Collaborations, Undergraduate Research, and Collaborations as an Administrative Model,” *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 90 (2002): 81-89.¹² Alan L. Carsrud et al., “Undergraduate Psychology Research Conferences: Goals, Policies, and Procedures,” *Teaching of Psychology* 11, no. 3 (1984): 144; John M. Galbraith, “Shepherding Undergraduate Students Through a Research Experience and a Professional Meeting,” *NACTA Journal* 56, no. 2 (2012): 77; Lancy, “What One Faculty Member Does,” 87.

¹² Alan L. Carsrud et al., “Undergraduate Psychology Research Conferences: Goals, Policies, and Procedures,” *Teaching of Psychology* 11, no. 3 (1984): 144; John M. Galbraith, “Shepherding Undergraduate Students Through a Research Experience and a Professional Meeting,” *NACTA Journal* 56, no. 2 (2012): 77; Lancy, “What One Faculty Member Does,” 87.

¹³ Merkel, “Undergraduate Research,” 52.

In recent years, I have been very fortunate to participate in three research initiatives from their beginnings: the Untold Stories oral history project, a collaborative effort in conjunction with the Kamloops Women's Resource Group Society; the Tranquille oral history project, a shared undertaking with the Kamloops Heritage Society and Tranquille-on-the-Lake Developments, conducted under the auspices of TRU's Community-University Research Alliances Program (CURA); and, currently, a collaborative, multi-disciplinary project undertaken by the Undergraduate Conference Research Group (UCRG) at TRU, with contributions from past and present faculty and students of TRU and other Canadian universities.

Undergraduate Conference

An integral part of undergraduate research is communicating results to fellow students, faculty members, other institutional constituents, and the public. Several of my research projects have led me to participate in the faculty-organized TRU Undergraduate Research and Innovation Conference (URIC) since its inauguration in 2006, and I have also presented, from 2008, at the annual TRU Philosophy, History and Politics (PHP) undergraduate conference, a student-initiated and student-organized research conference.

Carsrud (1984) promotes research conferences as experiential learning tools essential to developing an appreciation of research concepts and applications, whether original research or new findings in replication of previous research. Asserting that undergraduates benefit from participation in the "final phase of the research process," Carsrud advocates student involvement in roles such as chairperson(s) with supportive faculty advisors.¹⁴ I have assumed several roles in my participation at the TRU conferences. I have participated as a volunteer at several of the URIC conferences, and I particularly enjoy working the early-morning registration desk as it allows me an opportunity to meet other presenters and time to get to know the organizers and other volunteers. As a session room attendant, I perform tasks such as checking that media equipment is in working order, assisting students in preparing media set up, ensuring podium placement, and providing water for presenters. It is always interesting to work at the book sale, a fundraising venue. I usually end up with several books to add to my own collection!

¹⁴ Carsrud et al., "Undergraduate Psychology Research," 144.

My participation as a session moderator contributed to my engagement with conference learning outcomes. In this capacity, I have attended sessions that I might not otherwise have attended, and discovered new knowledge while preparing questions for each presenter in an effort to show interest and to provide feedback; in this role, due to my own experience as a presenter, I became increasingly sensitive to the presenters' comfort zones. I also paid more attention to audience participation.

As a research presenter, I learned first-hand the daunting challenge of organizing a twenty-page paper into a fifteen minute presentation, which is no easy feat! Along the way, I also mastered the skill of preparing power-point slides to augment my presentation, and I learned the value of minimizing the number of slides as well as simplifying the content of each slide to maintain audience attention. Each of these learned skills underscores the efforts of my faculty supervisor to provide guidance for my research and essay composition, and of other faculty members providing instruction in, for example, public speaking. As well, I benefited from the support of fellow students organizing workshops to assist in technical instruction on media technology, such as computer-generated projection of presentation slides.

Faculty supervisor support is essential to the success of conference presentation. My first opportunity came about through encouragement from my second year Canadian literature instructor, Associate Professor Ginny Ratsoy. In her class, I delved into the mysteries of poetry and the poets who write it, and I submitted a paper for consideration to the inaugural URIC in 2006. With her assistance, I polished the essay into a concise analysis of the work of three Canadian poets: Archibald Lampman, F. R. Scott, and Irving Layton. In the process of preparing for the conference, I attended a workshop on computer projection of power-point presentations, technology that I was not familiar with, but learned quickly from the students volunteering to help in this aspect of the event. To my delight, family members attended my presentation, as well as faculty and students from TRU, and Ms. Ratsoy was there to give me moral support. From there, I was indoctrinated into the culture of undergraduate research and the importance of conference participation as a capstone to the process.

At the time I was unaware that this event would be precedent-setting for the university, the first of a now annual opportunity for undergraduates to share their research with fellow students and faculty at TRU, as well as a chance to showcase the advanced studies foundations

provided to post-secondary students within the small city of Kamloops. In 2008, the initiation of the annual Philosophy, History and Politics (PHP) undergraduate conference provided another venue for students to share research findings.

I have always been strong academically; however, undergraduate independent research opportunities have strengthened my personal engagement in scholarly studies and have provided me with knowledge outside traditional passive-learning lecture halls. Participation in undergraduate research conferences, and, in some instances, subsequent published research papers, completes the circle of research work. The hours of reading, analyzing and writing culminate in an opportunity to share your work with peers and faculty mentors, and to fortify the learning outcomes so valued at academic institutes. If the end game of scholarship is to obtain new knowledge, or to add depth to the understanding of existing knowledge, then the responsibility of the researcher is to disseminate this knowledge for future analysis and understanding.

Community Research

An interview I recently listened to introduced me to a phrase that emphasized the significance of community-based research: culinary historian, Michael W. Twitty, asserted that “history is not generic,” that the personal stories inside the big historical events are important.¹⁵ Recently I have been involved in community-based, oral history research, and I have revelled in the depth given to the big-picture history, the one we all know in a transient, side-glance way. The projects I have worked on illuminate the history of Kamloops, juxtaposing the personal stories of lives lived in the community onto the bricks and mortar institutions that anchor our small city to the confluence of the Thompson Rivers. I am in complete agreement with Garde-Hansen and Calvert (2007) in their assessment that “promoting undergraduate research through tying assessment to local community involvement may well be particularly enriching.”¹⁶

The work I do, and enjoy the most, is storytelling. My work in Kamloops’ oral history research included personal interviews with people involved in the formation of several of the city’s significant social support organizations. As I worked with them, the participants became

¹⁵ Michael W. Twitty, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, *Q: CBC Radio One* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 11 July 2013). Interview by Jian Gimeshi.

¹⁶ Garde-Hansen and Calvert, “Developing a Research Culture,” 114.

increasingly aware of their work as an important contribution to the greater story of their community, thus establishing a greater sense of place in their memories. It is noteworthy that, with the exception of one, all my oral history work has been done in the voices of women, and many of these women began their stories with humility, saying, in essence, “you just do what has to be done.”¹⁷ The one male voice constructed organizational substance to the women’s related stories, and, as occurred with the women, evoked his deep personal commitment to the people his work affected.

My experiences with the Government of Canada’s New Horizons for Seniors Program’s “Untold Stories: Valuing Women’s Contributions to Community Life” oral history project and the Tranquille oral history projects produced revelations about the underpinnings of community development in Kamloops: the first through stories of a generation of women who volunteered their time and considerable knowledge to provide service to the community in a myriad of social and educational spheres, and the second with a focus on the economic, political and social influence of a large institute on the outskirts of the small city. The knowledge that evolved from these projects enhanced an understanding of the cultural, social and economic keystones in small city development.

Untold Stories Oral History Project

At the end of the winter semester of 2008, Ms. Ratsoy approached me in a campus parking lot to offer me an opportunity to work with a newly-formed research group. I had just completed a two-hour history final exam, and I was exhausted, so I thanked her and told her I’d get back to her sometime through the summer. However, within a few days, my innate curiosity prompted me to contact her to let her know I would indeed be interested in being part of this significant community research initiative.¹⁸ My work began under the umbrella of a third-year undergraduate service learning course with Ms. Ratsoy as my faculty supervisor, and in June 2008 I became part of a collaborative research project between TRU and the Kamloops Women’s Resource Group Society (KWRGS), under the direction of TRU social work associate professors Julie Drolet and Trish Archibald. An oral history project, the goal of the KWRGS was

¹⁷ Trish Archibald and Julie Drolet, eds., *Not Just a Tea Party: Celebrating Women’s Contributions to Community Life*, Kamloops, BC: Kamloops Women’s Resource Group Society, 2009: Introduction, xxi-xxiii.

¹⁸ I am grateful to Ms. Ginny Ratsoy for offering me this research opportunity and for her constant and continued support for my undergraduate education goals.

to document “the stories of some extraordinary senior women who have made a difference in the social fabric of our community” through volunteerism during the twentieth century.¹⁹ In the process, we discovered that several of these women continue their work into the present day, decidedly ignoring the concept of retirement. KWRGS gathered a group of female volunteers whose “mission was to get the stories, to pick up the threads of the tapestry from the past, and weave them into a cohesive textual and visual form.”²⁰ The work culminated in two books being written by members of the group of volunteers to present the stories of twenty-two local senior women: *Not Just a Tea Party: Celebrating Women’s Contributions to Community Life* (2009) and *One Action at a Time: Celebrating Women’s Contributions to Community Life* (2013). I was honoured to write the stories of two of the women I interviewed for this project. The documents used to create the publication are stored at the Kamloops Museum and Archives.²¹

During my work on this project, I became interested in my fellow volunteers’ motivation for participating in the Untold Stories research, and my inquisitiveness evolved into a second service learning course, again supervised by Ms. Ratsoy. In this case, I explored women’s roles in volunteerism through interviews with members of the KWRGS volunteer group and a topical literature review. This research resulted in my 2009 paper, “In the Company of Women: The Work We Do,” and in it I noted that my motivation to pursue this inquiry was that

I became intrigued by the idea that a group of women, virtually unknown to one another, would embark on such a venture, and would be able to work so well together; we genuinely believed in the importance of the work we were doing, and a sense of camaraderie naturally formed.²²

Unlike the KWRGS project, in which all of the women interviewed had been vetted by committee and the ethics approvals were in place before my work began, for my own project I contacted each of the fifteen women I had worked with, explained my research goal, and eight of the women agreed to participate in my research. Of course, Ms. Ratsoy and I were required to apply for TRU ethics approval, which involved

¹⁹ Debra Andrews, “In the Company of Women: the Work We Do,” *Proceedings of the 4th Annual Thompson Rivers University Undergraduate Conference*, edited by Dr. Kelly-Anne Maddox and Dr. Mairi MacKay, Kamloops, BC: Thompson Rivers University Office of Research, Innovation and Graduate Studies, 2009: 26.

²⁰ Andrews, “In the Company,” 26.

²¹ Archibald and Drolet, “Not Just a Tea Party,” Preface, xix.

²² Andrews, “In the Company,” 26.

thoughtful consideration of questions to be asked and confidentiality safeguards to be put into place. Everything about my independent research was underpinned by knowledge of oral history practices gained through my participation with the KWRGS project. In particular, the training I had received on audio-visual interviewing techniques and transcription of interviews was invaluable, as was the guidance of the project coordinator as she moulded us into effective, interchangeable working teams comprised of interviewer, audio recorder and video camera operator, roles transposable within teams.

My independent investigation into volunteering began with the advantage of having worked with each of the eight women, so a collaborative relationship had already been established between us; it was helpful that we had all received the same training on interviewing techniques. I am keenly aware that a trusting rapport, based on sincere mutual respect, is paramount when enquiring into a person's life-stories. These eight women were from disparate work places and life-phases. Included were two TRU faculty members; a local business woman; a full-time homemaker; a TRU student married with two young children; two inveterate volunteers with several social organizations in town; and, perhaps predictably, one of the senior women interviewed for the Untold Stories project!

My research goal was to gain a deeper understanding of three elements of volunteerism: "What motivates women to volunteer? How does volunteering benefit them? And, ultimately, what are the benefits to the communities in which we live and work?"²³ I had chosen my subjects well; each had an understanding of their own motivations in the volunteer work they took on. Several echoed motivations highlighted in Mueller's research into volunteer work by women. She asked why women "would find it rational to do work for free," and she recognized four reasons: "family need for an organization's service, human capital (skills training), individual prestige, and altruistic motivation."²⁴ The common thread throughout the narrative of these eight women was that they felt very strongly about acknowledging the unrecognized work that women take on to make their lives and the lives of others more valued and integral within their

²³ Andrews, "In the Company," 27.

²⁴ Marnie W. Mueller, "Economic Determinants of Volunteer Work by Women," *Signs* 1, no. 2, (1975): 327; Andrews, "In the Company," 28.

community. Within their eight stories, the histories of thirty-one different Kamloops community and cultural organizations were underscored: parent advisory councils, children's sports programs, fundraising for health research, political campaigns, crisis line monitoring, women's shelters advocacy, literacy programs, immigrant services and many more, such as the Japanese Cultural Society and the Kamloops Film Society. This group of women included a young, thirty-something student and mother, an eighty-something elder, and everyone in between. *Women. Working.*

Their recorded interviews and written statements supported the assertion that women are motivated to volunteer due to altruistic sensibilities, and that they are aware that their work provides benefits to themselves and to their communities. For the work on the Untold Stories project, each of the KWRGS women stepped forward to participate in what they deemed an important and worthwhile project for their community at large and each felt honoured to be involved. They recognized that the project was beneficial to the senior women in acknowledging their contributions to the community, and that the community would benefit by recognizing the value of these contributions and, perhaps, encourage others to take on volunteer work.

For my work on the Untold Stories project, Ms. Ratsoy encouraged me to apply to, and recommended me for, the British Columbia Social Policy Research Award; my application was successful and the funding received in the fall of 2008 was appreciated as I progressed in my volunteerism research project. In 2009, I presented my paper on this research to both the TRU PHP and URIC conferences, and it was most gratifying to have this paper chosen to be published in the *Proceedings of the 4th Annual Thompson Rivers University Undergraduate Conference*. For this work, I was chosen to be the recipient of the Canadian Studies Faculty Award in 2009. Quite unexpectedly, "In the Company of Women: The Work We Do" was identified as one of the top three submissions to the *Proceedings*, and I received a cash award from the TRU Research, Innovation, and Graduate Studies Department in March of 2010. The knowledge gained in undergraduate research has its own rewards, and recognition of the commitment and effort required to carry out such research is very much appreciated.

Tranquille Oral History Project

Community history research is circular, with beginnings and endings entwined and bound invisibly. My work with the Untold Stories project germinated into an account of the Canadian immigrant experience through the oral history of an immigrant from the Netherlands and her story of landing in Montreal during the height of the FLQ crisis in Quebec in October 1970. The woman in the immigrant story was my colleague on the Untold Stories project. Though not presented at one of the campus-wide conferences, I enjoyed presenting the story to my classmates and instructor, and I especially enjoyed spending time and drinking tea with my former collaborator. In 2012, one of the women I interviewed for the Untold Stories project offered the story of her work at Tranquille during the 1970s over a cup of coffee in her home; her story was part of my presentation at the two TRU conferences based on my work on the Tranquille oral history project.

The Tranquille project came to me from another TRU faculty member, Dr. Tina Block, Associate Professor of history. In the spring of 2012, she approached me about a research initiative being undertaken by TRU and the Small Cities Community-Research Alliance (CURA) in collaboration with the Kamloops Heritage Society (KHS) and Tranquille-on-the-Lake developers.²⁵ The initiative is an attempt to find the stories of people who had worked and lived at Tranquille, a tuberculosis sanatorium in the early 1900s and a health institution for individuals with cognitive disabilities from 1954-1985 and to create a repository for these stories. Dr. Block developed a directed studies course description, “A Social and Cultural History of Tranquille.” She recruited another undergraduate student to be involved in the project, and the three of us collaborated on developing a set of questions to guide interviews that would gather information including biographical sketches, descriptions of Tranquille as a work site and home, and perceptions of Tranquille’s location and physical and social landscapes. She also submitted a request for ethical review, and when the Certificate of Approval was returned, we were ready to get to work.

An initial meeting with the signatories of the Tranquille project revealed that the concept for the research was still in its formative stages, and that the basis of the research was a list of names of former Tranquille employees and residents that had been collected by the Kamloops

²⁵ I am grateful to Dr. Tina Block for encouraging me to become a part of this on-going project and for her continued support in my undergraduate education goals.

Heritage Society. Some of these employees had worked at the King Edward VII Tuberculosis Sanatorium, built and operated at the Tranquille site from 1907 to 1958, and their ages made it imperative to try to gather their remembrances as soon as possible.²⁶ Whereas in the Untold Stories project the interviewees were vetted and informed of the project by the organizers before I became involved, the KHS provided me and my co-researcher with a list of former employees and residents at Tranquille, and our work began by dividing the list in half and contacting the individuals to explain the project and ask for their participation. The KHS list consisted of just over sixty names, most, but not all, with contact information and a description of their time spent at Tranquille and duties performed. Responses to our telephone calls were varied. Most people we contacted were not interested or did not return our calls, but we eventually arranged interviews with seven people.

The KHS arranged for the two of us to attend one of the monthly luncheons held by former Tranquille employees since its closure in 1985. Reactions to our proposed research were mixed: some people were concerned about our intent, and others were happily willing to share their stories with us. One man we met at the luncheon was very enthusiastic about participating in our research, but, unfortunately, he did not return our calls.

I was privileged to interview three former staff members of the Tranquille Institution, for developmentally disabled persons, each at varying levels of responsibility in the day-to-day operation of the facility from 1963 to its closure in 1985. One interviewee, JR, worked at Tranquille as a caregiver, an inexperienced twenty-year-old who admired the dedication of her co-workers, especially her supervisor, and who accepted the vagaries of the residents. Her work there prompted her to become a registered nurse, and in her subsequent life-long career in psychiatric and mental health, she remained cognizant of the needs of disabled persons, such that, in an administrative capacity, she has been instrumental in the more recent closures of other large provincial institutes in British Columbia. Her memories of Tranquille were framed with humour and contemplative reflection of the impact Tranquille had on her later life. She felt that the closure of the facility in 1985 provided a better life for “a lot of the people [that] could do very well in the community in smaller group homes”; however, she maintains that there will

²⁶ Wayne Norton, *"A Whole Little City by Itself": Tranquille and Tuberculosis*. Kamloops, BC: Plateau Press, 1999.

always be “a core group of people that need that highly intensive, different kind of care that does not work in a community.” She commented that

when you look at Tranquille, Woodlands, Riverview, the grounds and the space that was allowed, these people could go out of their buildings and they weren't in somebody else's face . . . And I think that was important to them, it's important to the communities. And behaviour was accepted if you worked at those facilities, you accepted it. The community does not accept it, and that's hard on those people because they don't understand why they're not accepted.²⁷

Another former caregiver, and also an interviewee in the Untold Stories project, Charmian Ferguson, recalls long drives out to Tranquille, and the camaraderie of the workers. As a nurse's aide, she worked directly with the residents with their personal care and daily activities. Echoing JR's sentiments, she felt that the closure may have been good for most of the residents, but that there were some who were not prepared for life outside the institution. She still recognizes several former Tranquille residents around Kamloops, and she is concerned about the lack of structure in their lives. The violent death of one them still haunts her; she recognizes his death as an example of the community's lack of acceptance for difference in people, an example of a person who was negatively affected by Tranquille's closure.²⁸

Another interviewee, Alexander McIntosh, was hired as the Director of Resident Care at Tranquille in 1963. He remained in this position until he facilitated its closure in 1985. He was a registered nurse with training in psychiatric nursing care, and upon his arrival at Tranquille he knew that he “was coming to a different kind of institution” than he had worked at in Scotland and Edmonton, Alberta. He explained that Tranquille's care mandate was to prepare individuals for community placement, and that, during his tenure, over four hundred residents were placed outside of Tranquille, long before the announcement of its imminent closure. Unlike Woodlands residents, those at Tranquille “knew how to prepare a meal if they had to. They were accustomed to keeping their rooms clean and tidy,” and he felt that placement into smaller, community-oriented homes, less crowded than the larger institute, caused positive behaviour changes for most of them. The closure of the institute and the transfer of Tranquille residents were

²⁷ JR, personal interview, July 7, 2012.

²⁸ Charmian Ferguson, personal interview, June 27, 2012.

accomplished in a very short time. There was much controversy about the location of the group homes, no matter which city or town they were set up in. Several former Tranquille employees set up and successfully managed group homes throughout the province.²⁹

These interviews stimulated my curiosity and led me to investigate previous and on-going research into the legacy of institutionalization and deinstitutionalization of marginalized people from the 1850s to the present day. I was interested in the ideology that prompted the social, economic and political movement towards institutionalization through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the ideological changes that motivated the push for reform and closure of large institutions for developmentally disabled people in the mid-twentieth century. My central concern was Tranquille's place and time within these contexts. The interviews I was privileged to participate in, and relevant research regarding deinstitutionalization in a transnational context, provided insight into Tranquille's time and place in the evolution of mental health care. My work explored the history of Tranquille in the context of transnational sensibilities regarding mental and physical health, eugenics, institutionalization and deinstitutionalization, and the politicization of social reform. This research resulted in a classroom presentation to Dr. Anne Gagnon's Canadian history class as well as to Dr. Block's historiography students. As well, my paper was presented at the PHP and the TRU URIC conferences in 2013. The opportunity to disseminate this knowledge to undergraduate students in-class and to students, faculty and the general public at the undergraduate conferences intertwine the history of our small city with the academic community at TRU, thus emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between the two. Undergraduate research, in particular, oral history research, reveals the voices of people engaged in the building of the Kamloops community, thus connecting stories of personal accomplishment to the sphere of academia within our small city. The two undergraduate research conferences held annually at TRU provide the venues to share these narratives.

Undergraduate Conference Research Group (UCRG)

In the spring of 2013, Ms. Ratsoy offered me the opportunity to become involved in a multi-year research initiative regarding the learning outcomes of student participation in undergraduate research conferences. Without hesitation, I accepted the challenge; I hoped my

²⁹ Alexander McIntosh, personal interview, July 10, 2012.

past community-based research experiences and participation in several TRU undergraduate conferences would be integral to the outcomes of the project. As well, I am intrigued by the intellectual and logistical challenges of working with a large, diverse group of people – faculty members, undergraduate students and graduate students from TRU and other universities – focusing on the issues of student engagement and learner outcomes within the research site of conference presentation. Dotterer (2002) advocates a model of shared collaborative research experience between the teacher-scholar and undergraduate student to “achieve a fully integrated and effective model for learning;”³⁰ in this instance, I will be fully entrenched in this model with two faculty supervisors, Ms. Ratsoy and Dr. Block, to guide me as they, too, participate in their own research for the project.

At the beginning of this project, Ms. Ratsoy advised me of a funding opportunity through the Thompson Rivers University Students’ Union (TRUSU) Research Program, and I am very grateful to be the inaugural recipient of the stipend offered through this innovative program established in support of research about post-secondary education. The intent of the program is to “link the research to community service [and to provide] reference in policy formulation and the Students’ Union’s advocacy effort.” Digital documentation of research findings will be published on the TRUSU website, and a print copy will be available in its research library.³¹

As a fourth-year undergraduate student at TRU, one of my roles with the UCRG is to review existing research literature regarding undergraduate conferences in Canada and other countries. Several common threads were revealed in a review of research literature produced by faculty members in myriad disciplines, undergraduate students reflecting on their experience, and administrators providing support and program underpinnings for innovative undergraduate research. An over-arching consideration is the relationships among the three university constituents—students, faculty and administrators—and their outlook on the relevance of undergraduate research and subsequent conference presentation. Another task will be to survey Canadian universities to determine the prevalence of these events and to analyze models used as

³⁰ Ronald L. Dotterer, “Student-Faculty Collaborations, Undergraduate Research, and Collaboration as an Administrative Model,” *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 90 (2002): 88.

³¹ “TRUSU Research Program,” TRUSU Local 15 CFS website, accessed 22 August 2013, available at <http://trusu.ca/advocacy/research-program>.

frameworks for planning and organization. These research sites will provide a basis for analysis and insight into conducting and sharing community-based research.

My work with the UCGR is another opportunity to share observations gleaned from my community research and my involvement in the undergraduate conferences. Potter et al. (2010) note that although undergraduate conferences are becoming more prevalent, there is little research examining the impact on undergraduate student presenters. In their four-year study of undergraduate research conference presenters, they concluded that overall, the influence on this group is positive. Their study highlights beneficial interactions between faculty mentors and students, and it acknowledges the possible barriers present at post-secondary institutions, which influence faculty participation in undergraduate research and conferences: “mentoring undergraduate students remains a conundrum for faculty, as it is not valued by some academic departments and some University administrators. In many research universities, the pressures for faculty to publish do not provide appropriate incentives for mentoring undergraduate research.”³² Their research questions generated enticing results through analysis of demographic data and of experiential impact on confidence and empowerment, communication and presentation skills, enhanced research process knowledge, and recognition of university and the larger community connections. The activities of the UCRG will provide further investigative research in this area of undergraduate research and subsequent conference participation from the perspective of all three university constituencies: faculty, students and administration.

Conclusion

Decades of academic research have confirmed that undergraduate research is an essential component of a comprehensive and fulfilling university education, be it to prepare for graduate studies or employment, or to stimulate an interest in life-long learning—or all of the above. Scholarly inquiry is the antidote to rampant curiosity, not as a cure but as an enabling remedy, allowing an understanding of perceptions and connections between and among people and their communities of work, recreation and social spheres. From identification of a research site to communication of the results of academic examination at a conference, and perhaps publication

³² Sharyn Potter et al., “Intellectual Growth for Undergraduate Students: Evaluation Results From An Undergraduate Research Conference,” *Journal of College Teaching and Learning* 7, no. 2 (2010): 32.

in a research journal, the practice of academic inquiry provides a gateway to new knowledge and a better understanding of our world.

For the Untold Stories project, Drs. Archibald and Drolet brought together a group of women to record their life-time commitment to building the social texture of Kamloops. In the preface of their book, *Not Just a Tea Party*, they stated that the purpose of their work was to “contribute to creating stronger networks and associations between community members, community organizations, and governments, and improve our community’s ability to understand our present by sharing stories of our past.”³³ The Tranquille project offered a unique research site to engage in historiography practices, such as the creation of primary documents subsequent to interviews of former employees at Tranquille, and insight into the challenging process of collaborative research involving academics, non-profit organizations and corporate interests. The UCRG project brings together an eclectic group of academic professionals and learners, teacher-scholars and students, to examine the significance of undergraduate conferences in the scheme of higher education, as a forum for dissemination of knowledge realized through scholarly inquiry and synthesis. Each of these projects has contributed to my in-depth knowledge of the communities I live and work in, and has provided revelations and confirmations of time and place.

The opportunity to participate in each of these projects in their initial stages was presented to me by faculty who had confidence in my ability to contribute something of value to the collective. In particular, I want to acknowledge the continued support of Associate Professors Ginny Ratsoy and Tina Block for my undergraduate research work; their encouragement and guidance have allowed me to explore my community in unexpected places. Influence and support from faculty supervisors, fellow student researchers and the university community, as well as the larger Kamloops community, encouraged me to present my research at both undergraduate conferences. For my part, I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to historiographical knowledge of the communities of TRU and Kamloops, two communities intertwined in the journey I began several years ago. Each of these opportunities has buried any thought of “staid and somber” in relation to academic learning, and I have come to realize that academic “truths” are purposely elusive in the grand scheme of acquiring wisdom.

³³ Archibald and Drolet, *Not Just a Tea Party*, Preface, *xix*.

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