Community-based research has real, tangible impacts for both host organizations and students themselves. Completing these projects empowers the researcher to realize the power and potential of their work, and truly helps the host to craft well-rounded and logical management solutions for the future.

- Emily Amon, Student Researcher
DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Introduction

The 2016-17 academic year was one of significant achievement for the Trent Community Research Centre. After a modest year in 2015-16 with only one full-time staff member focused on projects, September 2016 saw the appointment of the Centre’s first post-doctoral fellow. Dr. David Tough joined the Centre on a 4 day-a-week contract to take on project coordination and development, and also perform research into community-based research methods. The result was something of a record year of projects with 44 community-based research projects and one community service learning project completed by 139 students. These projects ranged across the academic disciplines from history to psychology, from environmental studies to cultural studies and included in-class group projects, half and full year CBR projects and double-credit thesis projects. A number of graduate projects also continued throughout the year. For the first time, the spring Celebration of Research was a Trent only endeavour and was held in the Great Hall in Champlain College. Some 42 projects were presented to the Peterborough community, students and faculty (see page seven for a detailed report on the Celebration).

Capstone Courses

The three main capstone courses in Forensic Science (4890 Community-based Research), Geography (4030 Community-based Research in Geography), and International Development Studies (4220 Assessment of Development Projects), continued to be the bedrock of the CBR program in 2016-17. Working again with Sharon Beaucage-Johnson, the Forensics class had a record intake this year with 12 students working on 11 projects. Highlights included two projects for the Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee (HSJCC). Callum Stanford worked on a review of regional elevated risk situation tables, and Carly McCabe worked on a project looking at the potential social impacts of the new Peterborough casino. In cooperation with the Forensics course we have developed a strong relationship with the HSJCC, who now pay the TCRC to act as research developer and broker. Forensics students from this year’s course became involved in discussions on next year’s research topics, and Callum and Karly have both been asked to present at the bi-annual Provincial HSJCC conference this coming November in Toronto.

Other notable highlights from this year’s Forensics course include projects on rent supplements for the City of Peterborough, age and location research for the Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre, and a conference evaluation for the Kawartha Sexual Assault Centre. The model of collaboration and pre-course communication established in this course is something of a model of how to undertake community-based research (CBR). Students are interviewed for their aptitude to take on a project and are then matched to projects before term starts. The TCRC appreciates Sharon’s eight year commitment to this course that gives everyone involved – students, community partners, and TCRC staff – a clear understanding of how projects will work, and results in quality research for the community.

Overall lead on Geography 4030 is taken by our sister organisation U-Links and Sonja Addison, who started at U-Links in the summer of 2016, took this role. Dr. David Tough worked closely with Sonja to present and support the TCRC projects in this course. This year the course matched 6 projects with 9 students for the TCRC. The TCRC also offered support to a number of students for whom the work of a full CBR project was considered too much. Two projects in this course did not complete and we will attempt to meet the community partner’s research needs this coming year. For 2017-18 there have been some constructive conversations about mitigating the challenges of this course and how we direct
students towards projects that are better matched to their abilities. To offer a positive contrast to these challenges, one exceptional student, Brianna Elliott, working alone in this course, produced a highly valued report on the immigrant entrepreneur community in Peterborough for the New Canadians Centre (See Reem Ali’s reflection on page five).

International Development 4220 typically attracts very strong students with good research skills and a commitment to community engagement, and this year was no exception. As with Geography, this course had a new faculty in 2016-17 and was led from the TCRC by Dr. David Tough. The course resulted in nine students working on four projects. Of note were a project by Sarah Strom, Bhisham Ramoutar, and Claire Smith analyzing the effects of volunteering at the Warming Room, and Sabina Thiessen’s project (her second with the TCRC) using the TCRC’s database and archive of projects to analyze trends in community-based research in Peterborough.

Victoria Hamilton, who completed a very challenging project on barriers to enrollment in the Ontario Electricity Support Program, is now employed by the City of Peterborough, doing further research on the issues her report highlighted.

It is worth noting that our most predictable and consistent capstone class is one that has had the same committed faculty for eight consecutive years. From the perspective of the TCRC there is great value in faculty continuity in terms of establishing how projects and courses are going to run and how responsibilities are divided up. The pre-course interview model of Forensics is one that we would encourage for all capstone courses.

Course-based CBR

In addition to the three capstone courses, undertaking a CBR project is an option in a number of other courses at Trent University. Dr. Tom Whillans’ long-established ERST 3160, Community-Based Natural Resource Management, is a half-year course in which students can choose a CBR project as an alternative to more conventional assignments. For the last few years the TCRC has worked with the Ontario Invasive Plant Council to develop projects that meet the Council’s research needs and provide students with highly engaged research experiences. Collin Cassin from the Council worked with the TCRC to develop two projects that were matched in this course. One looked at encroaching invasive plant species that will likely present a problem in Ontario in the near future, and the other was a discussion paper on the role of climate change in the spread of invasive plant species.

For the last two years we have also had projects in Dr. Christopher Dummitt’s CAST-HIST 3011H: Everyday History. In this half-year course, students with a 75% or above grade average can choose to take on a CBR project as an alternative to other course assignments. This year two students researched the history of the stage at Nichols Oval that is used by the Peterborough Folk Festival. The project looked at the history of performers who had used the stage by undertaking archival research.

Following a slightly different format to the above two courses, Dr. May Chazan designed a whole course around a project that was proposed to the TCRC by OPIRG (Ontario Public Interest Research Group). The project’s aim was to capture the personal history of activists who have lived and worked in the Peterborough Community. WMST 4122H: Activists and Activisms: Feminist Perspectives gave twenty-fourth-year students the opportunity to research and interview women who have been activists in the Peterborough community in a variety of fields. Students not only learned about the history of women
activists in Peterborough, but developed skills in interview techniques and data recording.

**Independent CBR Projects**

2016-17 was a remarkably successful year for independent CBR students with eleven projects including two double-credit thesis projects. These students approach us having found projects that interest them on our website and then work independently of a conventional course structure with a faculty advisor from Trent, and a project coordinator from the TCRC. Typically these are highly motivated and capable students and this year was no exception. Highlights of this year include Mason Godden’s thesis on the history of OPIRG to help them mark their 40th anniversary and Emily Amon’s research on the Harper Creek watershed (see below) that received significant media interest with its research on the potential impact of parking lots for the new casino on the sensitive Harper Creek wetland. For the first time in many years, we also had a student in Mathematics performing data-analysis for GreenUp on the data gathered from the annual bike and pedestrian surveys.

The independent stream continues to be a part of our work that demonstrates clear community benefit as students commit to high-quality research that not only gives students a powerful engaged learning experience, but results in research that is essential for the development and future sustainability of the Peterborough community.

**Graduate projects and opportunities**

By their nature, graduate student projects do not always fit within the September to April academic cycle. Maddy McNab’s project on the early history of the New Canadians Centre continued through the

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**Emily Amon**
Environmental Sciences Student

Throughout my degree I was fortunate to take part in three large formal community based research projects. These experiences enriched my practical and applied skills in interdisciplinary aspects of both environmental sciences and policy, while also providing vital opportunities for networking with various environmental organizations in the Kawartha Lakes region. Community based research is important to me because it answers questions that real people are asking. It provides vital scientific backing for the creation of evidence-based policy and contextualizes the issues, and solutions, within the communities they affect. Community based research bridges the gaps between citizens and science, and helps to build sustainable solutions. Completing these projects empowers the researcher to realize the power and potential of their work, and truly helps the host to craft well rounded, and logical management solutions for the future.

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CBR bridges the gap between citizens and science, and helps to build sustainable solutions.

Read more about Emily’s project: goo.gl/Rk6obE
2016-17 academic year and should be completed in late 2017. Victoria Veenstra, who started her work in the previous year, completed a very comprehensive project for Lang Pioneer Village Museum on the history and operations of the Museum’s Grist Mill. This research is part of a wider legacy project of documenting the knowledge and work of senior staff at Lang in preparation for their retirement.

TCRC would like to see more of our projects matched to graduate students. Often the requirements from the community are for research that would fit well at the graduate level. One of the challenges of making these matches is that graduate students typically come to Trent with some plan for their major research. If we are to match more projects to graduate students in the future, we will need more faculty and department support in promoting potential projects to graduate students as they make their initial applications to Trent.

In addition to direct for-credit CBR opportunities, graduate students can work with the TCRC as a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) and also as a volunteer on a specific project. In 2016-17 Matt Hayes worked at the TCRC for a second year as his alternative GTA placement. Having already completed a year with the TCRC and worked over the summer of 2016 to help develop projects, Matt was well set up to manage his own portfolio of independent students. Matt also took responsibility for the students in Everyday History. Sadly Matt will not be returning to the TCRC in the 2017-18 academic year as he wants to gain more experience in classroom teaching. It is also the TCRC’s position that this should be a two year opportunity in order for other PhD candidates to access this valuable skills building experience.

On page thirteen of this report you can read Matt’s reflections on his time at the TCRC. His work and commitment has been much appreciated and his contributions will be missed.

In 2016-17 we also had two graduate students who volunteered on specific projects. Christen Watt again supported a forensic student who needed to develop specialized mapping skills for the Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre, and Alex Ha provided more general support to a number of students undertaking surveys and interviews. Graduate volunteers are paid a $250 honorarium to acknowledge their support and mitigate any costs they might incur in supporting CBR projects. This graduate opportunity helps the Centre support our undergraduate students and provides graduate students with experience of a community approach to research. TCRC would like to thank this year’s graduate volunteers.

**Service Learning**

In a CBR project students commit a significant amount of time to undertake an original piece of research on behalf of a community partner. To offer a taste of community research and the world of community development, TCRC also offers an annual service learning opportunity to first year students in the School of the Environment. Dr. Stephen Hill’s first-year class, ERSC 1010 supplies up to 100 students a year to get involved in an annual count of cyclists and pedestrians at 28 locations around Peterborough. Students commit about 10 hours to this work and write a reflection paper. This project is a collaboration between the City of Peterborough, Peterborough GreenUp and the TCRC. In the past TCRC has had a number of service learning projects, and we are looking to expand this program again in future years, but with a specific focus on projects that include a research experience.

**Department and University Outreach**

In addition to supervising CBR projects as described above, TCRC runs workshops in a number of courses to introduce the idea of CBR to a broad range of students. In 2016-17 in collaboration with U-Links we again ran an interactive workshop for
Dr. Mark Skinner’s second year class on research methods (ERST 2510). We also presented on CBR to Sustainable Agriculture students, ran a workshop on CBR methods for WMST 3021 Discovering Feminist Research, and took part in a webinar for incoming Trent students on experiential learning opportunities. As in past years, we also presented the value of CBR to Trent’s recruitment team. Though TCRC sees this outreach work as a critical part of spreading the word on CBR, this work comes second to our core function of running projects that benefit the community of Peterborough. Our ability to continue to provide this outreach to the University is dependent on sustainable funding.

**Community Engagement**

It is critical to the mission of the Centre that we are engaged directly in the Peterborough community. This means being aware of a broad range of community issues from housing to environmental concerns, and being connected to organisations that are critical to community developments in the city. The TCRC therefore sits on a number of local committees including the Youth Commission, LGBTQ+ Taskforce, A Way Home Peterborough, and the Regional HSJCC (Human Service and Justice Coordinating Committee). In addition to these memberships, TCRC regularly attends meetings of various committees and organisations who are involved in social support, housing, environmental concerns, work in the arts, and youth support. We also draw board members from organisations that are deeply connected to the Peterborough City and County community.

Our relationship with the Regional HSJCC has now developed to the point where we act as their research broker and they provide funding to the TCRC to host a series of research conversations that develop projects of interest to the HSJCC and wider justice and mental health/addictions sectors. Staff of the TCRC also make personal commitments to various projects and community issues outside of their direct work for TCRC.

Reem Ali
Community Host
New Canadians Centre

Last year, we were fortunate at the New Canadians Centre (NCC) to host Brieanna Elliot and her TCRC project: Supporting Immigrant Entrepreneurs. The project was in-line with the goals of the Peterborough Immigration Partnership, which aims at designing and implementing projects that help immigrants and newcomers integrate into the Peterborough community. The project focused on exploring best practices for supporting immigrant entrepreneurs that currently exist in communities similar to Peterborough, and identifying gaps in our implementation that can be mainstreamed into our own, as well as our partners’ future programming.

Working with Brieanna was a real pleasure. We met on a regular basis at the NCC to review her progress, provide feedback, and ensure that the project was moving according to plan. Brieanna’s self-motivation and commitment helped expand this project beyond its initial framework. Her efforts won her the Runner Up prizes in both the Community Impact and Innovative Presentation categories at this year’s TCRC Celebration.

Brieanna’s research continues to contribute to our ongoing research and implementation around best practices for supporting immigrant entrepreneurs with our community partners. My experience with this project, whether it be supervising a student like Brieanna or collaborating with David Tough at the TCRC, is one that I look forward to repeating again this year. It was a successful initiative that the NCC and the Peterborough Immigration Partnership were proud to be part of as we continue to provide further support to our community that is research-based and informed by existing best practices.
All this outreach work helps maintain strong connections in the community and keep the TCRC aware of community developments, research needs, and who is doing what in Peterborough. Furthering this work over the last few years has allowed us to avoid duplication of research projects and increase the effectiveness of the work undertaken by Trent students.

### County of Peterborough Projects

As noted above, Victoria Veenstra completed her work on the Grist Mill at Lang this last year. This project was funded by the County of Peterborough including a $3000 research award that acknowledged Victoria’s high-quality work. Two History students, Laura Schindel and Logan Taylor, supported by Matt Hayes, also researched the history of the Peterborough County Jail as part of a project that will result in the jail site being turned into a public park with information panels on the history of the site. This project was supported with photography from Matt Hayes. The collaboration with the County of Peterborough continues to demonstrate an excellent model for CBR research with the award of a Rural Economic Development Grant to the TCRC allowing the Centre to provide the County with focused support in the development of research projects that lead to significant student opportunity. For the next academic year, we have projects that will look at the History of the Jacquard Loom at Lang and undertake educational planning for the museum.

### Celebration of Community Research

For many years TCRC has collaborated with Fleming College to jointly host the Community Innovation Forum. This event showcased research projects from both Fleming and Trent students. However we had become victims of our own success with this event,
out-growing our venue at the Golf and Country Club. This year both organisations therefore decided to host separate events. The TCRC’s Celebration of Community Research took place on Friday March 31st in the Champlain Great Hall. The event showcased forty-two community research projects undertaken by Trent undergraduate and graduate students. The morning event received over 300 visitors including students, faculty, and members of the Peterborough community. As always there was a great buzz in the room and much excitement at the work done by Trent students. Dr. Jacqueline Muldoon, Provost VP Academic gave out the student awards. For 2017 we had three awards, Innovative Presentation sponsored by the Workforce Development Board, Academic Achievement in a Community Setting sponsored by Professor Emeritus Dr. John Wadland, and Community Impact sponsored by Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 3908. TCRC would like to thank our award sponsors for their support. See below for a full list of award winners and runners up.

**Academic Achievement in A Community Setting Award**

*First Prize*  
Emily Amon (Sustainable Stormwater Management: Protecting Harper Creek Through Effective Policy & Priority Placement of Rain Gardens)

*Runner Up*  
Mason Godden (History of a Student-led Organization 1990 to 2017)

**Community Impact Award**

*First Prize*  
Callum Stanford (Analysis of Regional Situation Tables)

*First Prize*  
Ryne Evans & Brittany Reid (Evaluating the 2013-2014 Sex Worker Action Project in Peterborough)

*Runner Up*  
Brieanna Elliot (Supporting Immigrant Entrepreneurs)

**Innovative Presentation Award**

*First Prize*  
Skylar Onistchenko-Abrantes (Are Two Heads Better Than One? A Housing Network Evaluation)

*Runner Up*  
Brieanna Elliot (Supporting Immigrant Entrepreneurs)

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**Fundraising and Community Support**

The Trent Community Research Centre is an independent non-profit with charitable status. Though our single largest funder is Trent University, we are also reliant on financial support from a number of other organisations. As noted above, the County of Peterborough has been a significant supporter of TCRC through its gift of a Rural Economic Development Grant to the Centre. This five year agreement has another two years to run. The Regional Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee has also become a significant supporter with the agreement that TCRC will act as the HSJCC’s research developer and broker. In the last two years we have also asked our community partners to offer support where they are in a position to do so. TCRC would like to thank the City of Peterborough, Peterborough GreenUp, John Howard Society Peterborough, New Canadians Centre, Nourish Project, Ontario Invasive Plant Council, Seasoned Spoon Café, Workforce Development Board, Professor Emeritus Dr. John Wadland, Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 3908, Trent University School for the Study of Canada and Trent University School of the Environment for their financial support in 2016-17. It is an important principle for the Centre that community partners are not required to offer a donation in return for a research
project, and we would never want our request for financial support to be a barrier to participation in the program, but as we move forward the support of the Peterborough community is much appreciated in facilitating our work.

### Student Outcomes

The two key aims of the TCRC are to provide valuable research to the Peterborough City and County community and give Trent students a dynamic and original learning experience that can help them in their future careers. Elsewhere in this report you can read the reflections of two students on their CBR projects, but we can also report that two students in the last year have directly cited their CBR experience as critical in obtaining career focused jobs and numerous students who completed CBR projects have been accepted into graduate school. The contribution an engaged community research project can have on a student’s resume is clearly significant and positions TCRC to help Trent meet its experiential learning goals which the province sees as an essential part of the undergraduate experience. As we move forward with better tracking of our students we hope to offer more detailed evidence of the critical value of undertaking CBR as part of both undergraduate and graduate study.

### Board and Staff

There were a number of significant staff changes in 2016/17. In addition to Dr. David Tough coming on as a Post-Doctoral Fellow, James Onusko left TCRC in the summer of 2016 to pursue his university teaching career. James came on board with the Centre at the time that I took over as Executive Director. James took on the unenviable task of managing the office and providing much needed administrative support. We would collectively like to thank James for his work.

In July 2016 Will Pearson joined TCRC as James’ replacement. Will has done an excellent job of further streamlining the Centre’s administration and managing the day-to-day running of the office. Will’s diligent approach to the administration of the Centre has contributed significantly to our costs savings in the 2016/17 year.

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**Michael Andrews**  
TCRC Board Chair

After going through a transitional year in 2015-16, this past year saw the fruits of a significant effort by both staff and the TCRC board to enhance CBR research quality and process. These efforts paid off dividends of additional funding from Trent University, allowing TCRC to bring on another staff member to assist in developing research opportunities for students, bringing the total number of CBR projects displayed at March’s Celebration of Research to 40+.

Having a greater number of research projects completed and more students having the opportunity to engage in experiential learning is a significant achievement for TCRC, but other, less visible outcomes are equally important: relationship building between faculty, students, hosts and Trent University; development of soft skills, or employability skills, for students; and the community impact that results from research findings.

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The Premier’s Highly Skilled Workforce report emphasized the need for students to have experiential learning opportunities – i.e., learning outside of the classroom. Through CBR, students can apply research and communication skills they have learned, but also through engaging with faculty, hosts, research subjects, and key informants, develop the necessary workplace skills needed to be successful after graduation. By undertaking this work, students also broaden their professional networks and discover alternative occupational opportunities available to them.

I look forward to working with the board to support the TCRC in 2017-18 as it continues to seek ways to enhance CBR and work to support all stakeholders – students, faculty, Trent University, and community hosts – to thrive. On behalf of the board, I thank Trent University for its leadership in partnering with TCRC to invest in student learning and community development through the CBR program. I also extend our appreciation to other members of the CBR community, including Peterborough County, for your ongoing support and participation.
As noted elsewhere Matt Hayes was with us for his second year as the Centre’s GTA. Sadly this position came to an end in April 2017. Matt’s significant contribution to the Centre has been greatly appreciated and he will be much missed.

This year also saw changes to the composition of our board of directors. David Hollier, our board chair since 2008, retired from the board at our October AGM, and was replaced as chair by Michael Andrews. Paul Schaffer, Julia Harrison, and Carmella Valles also left the board this year. We thank all our outgoing board members for their contributions to the Centre.

These departures have been made up for by the addition of new board members. Trent Browett joined the board as a student representative and Karen Jopling joined as the County representative at our 2016 AGM. Kristy Buccieri and Yvonne Lai both joined the board later in the year. We welcome our new board members and thank them for their commitment.

- Dr. John Marris
Executive Director

Will Pearson
Office Manager

I joined the Trent Community Research Centre in the summer of 2016, and I’m looking forward to starting another year here this fall.

My role here is a supporting one: I aim to take some of the administrative pressures off our other staff so they can maximize the time they devote to working with students and community hosts. To this end, I pay the bills and track our expenses, check the mail, troubleshoot our IT, and arrange meetings, to name a few regular tasks. I have particularly enjoyed the opportunity to take on financial reporting responsibilities at the TCRC (collaborating with our bookkeeper, Sarah Bailey), because this is something that has required me to learn some new skills.

When time permits, I have been able to take on some extra projects, like interviewing and profiling students for our website and sharing the Centre’s news with local media or on our social media pages. These projects have connected me more directly to the TCRC’s core work, and have allowed me to gain an appreciation for how important this work is. I have been impressed by the quality of the research students are able to produce with our support, and it has been heartening to watch as our community builds research partnerships that have the potential to create a more resilient Peterborough.

Trent Community Research Centre Board of Directors (as of October 2017)

Michael Andrews (Chair)
Jim Blake (U-Links Representative)
Trent Browett (Student Representative)
Kristy Buccieri
Larry Clarke (U-Links Representative)
Martine Cleary (Student Representative)
Stephen Hill
Karen Jopling
Yvonne Lai
Nona Robinson (Ex-officio observer)
Brianna Salmon
When I joined the Trent Community Research Centre late last August as a Post-Doctoral Fellow in Community-Based Research, I had very little exposure to the scholarship on campus-community engagement. My research background had been a pretty conventional one for a historian, with an emphasis on the interpretation of government records in archives. After my post-doc at Trent ended in late 2015, though, I had started Electric City Magazine with a business partner, and, through journalism, was deeply connected to issues in the city that the TCRC was also addressing in its research activities.

My TCRC post-doc was a working post-doc, not a purely research position. I worked alongside John Marris running the CBR program, taking responsibility for about a dozen student projects, and learned what CBR was by doing it in real time. I read enough of the published scholarship on CBR to determine that most of it lacked a sufficient level of detail to be useful to practitioners. The idea of CBR is simple; the intellectual challenge is in the day-to-day details, the practice, whether working with students to carry out their research and present their results or with community hosts to articulate their organizational needs as research questions.

It’s a practice that calls out for an ethnography, and yet the scholarship on the subject is without significant exception normative, describing very abstract ideal scenarios, even when it’s nominally analysing how a given school or centre operates. John and Matt and I have repeatedly discussed how valuable it would be to write a practitioner’s reflection on CBR, one that located the heart of CBR in the tiny interpersonal details of how research partnerships work – and what needs to be done to fix them when they stop working. As practitioners, though, our time is absorbed in doing, leaving little time for work that is superfluous to the core work of getting projects completed and getting results out into the community.

That being said, I have found over the course of my time at the TCRC that my research interests have been shaped by the work, and that the steady drip of urgently necessary tasks has slowly formed furrows of intellectual curiosity, leading it along a particular line. A few months into the work, I started to think about the implications, both for pedagogy, for research output, and for community transformation, of a large-scale oral history of working in Peterborough, from the 1960s to the present. I’m spending part of the summer working on an application to submit to SSHRC to fund it.

As other major institutions shrink and die, and as universities like Trent increasingly come to dominate communities like Peterborough, it is absolutely vital that scholars and students who are committed to scholarship in the public interest push the university to use its financial and operational might to support important work that wouldn’t get done otherwise. Producing scholarship that makes a difference is great, but we also need to think about how we teach and do research, and I’m glad to have been at the Trent Community Research Centre as a Post-Doctoral Fellow.
### Host survey results

Overall, considering the amount of time and commitment required of you and your organization, and the results of the research, how worthwhile was your community-based research experience?

- **Extremely or very worthwhile:** 80%

Do you feel that your research will have an impact on your own organization?

- **Yes:** 93%

Do you feel that your research will have an impact on the wider community?

- **Yes:** 85%

How significant was the work of the project coordinator in supporting the research work during the year?

- **Extremely or very significant:** 87%

How likely are you to recommend the community-based research experience to other community groups?

- **Extremely or very likely:** 93%

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### Student survey results

As a learning experience, how valuable has your community-based research project been to you?

- **Extremely or very valuable:** 83%

How likely are you to recommend the community-based research experience to fellow students?

- **Extremely or very likely:** 78%

How likely are you to use the community-based research experience as part of your resume, or mention it to employers?

- **Extremely or very significant:** 83%
Matthew Hayes
Graduate Teaching Assistant

My two years as a teaching assistant with the TCRC have been invaluable. I have learned new skills, made connections with people and organizations I may have never have otherwise encountered, and developed unique relationships with my students. In many ways, this TAship is a more difficult position than a traditional TAship. Whereas the latter becomes, to a degree, routine and predictable, being a TA with the TCRC constantly presents you with new challenges and new situations to navigate. Especially if you come into this position without any of the necessary skills already developed, it can be a sink or swim experience. But that is also why the position was so rewarding. It pushed me as an academic, and as a coordinator. I believe this is the kind of challenge that traditional TA positions do not always offer.

So what exactly did I learn? The hard skills I developed were those necessary to get a community-based project up and running: development and research design, along with ongoing management and troubleshooting. This included creating spreadsheets or databases of all projects, clearly laying out all relevant categories of information, from student names and numbers, to course codes, to assignments completed and what are still to come, to notes on progress and extensive to-do lists. It also included syncing these tools with those of other TCRC employees, ensuring that they all stay updated and everyone has the relevant information needed at hand - that is, ensuring that my own projects did not become siloed from the others. These are the basic tools used to stay organized, to manage your time effectively, but are not usually taught in graduate school. I also now believe that research design is a hard skill that I learned, in the sense that I had to learn to read a set of research questions and a proposed methodology in order to identify whether or not they form a good fit, to identify potential gaps or flaws that might lead to trouble down the line.

As a result of this skill, a significant amount of editing was also required. The kind of editing used to evaluate a project proposal and its potential impact and how closely it fits the goals identified by a community host is different from the kind of editing employed to mark an undergraduate essay. These are all skills that I learned on the job as a TA, which I do not believe are accessible in traditional classroom settings.

Despite what I said above, the soft skills are, in some ways, even more challenging to master. These included the ability to communicate effectively to several different parties at once, all of whom usually had slightly different goals and expectations in mind. As a TA at the TCRC, you have to be a liaison, and liaising between faculty members - many of whom have never done a CBR project before - and community hosts - many of whom have never done research of this kind before - can be overwhelming. This is where, for example, the above-mentioned organizational and time management skills come in handy. A challenge of being a graduate student doing this work is the expectations placed on you. While it does not happen often, there is the odd time when a faculty supervisor of a project assumes that you are “simply” a TA, and thus do not have a responsibility to contribute to the overall project design and direction. I did encounter this attitude at times during my two years, and it becomes part of the challenge to assert the authority of the position in a way that is compatible with all others involved, and to ensure you do not step on any other toes. In this regard, the TA position is invaluable for recognizing when it is best to step back and let others take the lead, so as to avoid unnecessary confrontation and keep the project going. Meetings with faculty, community hosts, and students are lessons in compromise. Everyone comes to a CBR project with slightly different understandings and expectations of what can and should be done, and it is the job of the TA to attempt to sort these out into a coherent plan of action, so that the project can actually get started. Some projects have become grounded because this compromise could not be negotiated - one of my own ground to a halt because of a misunderstanding that occurred partway through the project. In hindsight, I now realize this was the result of a certain ambiguity around expectations at the beginning of the process, and I was able to successfully avoid this in future projects by ensuring that as much as possible the project’s goals and supervisor’s roles were clear from the beginning.

In short, while there are a number of challenges that a TA with the TCRC might encounter, this is in fact a good thing. It stretches you as an academic to do this kind of work, but considering the majority of graduates do not go on to tenure positions at universities these days, skills such as those I have developed here are invaluable. And what I’ve learned is that these are not skills useful only in corporate jobs, but can be incredibly useful for research as well. It is exciting to know that even if I cannot attain a position as a professor in a university, there are still contributions to be made to research projects in the same environment, which rely heavily on these skills.
Project Numbers

The following is a summary of projects completed, as well as the number of student participants and community hosts for the TCRC.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>TCRC Projects</th>
<th>Projects</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Community Hosts</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate CBR Projects</td>
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<td>Graduate CBR Projects</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Service Learning</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class-based Projects</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grad volunteer opportunities</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>45</strong></td>
<td><strong>139</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This is not a sum of the column, as there were some common hosts between different projects.

Project Hosts

- Peterborough Folk Festival
- Lang Pioneer Village Museum
- County of Peterborough
- Kawartha Sexual Assault Centre
- City of Peterborough
- Peterborough GreenUp
- Camp Kawartha
- The Mount Community Centre
- Ontario Invasive Plant Council
- Artspace Peterborough
- Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre
- Peterborough Police Service
- Human Services & Justice Coordinating Committee
- Trent Community Research Centre
- Seasoned Spoon Café
- Kawartha Komets Special Needs Hockey
- PARN Your Community AIDS Resource Network
- Heads Up For Inclusion
- New Canadians Centre
- Energy Cost Work Group
- YES Shelter For Youth And Families
- Community Climate Change Working Group
- Trent Vegetable Gardens
- Norwood Agricultural Society
- Peterborough Field Naturalists
- Climate Justice Trent
- The Warming Room
- Community Development Council Durham
- OPIRG Peterborough
- Sadleir House
Trent Community Research Centre

An independent facilitator of community-based research.

Offices:
Suite 208, Scott House, Traill College
310 London Street
Peterborough, ON

Phone:
(705) 748 - 1093

Mailing Address:
1600 Westbank Drive
Peterborough, ON, K9L 0G2