



## U-Links Centre for Community-Based Research

Established in 1999, the U-Links Centre for Community-Based Research works with community partners, faculty and students to deliver research and community service-learning services to Haliburton County. We partner local organizations with faculty and students from Trent University and Fleming College to explore important research questions and increase the capacity of organizations through community service-learning initiatives. The result is lasting relationships and tangible benefits to the social, cultural, environmental and/or economic life of Haliburton County.

### What is our mission?

- To provide assistance to community organizations, businesses and municipalities in finding practical information that will support development in Haliburton County.
- To provide students with opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills through their engagement with community-based research and community service-learning projects.
- To provide the community with opportunities to inform universities and colleges about community issues and community development.
- To give the community access to the knowledge and resources of universities and colleges.

### Strategic Priorities

#### 1. Identify and address community needs and priorities in Haliburton County (Addressing Community Needs)

We will continually refine our consultative process to identify community needs, leading to relevant research initiatives related to the Environmental, Economic, Culture, and Social Development.

#### 2. Maintain and improve our relationships with post-secondary institutions (Relationship Building)

We will engage with the administrations, students and faculty of our post-secondary institution partners to provide quality, community-based research and experiential learning.

#### 3. Expand and enhance the profile of U-Links with key constituencies (Visibility)

We will ensure that Haliburton County community organizations, local municipalities, post-secondary institutions, faculty and students, and other key stakeholders are aware of U-Links' expertise in facilitating actionable, community-based research to meet their objectives.

#### 4. Ensure the quality of program delivery (Program Quality)

We will continue to refine our systems for program delivery, collaborations with post-secondary institutions, professional development opportunities and evaluation methodology to ensure the quality of the services that we provide to the community and experiential learning opportunities for students. We will conduct meaningful evaluation of our programs and services.

#### 5. Share knowledge gained through research initiatives with the broader community (Knowledge Mobilization)

We will share knowledge through a wide range of fora and media including an annual Celebration of Research, social media, traditional media, presentations, on-line database/archive of Research Projects and Grey Literature and engagement with national networks.

#### 6. Ensure the future of U-Links (Sustainability)

We will ensure the future of U-Links by recruiting, maintaining and supporting motivated staff and volunteers, establishing and enacting operational procedures and policies, securing sustainable funding, leveraging regional and cross regional relationships.

# **The community-campus relationship between Haliburton County and Trent University.**

**Presented as part of a webinar Bringing the University to Rural Ontario:  
Brokering Campus & Community Engagement in Haliburton**

Today we are talking about the community-campus relationship between Haliburton County, a rural area of Central Ontario, and Trent University.

Haliburton County is located just south of Algonquin Park in the traditional territories of the Mississauga Anishinaabe and Algonquin Anishinaabe, with a land mass of around 4000 square km which is over two thirds the size of Prince Edward Island. If you look at a topographical map you can see why the area is called Haliburton Highlands. It forms the headwaters of three watersheds. There are hundreds of lakes and a small year-round population of 18,000. The villages of Haliburton and Minden are the two main population centres but there are a number of other villages and hamlets. It takes an hour and a half to drive from the south to the north of the County. It is rugged terrain, but has a vibrant community life enhanced by a seasonal population of 45,000 who have cottages on dozens of the lakes.

The main campus of Trent University is in Peterborough Ontario, on the Otonabee River an hour and half drive south of the village of Haliburton.

Trent University was founded in 1964. In 1972 the university formally launched its Canadian Studies Program. Alan Wilson, also founding Chair of the Department of History, was charged with the responsibility of leading Trent's first, interdisciplinary program. John Wadland, was the first academic appointment.

Alan Wilson had a long-time friendship with Mary Northway and Flora Morrison who founded a small out-tripping camp for girls on a 26-acre property called Windy Pine on Lake Kushog in Haliburton County in 1941. Mary was a psychology professor and the Director of Research at the Institute for Child Study at U of T. As Mary and Flora grew older and were unable to lead canoe trips, they gradually changed Windy Pine site into a summer retreat for their friends, most of who were professional women from a broad range of occupations. They took an avid interest in the development of Trent University and specifically the Canadian Studies Program.

In the summer of 1972, immediately following his admission to the faculty, John Wadland was enlisted as custodian at Windy Pine on the recommendation of Alan Wilson. Wadland was still putting the finishing touches on his Ph.D. dissertation, so having his own rent-free cabin in the woods, with

daytime responsibility for routine maintenance around the property, made this arrangement most agreeable. Evenings were left free entirely for writing and new course preparation. The true highlight of his experience came from the deep and enduring friendship with Mary and Flora that grew from it.

A combination of all of these factors led to Mary, after Flora's death, bequeathing the Windy Pine property to the Canadian Studies Program of Trent as a retreat, conference centre and base for research. She also provided an endowment for the maintenance of the property.

Prior to her death in 1987 Mary requested that Windy Pine be used as base for (among other things) giving back to the Haliburton community which had been such an important part of her life. This set the groundwork for over 30 years of Trent University's engagement with the Haliburton Highlands community.

1987 was also the year that the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the Brundtland Commission, published its report, *Our Common Future*. Professor Wadland of Canadian Studies and his friend and colleague, Professor Tom Whillans in the Environmental Studies Program, were both taken by the report's central admonition, in the interests of sustainability, to "Think Globally, Act Locally." This fit perfectly with their shared interest in the emerging theory of bioregionalism.

They were inspired to develop a new interdisciplinary honours Bioregionalism course that could serve two distinct ends:

(1) the intellectual challenge of exploring a new idea from science, social science and humanities perspectives, and

(2) accomplishing this with dedicated students, undertaking research that would actually meet the needs of a local community.

Both faculty members agreed that this course could focus on the Haliburton Highlands with Windy Pine as its base, and also fulfill Trent's commitment to Mary Northway to give back to the Haliburton community.

Wadland and Whillans launched their Bioregionalism course in the autumn of 1989, focusing on the Haliburton Highlands, which is also the headwaters of the Trent watershed, of which Peterborough itself is a part.

Wadland and Whillans quickly learned that a foundation of trust from the community was most important for the success of their course. They turned their energy to building that foundation through open collaborative research strategies engaging students and community members. By degrees, and

over the years, they built an expanding conversation in which the process of collaboration with community-members was cemented in friendships and a sense of shared purpose.

Between 1989 and 2002, the final year the course was offered, students individually and in groups undertook over 150 distinct projects meeting research needs identified by community partners. The papers produced remain available for any citizen of the community to read.

In 1995, Trent University's graduate program, the Frost Centre for Canadian Studies and Indigenous Studies, collaborated in a pilot project in Peterborough on "Community Enterprise Development". The partners were 14 Peterborough-based public interest institutions, led by the Community Opportunity and Innovation Network (COIN) and the Peterborough Social Planning Council. A course on Community Enterprise Development provided research support for this initiative.

In 1996, taking the Bioregionalism and CED courses as models, Trent extended its partnership with the COIN and the PSPC to establish the Trent Centre for Community-Based Education (TCCBE). The underlying logic was that if community-based research had worked in Haliburton, it should also be offered as an option in Peterborough. Projects were solicited from host agencies in the Peterborough community and they sought out interested senior students to undertake the research. Projects were negotiated with the faculty member who accepted academic advisory responsibility. A contract was entered into by the host agency, the student, the faculty member and the TCCBE Management Committee each agreeing to defined responsibilities.

The University reviewed the proposed program and endorsed it in Senate. After three years of positive student response the Management Committee persuaded the University to adopt a plan whereby participating departments could dedicate third and fourth year course numbers to a "Community-Based Research Project". This made it possible for a faculty member of any department to construct a pedagogy around a research need determined in the community. Such a course could serve several students, or merely one.

With this foundation in place, Wadland and Whillans encouraged the community activists and leaders in Haliburton County, who had supported the Bioregionalism course, to establish a similar community-based committee in Haliburton County. In this way the community would take ownership of the identification of local research needs. This was formed as the U-Links Centre for Community-Based Research in 1999 under the auspices of the Haliburton County Community Co-operative – a grass roots organization focused on community economic development and community capacity-building.

The goal of U-Links was to create a symbiotic relation with Trent and other universities - bringing the

resources of the university to the community and the knowledge and experience of the community to the university. From 1999 to 2002 the Bioregionalism course evolved into an independent centre for community-based research.

U-Links and TCCBE developed a partnership to provide community-based research opportunities for Trent University students in Peterborough and Haliburton and Trent University committed to providing funding to support the work.

The understanding was that Trent would provide two thirds of the cost of the program and the community would raise the other third. The Municipality of Anson, Hindon and Minden (now the Township of Minden Hills) in Haliburton County provided the space for the U-Links office.

For over 20 years, U-Links has been linking community organizations and municipalities who have research questions with students and faculty who are interested in undertaking research or community-based projects. U-Links has also linked up organizations and faculty to provide Community Service Learning Projects.

Since its inception in 1999, U-Links has shepherded hundreds of research and community service learning projects engaging thousands of students. The research papers are all available to the community through an online database – The Haliburton County Collection and through the County Library.

The U-Links Management committee consists of representatives from a broad variety of sectors in the community, representatives from Trent University and Fleming College as well as representatives from municipal councils. U-Links is currently staffed with 3 full-time equivalents who facilitate the relationship between the community and the university.

The staff and committee are also engaged in community development, bringing groups together to identify community needs, liaising with community groups to develop research proposals and looking at ways to apply the research within the community.

Each spring a Celebration of Research is held by U-Links, the students prepare posters of their work and the community is invited to hear about some of the highlights and to talk to the students about their research. This event attracts around 100 students and community members each year.

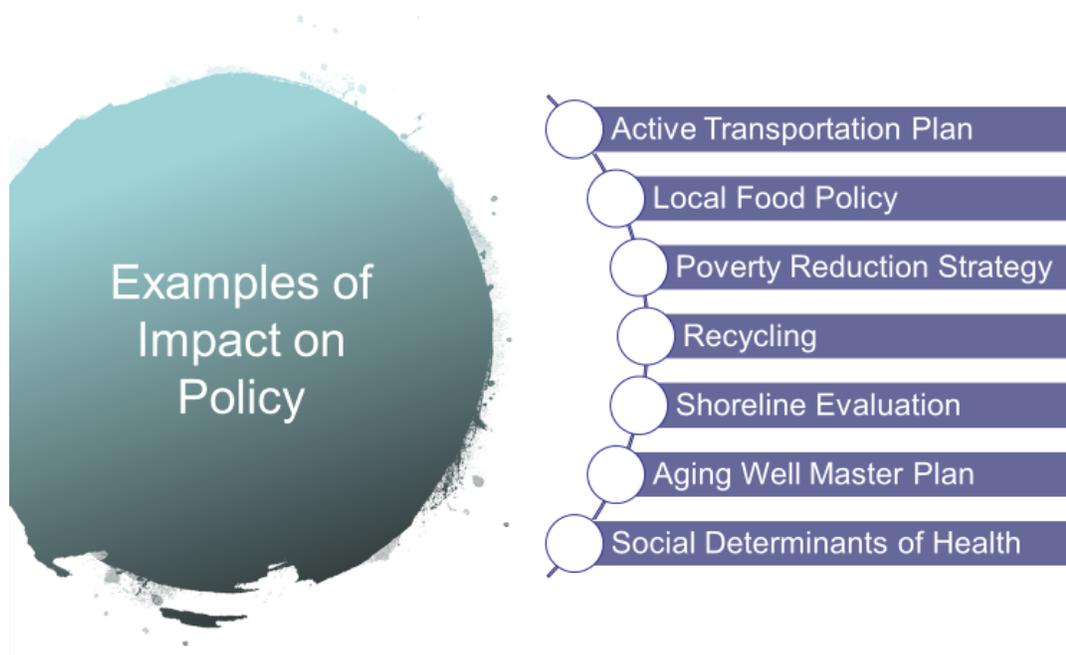
In addition to working with Trent University, U-links has also partnered with a number of different universities and colleges on various research initiatives. U-Links also undertakes research projects independent of the university when specific and timely outcomes are required.

As a participant in the CFICE project (Community First – Impacts of Community Engagement – a 7 year

national initiative funding through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)) U-Links expanded its capacity by accessing funding to have masters students as imbedded researchers in the community undertaking projects that are more in depth and long term. U-Links became a founding partner in the creation Community-Campus Engage Canada, a national network that came out of the CFICE project.

A number of the research projects have led to significant policy development in local governments and agencies. Sometimes the research has led to the creation of new committees or organizations which dig deeper and champion various issues. Given the location of Haliburton County, with a landscape mostly of forests, lakes and wetlands, environmentally related research has played a key role. But there has also been lots of work done in the areas of active transportation, housing, poverty reduction, rural transportation, food security, local agriculture, tourism, local history and much more.

In the diagram below you will see a number of areas where the student research has led to the development of policies by local municipalities and community organizations.



More and more U-Links is seen as the research arm of the community – providing resources in partnership with the university that would otherwise be unattainable.

In 2019, U-Links brought together a team from Trent University, Fleming College, and numerous lake associations to undertake longitudinal regional research initiative on benthos bio-monitoring. This would engage students from both institutions undertaking benthos bio-monitoring on a rotating basis on an established set of lakes in collaboration with the lake associations and lake stewards.

U-Links has been able to attract funding from a variety of sources to fund the co-ordination of this program and to include dozens of lakes in the region. The program is being expanded to include terrestrial monitoring in collaboration with the Haliburton Highlands Land Trust. The program has been renamed the Woodlands and Waterways EcoWatch. A steering Committee representative of Trent University, Fleming College, Lake association and lake stewards, Haliburton Highlands land Trust and citizen scientists has been formed to provide oversight for this program.