

Introduction to the Proceedings of the 12th Annual Thompson Rivers University Undergraduate Research and Innovation Conference

Consistent with TRU's mandate as a comprehensive, primarily undergraduate institution, the Undergraduate Research and Innovation Conference has maintained an inclusive approach to research, encouraging students from across campus to share their research and creative practice in individual and group oral presentations, posters, and class projects. While the six essays in this edition are but a sampling, they, too, reflect inclusion and variety. Written by students from first to fourth year, from disciplines ranging from Biology to English and Modern Languages, the articles run the gamut from personal narratives through field research. At first glance, their approaches and themes could not be more varied. Collectively, they are a reminder of the many paths and approaches that passionate and inquisitive minds can take to addressing local and global challenges. These writers share an ability to perceive the connections between the parts and the whole—to argue for holistic approaches, whether their subject matter is educational, environmental, or related to social health.

In their first year of university studies, Georgia Cackett and Patience Nyoka were prompted by personal experience to research the wider implications of their educational choices. Cackett turns to her personal experience in an

introductory psychology course, delivered half online and half face-to-face, to launch a study into the advantages and disadvantages of these two modes of education. Cackett concludes that online courses have many benefits, including lower costs and convenience, and she points out that these courses are particularly valuable for people who live too far from a campus or who may “suffer from social phobias or physical disabilities.” But her assessment concludes that, overall, face-to-face education is preferable for a number of reasons, primarily because students, who are, after all, “social creatures,” can benefit in terms of motivation and success from the physical presence of “good teachers, who are likely to be charismatic and passionate about their subject.” Nyoka, an international student, examines Study Abroad programmes with an emphasis on student experiences in Canada. Weighing the advantages and disadvantages, she concludes that, despite loneliness and other coping challenges, studying abroad is a “viable option that will encourage students to experience new cultures and gain knowledge in different ways and from different people.” Both writers demonstrate an awareness of holistic approaches to learning.

In the discipline of Biology, although their articles take very different approaches to their subject matter, students evince a similar recognition of the importance of integrative thinking. Maddison Ellis, in “The Invisibility of Choice” uses the prism of creative nonfiction to narrate her reflections on her interviews with citizens of Revelstoke, BC; the topic of discussion was how the Hugh Keenleyside Dam, constructed in 1968, continues to shape the character of the town—how a political decision on an environmental issue has had long-lasting social implications. Tanna J. Lauriente and Drayden Kopp build on previous research on the relatively new practice of employing dog therapy to alleviate university students’ stress to report on their analysis of data assessing the efficacy of the practice on their own campus. Both papers reflect awareness that

the quality of human life is intimately connected to other-than-human elements in one's immediate environment—and a determination to foster that connection.

A different kind of human-animal relationship is explored when Nick Fontaine focuses the lens of scientific inquiry on an understudied local issue: the recent spread of the Black Rat (*Rattus rattus*) population in Kamloops. Various labels given to the species, such as the “roof rat,” the “house rat,” or “the ship rat” suggest its ability to thrive in many human environments. Fontaine's research integrates different kinds of data from local sources such as “the City of Kamloops, pest control companies, ranches, farms, equestrian centres, stores that sell rat traps, and landfill sites” to draw conclusions about how human activities have encouraged the increase in abundance and spread of the species; he then makes suggestions about humane and cost-effective control of the Black Rat in Kamloops.

Another timely study that recognizes the need for an integrative approach to health, by undergraduate researcher Tianhao Xiao, looks at changes required in Nursing curricula in response to the recent legalization of cannabis for medical purposes in Canada. In this study, Xiao examines the ways that nursing instructors will need to adapt their approaches, moving “away from a focus on substance abuse” and towards a focus on the possibilities of cannabis for “economic, social, and health promotion.” Through a scoping review of current cannabis education literature, Xiao concludes that it will be challenging but essential for nursing students, teachers, and administrators to become better educated about medical prescriptions for cannabis, about its recreational use, and about appropriate responses to indications of drug abuse.

We congratulate the promising scholars in this volume for their diverse contributions to the tradition of undergraduate research at Thompson Rivers

University. With their mutual respect for holistic approaches to the wider health of society, these students offer hope for the challenges that lie ahead.

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