

Reflections on the 2017 Western Research Forum

Highlighting Interdisciplinary Research

The Western Research Forum is an annual interdisciplinary graduate student conference held by SOGS and organized by the Academic Committee. As the largest interdisciplinary graduate conference at Western, it brings together graduate students from all research disciplines, and provides a platform for students to present their work to a community outside their field of research. Further, the Western Research Forum creates a unique and valuable opportunity for interdepartmental learning and networking.

We identified two primary objectives for the Western Research Forum. First, to encourage students to engage with researchers from outside their field to create a fruitful and respectful scientific dialogue, generate innovative and stimulating questions, and identify promising areas of future exploration. Second, the Western Research Forum aimed to enable students to develop their skills as they relate to communication, networking, and providing feedback. In presenting research to an audience of scientists outside one's field, one would need to modify their language and use of jargon, practice explaining methodologies, and justify their research approach and interpretations. These are all necessary skills when applying for grant funding or searching for career opportunities outside academia. Our goal in organizing the Forum was to ensure that these objectives were met.

Western Research Forum 2017: Mosaic Research

The Forum was held on Friday March 10, 2017. The Forum was given the theme "Mosaic Research" to emphasize the importance of interdisciplinary research. Graduate students were invited to submit an abstract for a paper, poster, or creative project that speaks to this theme. As part of their submission, students had to provide a short explanation about the interdisciplinary aspect of their work. We wanted to make our theme as broad as possible, to ensure that Forum was accessible to students from a variety of faculties. It was only by securing attendance from students of various fields that we could even begin to facilitate conversations about interdisciplinary learning.

The Forum was organized in the style of a typical scientific conference. In the morning, we had five students present research papers, followed by our Young Researcher Keynote and Faculty Keynote Address. In our afternoon session, we had a Panel Discussion on Open Science followed by a poster session and brief awarding ceremony.

The Young Researcher Keynote was a new addition to the Western Research Forum. It was aimed to provide a distinguished senior graduate student with valuable experience presenting their body of work at a high level. Our Young Researcher speaker was Yimin Chen from the Faculty of Information and Media Studies. His talk was called "The Politics of Internet Memes: Fake News, Trolling, and the Populist Power of Peeps" and discussed the evolution of viral media from purely entertainment purposes to a burgeoning political tool.

Our keynote speaker was Dr. Pamela Bishop, from the Faculty of Education. Her talk was titled “Leadership and Research in Turbulent Times: Why They Matter for Democracy” and focused on how the skills that young researchers are developing positions them to be the next generation of leaders.

We kicked off the afternoon session with our discussion panel called “Open Access: What’s in it for me?” which was held in the Chu Centre of the International and Graduate Affairs Building (IGAB). There were three presentations from each of panelists, followed by a question-and-answer period. The first talk was given by Calin Murgu, Master of Library and Information Science Candidate, and it was called “Local Actions/Global Implications: Economic and Social Impacts of Open-Access Publishing”. In his talk, Calin discussed the broad advantages to open-access publishing. The second presentation was by Associate Librarian, Kristin Hoffman, and it was titled “Rights Well: Understanding Your Rights as an Author”, and covered frequently-asked topics regarding scientific publishing. The third panelist was Dr. Lorne Campbell from the Department of Psychology, and his talk was titled “Practicing Open Science”. In this talk Dr. Campbell discussed taking steps to make science more transparent and accessible.

The last session of the day was the Poster Presentation session in the IGAB Atrium. We had a record 35 poster presenters from diverse research backgrounds. All conference attendees and presenters were encouraged to visit the posters and learn about the different projects being conducted at Western.

Awards for Best Oral Presentation and People’s Choice Poster were awarded to Brandon Baer and Cadence Baker, respectively.

Acknowledgments

The Western Research Forum 2017 would not have been possible without the tireless dedication and support offered by the members of the Academic Committee. We are sincerely grateful and appreciative of their invaluable commitment. We would like to recognize all of our members: Chandell Gosse, Vicki O’Meara, Hadir AlQot, Claire Burrows, Ariel Frame, Felipe Denoso, and our VP Academic, Lenny Guizzetti. We are grateful for the privilege of leading this team of talented individuals.

We would also like to acknowledge the involvement of the larger Western community. Thank you for your support and cooperation in making the Western Research Forum a success. We would like to recognize Marc Lalonde and the Grad Club for catering, Katie Merchant for assisting with venue reservation, Melissa Seelye for her hard work in organizing the Open Science Panel discussion, Kristyn Seanor and Madison Bettle for helping promote our event, and all of the volunteers who helped make the day run smoothly.

Lastly, we would like to thank all of our presenters for sharing their interesting research with us. We hope you continue to support the Western Research Forum for years to come.

Ysabel Domingo and Jina Kum
Chairs, *SOGS Academic Committee 2016-2017*