

SYMPOSIUM SUMMARY REPORT

Reimagining the PhD



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

2017 Symposium Summary Report

Reimagining the PhD

Event at a glance

Attendees

116 in person, mostly faculty and students; an additional 92 via webinar

Event Sponsors

Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies; *alumni* UBC

Key Topics

The future of doctoral education; furthering innovative doctoral education approaches; preparing doctoral students for diverse career paths; engaged scholarship; UBC Public Scholars Initiative

Guest Speakers:

- Ursula Gobel, Associate Vice-President, Future Challenges SSHRC;
- Lauren Hunter, Director, Talent Cloud, Government of Canada;
- Dean Oliver, Director, Research, Canadian Museum of History;
- Suzanne Ortega, President, Council of Graduate Schools, Washington DC;
- David Phipps, Executive Director, Research and Innovation Services, York University;
- Kathleen Woodward, Director, Simpson Center for Humanities, University of Washington.

Emerging Themes:

interdisciplinary habits of mind; tackling the grand challenges of the century; the changing ways of work; public facing scholarship.

Suggested actions

Develop more and greater learning opportunities around broadened scholarship; encourage interdisciplinary, inter-sectoral scholarship; explore opportunities to support and develop methods to assess broadened PhD scholarship; further increase awareness of PSI and the values it champions.

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Event Videos

Event videos can be viewed online at:

[Graduate and Post Doctoral Studies - Public Scholarship Initiative 2017](#)

Video #1: Opening Remarks (13:30)

Prof. Santa J. Ono, President & Vice-Chancellor, UBC

'Why Reimagine the PhD?'

Video #2: Morning Panel: Public Scholars Initiative (1:17:33)

Moderator: Dr. Efe Peker and Dr. Jenny Phelps

Panel: Sarah Munro, Jeremy Stone, Gloria Kendi Borona

Video #3: Lunch Address (30:51)

Dr. Kathleen Woodward, Director of the Simpson Center for the Humanities, University of Washington

'Public Scholars in the Humanities = Public Goods'

Video #4: Afternoon Panel: PhD Careers, PhD Capabilities, and the Public Good (1:26:07)

Moderator: Dr. Jenny Phelps

Panel: Dean Oliver, Lauren Hunter, Lorne Whitehead, Ursula Gobel

Video #5: Keynote Address (47:24)

Dr. Suzanne Ortega, President, Council of Graduate Schools, Washington, DC

'Doctoral Education, Doctoral Careers: 2030 and Beyond'

Video #6: Afternoon Panel: Formation of Scholars - Scholarship, Dissertations, Capability Development (53:33)

Moderator: Serbulent Turan

Panel: David Phipps, Anthony Paré, Susan Porter

Report Contributors: Janey Dodd, Valeria De La Vega, Serbulent Turan, Susan Porter

Event Context and Purpose

The second symposium on *Reimagining the PhD*, held at the University of British Columbia in the Robert H. Lee Alumni Centre on Friday, September 29, 2017, was designed to continue and reinvigorate a critical conversation stemming from the first symposium in 2014. Together, UBC leaders, faculty members, students, and distinguished guests discussed how to continue to transform the doctorate in ways that move forward today's complex problems, engage partners from multiple sectors, and help prepare students for diverse career paths. The dialogue encompassed such topics as:

- The future of doctoral education and its relevance for the 21st century workforce and society;
- The current state of doctoral education at UBC, including work accomplished since the 2014 symposium—initiatives, results, and continuing gaps;
- How UBC could continue to rethink and innovate in doctoral education

Opening Remarks

The symposium began with opening remarks by Prof. Santa J. Ono - UBC President & Vice-Chancellor - who articulated UBC's

commitment to continued innovation in doctoral education. Recognizing the increasing number of PhDs finding employment outside of the academy, Prof. Ono encouraged attendees to acknowledge the importance of these diverse career paths, and the changing nature of knowledge production and mobilization. As educators, he said, we need to move toward a perspective of the anticipated needs of students and society. "It is an ethical and moral responsibility of universities and the leaders of these institutions to ensure that we somehow calibrate and align the output of our graduate students with opportunities that exist for them post-graduation." This includes the ethical responsibility to prepare students to make connections with diverse partners, both locally and globally, and to confront those "vexing challenges" facing the world today.

In concluding his address, President Ono suggested a number of possible areas in which we might reimagine the PhD, including supporting and valuing interdisciplinary work, increasing partnerships beyond the academy, and finding ways of assessing PhD work in order to better support student and faculty seeking to re-envision the form and function of doctoral education. Many of the themes touched on by President Ono, along with his enthusiasm for the subject, extended to discussions throughout the symposium as

panelists and honoured guests considered the potential of a reimagined PhD.

“ It is an ethical and moral responsibility of universities and the leaders of these institutions to ensure that we somehow calibrate and align the output of our graduate students with opportunities that exist for them post-graduation. ”

Prof. Santa J. Ono

Imagining the Future PhD: Doctoral Education, Doctoral Careers: 2030 and Beyond

Dr. Suzanne Ortega - President of the (US) Council of Graduate schools - gave a keynote address describing key features of the 21st century that should inform our views on doctoral education, and help us envision possible advances to meet 21st century needs. Dr. Ortega began by asking attendees to imagine the doctoral *student* of 2030 and beyond, who, she suggested, would be part of a more diverse institutional demographic, which would include more underrepresented population groups. Universities, she urged, need “to create access for these communities, and the infrastructure that supports their

success and includes their perspectives in creating more vital programs.”

Dr. Ortega touched on potential drivers of change, including technological development, the transition to a project-based economy, and a shift to “portfolio careers” away from job-defined careers. Modes of research, research funding, and knowledge dissemination are also changing.

In recognition of these cultural shifts and their impact on doctoral student careers, Dr. Ortega suggested a number of best practices for educators. Along with the development of specific cross-disciplinary skills such as leadership, teamwork, and written and oral communication, she encouraged universities to facilitate the development of “interdisciplinary habits of mind,” which she said are critical as we shift towards collaborative, global workspaces designed to tackle grand themes rather than discipline-specific problems. “At its heart, interdisciplinarity begins with a profound understanding of the limits of your own paradigm and your awareness of the need for finding those who can complement your work in meaningful ways.” She also touched on the importance of public-facing scholarship, the use of big data, and the need to support intellectual risk-taking. Ultimately, she urged universities “to create a strategy that allows for

students to be as flexible as possible in their career choices,” and suggested that “faculty and administrators need to rethink pedagogy and the structure of the curricula to provide advising and mentoring networks that meet the needs of a new generation of students.”

“At its heart, interdisciplinarity begins with a profound understanding of the limits of your own paradigm and your awareness of the need for finding those who can complement your work in meaningful ways.”

Dr. Suzanne Ortega

Public Scholars, Revolutionary Ideas

Following the keynote address, the symposium transitioned to a panel format. Dr. Efe Peker - SSHRC Postdoctorate fellow in Sociology at McGill University and former PSI Coordinator - was joined by Dr. Jenny Phelps - Senior Advisor to the Dean - to provide an overview of the Public Scholars Initiative (PSI) and outline its goals, achievements, and shortfalls. Emerging from an advisory group formed after the 2014 Reimagining the PhD symposium, the PSI was launched the following year to address the types of changes in society and the academy remarked upon by President Ono and Dr. Ortega. The goals,

as outlined by Drs. Phelps and Peker, are to “encourage and enable a broadened conception of doctoral education, such that: students gain experience in the environments and types of scholarship they may productively engage in post-graduation, contributing to enhanced career opportunities for students, enhanced public perception of the value of the doctorate, and advancement of the public good.” Specifically, the PSI supports broadened dissertation scholarship that engages partners external to the academy or in alternative academic contexts, to work on issues of mutual interest and public benefit. The PSI supports students in several ways; through the provision of research or stipend funding, networking opportunities, mentoring and professional development offerings, academic support, and public events. Most notably, PSI scholars are afforded the opportunity to effect concrete change within a global context, a theme which was highlighted by the panel of speakers that followed.

Before turning to a panel of PSI scholars, both Drs. Phelps and Peker noted the ongoing success of the program in terms of enrolment, outcomes, and reception. There have been 115 PSI scholars to date, collaborating with a wide range of community partners, including those in government, the private sector, and from community and disciplinary groups.

The program has been very well received by students, partners, and faculty supervisors. Most students felt it contributed significantly to their development and identity as scholars, and were thrilled with the legitimization of work they felt passionately about. Partner organizations and individuals were uniformly positive about the experience, and many faculty noted their students' deepened understanding and enhanced skills as a result of their participation in the initiative. Yet, while the opportunity to engage in well-supported, public-facing scholarship resonated with faculty, some did not view the work as appropriate for inclusion in a traditional dissertation.

Following Drs. Phelps and Peker, a panel of PSI scholars presented on their experience in the program. This was a highlight of the symposium, and generated much conversation and congratulations as the day continued.

“It did not make sense to me to take my dissertation and dump it on a policy-maker's desk...”

Dr. Sarah Munro

Dr. Sarah Munro - currently a postdoctoral fellow with the UBC Department of Family Practice (jointly with Dartmouth College) - commented on the ways in which the program

helped her mobilize her research findings. Dr. Munro's research was aimed at better understanding the reasons behind rising rates of repeat cesarean sections in Canada. The PSI funding allowed her develop an actual plan to reduce these rates. “It didn't make sense to me to take my dissertation and dump it on a policy-maker's desk”, she said, and so she engaged further with various stakeholders across BC, ultimately creating a policy brief which was included and discussed in her dissertation. Some of the recommendations from the brief have already been implemented by the Fraser Health Authority and other groups, representing a remarkably accelerated translation of new findings to practice.

The second panelist, Jeremy Stone - a PhD candidate from the School of Community and Regional Planning - underscored the importance of working with and learning from community stakeholders, and called for more PhD level scholarship rooted in “grounded outcomes” and research directed at social change. “The demand for knowledge has changed,” he suggested, “knowledge needs to do things.” Mr. Stone's work, which focused on gentrification in the New Orleans' neighborhood of City Central, was conducted in partnership with the community. This partnership enabled him to conduct interviews with community members and eventually

create an informative video, which was then used to communicate the findings in diverse contexts, including an election forum, a community forum, and a restorative listening project. Mr. Stone stressed the importance of outcomes, noting that the goal of scholarship should be “the changes [scholars are] bringing to the communities.” While clearly valued, he also touched on challenges in doing community-engaged research, including the higher costs involved relative to those for more traditional scholarship.

Along similar lines, the final panelist, Gloria Kendi Borona - PhD candidate in the Faculty of Forestry - remarked on the PSI’s radical perspective on the potential roles of researchers. Ms. Borona, whose research explores indigenous knowledge systems and conservation efforts in her native Kenya, has been met with criticism for addressing, rather than simply studying, societal issues. “Our communities have been ravaged by climate change, resource extraction and many other issues, and we feel that our research should make a contribution, or at least an attempt towards resolving those problems. We cannot simply look away and say that we are doing ‘pure’ research. I see nothing wrong with research that is tied to social justice imperatives”. She continued, “Do you know why I could say that [in a public arena]? It’s

not because I’m brave, it’s because I knew somewhere at UBC, there’s an initiative known as the PSI...that supports that.”

She called for more compassion within academia in its relationship with societal problems, and concluded that “education should help us create a just society for all.” The PSI, she said, “is at the very pinnacle of this kind of thinking, and for that, it is a revolutionary idea.”

“Education should help us to create a just society for all. The PSI is at the very pinnacle of this kind of thinking, and for that, the PSI is a revolutionary idea.”

Gloria Kendi Borona

Serbulent Turan - current PSI Coordinator - and Dean Susan Porter concluded the panel by discussing the future of the PSI program. They remarked on the extraordinary passion of the PSI scholars and the salutary effect the application of knowledge had on scholars’ ultimate conclusions, but noted the need for increased visibility and support for the program and its concepts within the university. Considering how to scale the program up, they suggested a primary barrier continues to be the culture within the university itself. They also noted that further learning and

assessment resources are needed. In the discussion that followed, guest speaker David Phipps suggested that it needs to be positioned as a competitive advantage to the university, and to be represented in the highest levels of planning at the institution. Better connections across relevant areas of interest at the university was also suggested. Ursula Gobbel from SSHRC affirmed a strong interest by SSHRC in leveraging university talent and research to meet the needs of private, public, and community sectors, similar to the aims of the PSI. She noted an increasing number of opportunities across Canada by which to accomplish that.

Lunch Address - What Can the Humanities Do for Us?

“[Scholarship today] must infuse our worlds with empathy and understanding of others with a nuanced sense of the differences that are many among us... [and must] insist on addressing ... what have been called the grand challenges or the wicked problems of our day.”

Dr. Kathleen Woodward

In her lunch address, Dr. Kathleen Woodward - Lockwood professor in the Humanities and director of the Simpson Center of Humanities of Washington - discussed the importance of the humanities and the potential of humanities scholars to carry out impactful, public-facing scholarship. Scholarship today, she noted, must “infuse our worlds with empathy and understanding of others, with a nuanced sense of the differences that are many among us... [and must] insist on addressing ... what have been called the grand challenges or the wicked problems” facing the world today.

Dr. Woodward’s address also touched on key issues brought up earlier in the day, including the responsibility of the university to address the needs of its students and community members. Echoing President Ono’s opening remarks, Woodward discussed a key recommendation from the Modern Language Association’s “Doctoral Study in Modern Language and Literature” task force, which argued that doctoral programs need redesigning to better serve both the educational and vocational goals of their students. Acknowledging the challenges these sorts of changes face in terms of institutional culture, Woodward offered two possible steps toward creating long-term culture change within the university. First, she suggested

that departments need to incentivize faculty members to create “public-facing” scholarship; and second, she suggested that we need to redefine PhD educational criteria to allow for more creative, public-serving outputs.

PhD Careers, PhD Capabilities, and the Public Good

The second panel of the day examined the increasing diversity of potential career paths available to PhDs today, reminding attendees that individuals with doctoral-level education are needed more than ever to advance the public good. Today’s diverse career pathways and complex problems speak to the need for intellectual depth and rigour in graduates, but also the capacity for creative, collaborative, interdisciplinary, and effective thought and action. The speakers in this session explored and elaborated on the connection between PhD education, the value of the PhD inside and outside the academy, and the capabilities needed in the 21st century.

The first panelist, joining by videoconference from Ottawa, was Dr. Lauren Hunter, a UBC PhD graduate and director of an experimental new staffing model, Talent Cloud, in the Government of Canada. She relayed how society, and the government,

is moving from an “analogue” to a “digital” model of human resource management. This transformation entails a change from the traditional hierarchies or groupings based on functions or jobs to often temporary groupings of individuals with successful track records and interest to work on specific problems. In that sense, people are viewed less as specific job-holders than as human beings with distinctive talents and interests.

She stated that at the government level, “having a PhD is a unique kind of currency” because it demonstrates “the mindset that comes with the staying power to solve problems, and the ability to pick up a lot of different methodologies for doing that.” She also strongly emphasized the importance of ‘intrapreneurship’ skills - “the ability to navigate systems, to network, to be more than your job description”. These skills, she noted, will only increase in value as employers transition into new models of employment.

Next, Dr. Dean Oliver - Director of Research at the Canadian Museum of History - considered past, present, and future PhD education in terms of community engagement, career readiness, and public contribution. He concluded that past PhDs were primarily prepared to work within the academy, and that community

engagement and public contributions were not encouraged. Similarly, while present-day PhDs are outstanding scholars, their programs are not designed to enhance broader, critical, career-relevant attributes such as creativity, an interdisciplinary mindset, adaptability, teamwork ability, and flexibility. He recommended that integral to doctoral programs should be opportunities for students to develop “multiple connections to their evidence, their stories, multiple points of view, intensive multifarious contact with the communities about which they’re writing”. The sole reliance on a “single project, in a single discipline” is not serving them or society well. “In the end,” he concluded, “everything we do needs to be for a public good...otherwise why are we doing it?”

“We are looking for a bold new generation of leaders who want to roll up sleeves and tackle problems.”

Dr. Lauren Hunter

Expanding on this notion, Dr. Lorne Whitehead - UBC Special Advisor for Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Research, and Professor of Physics and Astronomy - pointed to the commonly held false belief that research should be either basic or applied, but

not both. As a corrective to this false belief, he gestured toward a recent APLU (Association of Public Land-Grant Universities) initiative that seeks to support “highly integrative basic and responsive” - or, HIBAR - research. Like PSI-sponsored research, this form of research engages academics with societal partners to address ‘real-world’ problems while also advancing fundamental knowledge. While there can be resistance to this idea, particularly in terms of peer review, the APLU is working towards creating broad, concurrent culture change across institutions.

Ursula Gobel - Associate Vice-President of Future Challenges at SSHRC - closed the panel with a discussion of the ways in which SSHRC works to help prepare students for a diverse range of career paths. Initiatives include the SSHRC storytellers competition, the Imagining Canada’s Future Initiative, and additional projects in the areas of collaboration and communication.

A key challenge emerging from the Imagining Canada’s Future project was the necessity of developing “new ways of learning to meet the needs of an evolving society and labour market”. Students consulted on this challenge identified three main areas for prioritization: 1. Increase opportunities for experiential and work-integrated learning, 2.

Encourage collaborative, multidisciplinary scholarship; and 3. Encourage mobility. From these and other conversations, it is apparent that student values are changing, said Gobel, who quoted a recent report asserting that “more and more young people are looking for educational experiences and careers where they can make a difference and contribute to society”. Moving forward, she said, it will be essential for educators, governments and businesses to work more closely together to imagine a 21st century curriculum.

Formation of Scholars—Scholarship, Dissertations, Capability Development

The symposium’s final panel framed PhD education in terms of its ultimate goal: the formation of scholars. With this in mind, panelists considered what aspects of doctoral education need reimagining given the changing nature of scholarship, scholarly outputs, scholarly actions, and modes of work, particularly in terms of mentorship, communication, evaluation and research.

Dr. David Phipps - Executive Director of Research & Innovation Services at York University - led the panel off by discussing research impact, and the opportunities

available to develop key competencies necessary for ‘impact literacy’. As identified through a survey of knowledge brokers conducted in the UK, these important competencies included: communication skills; working in teams, communities, and networks; managing multiple conversations; and active listening. These are critical to careers both inside and outside of the academy and should be cultivated by graduate students over the course of their degrees. Dr. Phipps then challenged attendees to consider if and how graduate programming encourages the development and reinforcement of these core competencies in PhD students.

Next, Dr. Anthony Paré - Professor and Head of Language and Literacy Education at UBC - discussed the limitations of “The” dissertation as central to doctoral education. Considering the multiplicity of ways in which scholarship is produced and disseminated, Dr. Paré suggested that the “single author, single methodology, single rhetorical purpose, single readership” model of the PhD dissertation should be reimagined to enhance scholarship generally, and to better support students doing innovative research. Dr. Paré suggested that doctoral programs consider replacing the dissertation with other forms of scholarly output, such as a portfolio of different genres, modes, and media. This, he suggested, would

better equip doctoral students to speak about their work outside of the academy, and “to find ways to manifest scholarship, to bring scholarship to life.”

“There is a problem in the way in which we think about this crowning achievement as a singularity, as *the* dissertation.”

Dr. Anthony Paré

Lastly, Dean Susan Porter spoke in her capacity as the co-leader of the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS) Task Force on the Dissertation. The aims of the task force, as outlined by Dr. Porter, are to encourage dialogue and to establish recommendations regarding the purposes, content, structure, and assessment of the doctoral dissertation. Stakeholders from across Canada were consulted, and expressed a full range of views on the topic. There was significant interest and excitement about the possibility of increased flexibility in dissertations, but concerns were also expressed about the potential loss of scholarly depth this could entail. There were also concerns about the capacity for appropriate mentorship and assessment. The developing recommendations include encouraging a broadening of the dissertation “to move towards actual anticipated needs of the student, the workplace, and society,”

a continued acknowledgment of the value of traditional scholarship, and the “recognition of alt-scholarship in faculty reward systems and hiring practices.” While these recommendations provide clear steps forward, Dean Porter emphasized that, of paramount importance, is keeping this critical conversation about doctoral education going.

Other Voices: Drawing on Community Imagination

In total, 116 faculty, staff, students, postdoctoral fellows, and alumni participated in the symposium, with an additional 92 viewing the symposium online from across the country and beyond. The day concluded with two concurrent workshops, each designed to draw on the broad spectrum of knowledge and experience afforded by this diverse range of attendees.

Under the co-facilitation of PSI Coordinator Serbulent Turan and PSI scholar Kaylee Byers, “Overcoming Obstacles and Challenges to Reimagining the PhD” engaged participants to design ways of moving forward on four significant challenges faced by PhD programs today. These included pressures around current apprenticeship and funding models, internal resistance to public scholarship, concerns around completion times, and concerns over

the lack of guidelines or precedents. Echoing Ono's opening remarks and several of the day's speakers, many concluded that there would need to be a significant cultural shift in university values before we could see any significant change in the structure of the PhD. In addition, participants suggested that the university needs to consider encouraging more interdisciplinary partnerships and programs, and designing more flexible funding packages and apprenticeship models.

The second workshop, "Reimagining the PhD—What's next?" was facilitated by Joseph Topornycky, Manager of Graduate Student Programs at the Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology, and PSI scholar Andrea Johnson. Participants were asked to imagine the PhD of 2030 and the possible steps that might be taken towards reaching that goal. Generally speaking, participants remarked that PhD programs need to do a better job of accounting for the ever-changing professional, global, and technological landscape. Reflecting on Dr. Ortega's keynote address and the increasingly globalized platform for knowledge production and dissemination, they suggested that the PhD needs to be more focused on collaboration both inside and

outside the institution, allowing students to work more broadly on tackling the "big issues" and affording them the opportunity to work collaboratively across disciplinary, institutional, and national lines. Additionally, many attendees felt that the current university structure does not adequately recognize the diversity of its scholars. Moving forward, they suggested, PhD programs need to be more individualized rather than prescriptive. This would allow students to build on previous professional experience, explore interdisciplinary areas of interest, and consider alternate forms of scholarly output. Like the first workshop, participants also felt concerned about the influence and constraints that funding programs place on PhD research due to their specific values, assessment criteria, and expected outcomes, which do not consistently allow for non-traditional forms of research. While Ursula Gobel spoke to SSHRC's continued investment in innovative scholarship earlier in the day, many still felt uneasy about what they saw as increasingly competitive, traditional funding paradigms.

Emerging Recommendations:

The response to the 2017 Reimagining the PhD symposium was overwhelmingly positive. Yet, a consensus was that, in order to affect any sustained change to PhD programs across disciplines, there still needs to be a substantial culture shift within the university. While the Public Scholars Initiative has been incredibly successful at UBC, many in the university are still unaware of it, and many students struggle to find avenues to make use of it. There is also a need more broadly to gain support for the value of multi-sectoral collaborations and non-traditional scholarly outputs in doctoral education. Tangible steps include:

- Continuing the 'awareness campaign';
- Encouraging the involvement of appropriate supervisory and examining committee members from outside the academy;
- Creating more opportunities for transdisciplinary and collaborative scholarship;
- Developing assessment and learning frameworks and;
- Recognizing the value of public-facing scholarship in faculty reward systems.

Overall, there was a sense that as these ideas and conversations spread, the academy will be increasingly attentive to deliberately supporting the vast potential of doctoral students to develop as engaged scholars and contribute positively to the rapidly changing world of the 21st century.