



## Immersed in evolution

SJC Senior Faculty Fellow Linc Kesler explores Aboriginal culture over time

While relatively new to St. John's College, Senior Faculty Fellow and Associate Professor Linc Kesler is a man fully immersed in life at UBC. Linc came to the University in 2003 to become the first Director of the First Nations Studies Program. He soon took on the additional responsibilities of Director of the First Nations House of Learning and Senior Advisor on Aboriginal Affairs to UBC President Stephen Toope. Amidst all of this, he also finds time for research, teaching, and inspiring those around him to make Aboriginal issues a strategic priority, to the benefit of both undergraduate and graduate students.

Linc's connection to St. John's College is a natural fit with the latter. He became affiliated with the College late last year and with the help of SJC's new Principal Henry Yu, has been identifying a number of interests common to his own passions and those of SJC residents and faculty members. Together, they are helping Aboriginal students on campus and international indigenous scholars visiting UBC develop closer relationships with the broader University community, starting with St. John's College.

One of the most immediate and tangible ways they are achieving this is by hosting Aboriginal research events and seminars

at the College. Using this physical setting, which is known to be a welcoming and multicultural environment, communicates the important message that Aboriginal programming and studies are accessible – and of importance – to all. Linc believes that increased participation in these events, such as the recent screening of a film developed by some of UBC's Aboriginal faculty members, will lead to better understanding of Aboriginal history, culture, and contemporary issues in general, and at the same time, help create an advanced-level graduate curriculum that is appealing to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and faculty.

As for his own academic work, Linc's long time focus has been on the impact of communications technology on culture. During his nineteen years at Oregon State University, he examined the impact of printing and literacy on the development of theatre, drama and poetry in Britain.

"Many European narrative forms that we now think of as 'literary' existed in various forms for a long time before they were written down," explained Linc. "Even plays from Shakespeare's time may have been worked out collaboratively between actors, before being recorded later in writing, but the change in status

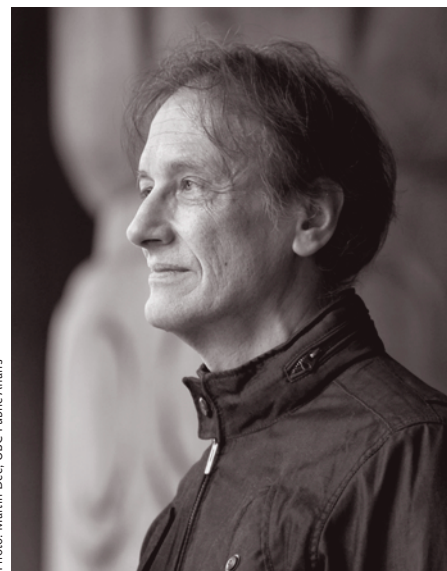


Photo: Martin Dee, UBC Public Affairs

Associate Professor Linc Kesler

brought by printing and commercial production changed many things, including, for instance, in drama, the emphasis on 'plot' as a way to understand change."

Linc's interest in technology and narrative began with the need to understand the oral culture of his grandparents, who lived on the Pine Ridge Indian reservation in South Dakota, and these days he is looking at the impact of new media on the way knowledge is traditionally transmitted within indigenous communities. In many Aboriginal communities, young people are working to capture the oral history of their indigenous cultures by videotaping their elders. On the surface it seems to be a simple solution,

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# Who's not there?

## A running commentary on the Vancouver Winter Games



Stacy Kohut, 1994 Paralympic Gold Medalist in Alpine Skiing.

There are many reasons to take pride in the achievements of our best athletes, and to support the work being done to ensure that the tens of thousands visitors, athletes and volunteers from all over the world enjoy a warm welcome in Vancouver in February 2010. But there are also many questions that can be asked about the political and cultural environment in which the Olympics operates, and the social effects Olympic competition has on those who compete – and on those who are blocked from competing. To examine these questions, St. John's College put together a program of events to encourage conversation about what the Vancouver Winter Games might mean, not just to those who are there, but also to those who are not.

The series, "Who's not there?" kicked off with a reprise of the Whistler Snow Screen, a showing of an eclectic mix of 15 short films telling the Whistler story, but with an Olympic twist.

The series continued with three Wednesday evening talks, each of which focused on factors that could exclude athletes from the Games. First up was Dr. John Hoberman of the University of Texas, the author of numerous books and articles on sports, specifically on their cultural impact, their relationship with race, and the issue of doping. Dr. Hoberman's visit was co-sponsored by the Department of Central, Eastern and Northern European Studies.

Next was a visit from Stacy Kohut, 1994 Paralympic Gold Medalist in Alpine Skiing. A good

sport with a take-no-prisoners drive to win, Stacy has won medals at the Lillehammer and Nagano Paralympics and is still going strong. When not competing, he often speaks to schools in association with outreach programs such as the P.A.R.T.Y. (Prevent Alcohol and Risk Related Trauma in Youth) Program, SmartRisk Foundation, the Esteem Team, and the Whistler/Blackcomb Freeride Team. Stacy is also involved in the design and manufacture of disabled equipment, including sit-skis and four-wheeled mountain bikes. Stacy's topic was disability, and including his take on why Paralympic competition should be integrated with the main Olympic Games.

The series wrapped up with a discussion, led by the College's own

Senior Faculty Fellow, Dr. Patricia Vertinsky, and Postdoctoral Fellow Shannon Jette, focusing on the International Olympic Committee's position on female ski jumpers. The speakers examined the history of women's ski jumping, some of the reasons for its historical exclusion from the Olympic Games, and an analysis of the (failed) lawsuit launched by a group of female ski jumpers and its implications for gender equity.

The "Who's not there?" series was supported in part by the UBC Winter Games Education Initiative. We thank them for the opportunity to engage in thoughtful and provocative discussion with such knowledgeable speakers.

## The end of conflict SJC Distinguished Visitor reveals results of persistence and patience

Some conflicts seem to defy resolution, even in the face of the most heroic efforts. And yet sometimes, with persistence and patience, there are breakthroughs. One of these was in Northern Ireland, and the man who brought it about, General John de Chastelain, was our Distinguished Visitor this past fall.

General de Chastelain served as Canada's ambassador to Washington, but it is as a military man that he made his career,

rising twice to the nation's top military post as Chief of the Defence Staff. Far too energetic to retire when retirement age came, General de Chastelain was appointed Chair of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning. Mandated to disarm both sides of the Irish conflict, the three commissioners have spent the last 10 years negotiating the end of one of the most intractable conflicts of the past half-century.

The idea of inviting the General to St. John's was the inspiration of Tyseer Abounasr, UBC's Dean of Applied Science and a Senior Fellow of the College. Dr. Abounasr was inspired by last year's Muslim Identities initiative at the College, and having heard General de Chastelain speak at a joint Arab-Jewish forum in Ottawa, believed that he could offer valuable insights for the peace process in Palestine. Indeed he did. The October evening took the form of a fire-

side conversation with Dr. Stephen Owen. Former Secretary of State for Indian Affairs and Minister of Public Works, and now UBC's Vice-President for External, Legal and Community Relations, Dr. Owen has extensive experience as a legal advisor and mediator in conflict situations from Northern Ireland to

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Principal Tim Brook

## Message from the Principal

### Farewell from SJC Principal Tim Brook & welcome to Henry Yu

*Since preparing his final message, Tim Brook has finished his term as Principal of St. John's College and moved on to a joint appointment between the Department of History and the Institute for Asian Research. The College thanks him for his service and contributions.*

*With the next issue of the College newsletter, we will take pleasure in more thoroughly introducing you to our new Principal, Dr. Henry Yu, who was confirmed in his appointment as of February 9, 2010 – we literally stopped the presses to bring you this news! Dr. Yu has been an active member of the College community as Associate and Acting Principal since 2006. He looks forward to working together with the Junior Fellows, Faculty Fellows, staff, and alumni during this next pivotal period of St. John's College's growth.*

I began writing this message as the rains of November danced in the puddles outside my office window on University Boulevard. Ever since I moved to Vancouver in 2004, friends have asked whether I've adjusted to the rain. I have assured them that it doesn't rain as much as they suppose,

at least not over the past six years, although those attending the Olympic Games this month may disagree.

The Olympic Games was the topic of a successful seminar series at the College this past fall. "Who's Not There?" was organized to probe some of the

more controversial aspects of the Games, such as the ongoing issue of athlete drug use, the potentially discriminatory nature of the Paralympic Games, and the argument that the exclusion of female ski jumpers from the Olympics betrays the long history of gender bias at the Olympics.

During the time of this series, the College also hosted two Distinguished Visitors. General John de Chastelain, former Chief of the Defence Staff and ambassador to Washington, came to share his experiences in brokering the peace accords in Ireland in a fireside conversation with UBC Vice-President Stephen Owen. And Chippewa legal scholar John Borrows gave the first annual Grant Ingram Memorial Lecture on indigenous traditions of law.

As you all know, Grant was the founding Principal of the College. To mark the inauguration of this annual lecture, St. John's invited elders and dancers of the Musqueam Nation to bless the occasion and reenact the victory dance of Musqueam warrior Giyeplénexw—better known to most of us as Capilano. The College sits on unceded territory of the Musqueam Nation, and it was high time that we made formal acknowledgments of this relationship. The Ingram Lecture gave us that opportunity. It was the best possible way to remember and honour Grant.

In the weeks before I left the College – my stint as Principal concluded at the end of December – I attended a dinner with several former Junior Fellows whom we invited back to the College to discuss how to improve alumni relations. One of them was amused to learn that the clock ticks down on the Principal just as it does on the Junior Fellows. All our terms at St. John's are limited, as they should be. Each Principal brings to the College a set of interests and talents, and each changeover injects new perspectives and new hopes. I must say, though, that my hopes for St. John's remain as high on my departure as they were when I first arrived. St. John's and Green Colleges are among the UBC graduate faculty's richest assets. More than any other institutions on campus, they bring to life the ideals of scholarly community and global engagement that should occupy the heart of graduate education.

Students come to UBC to receive advanced training and engage in innovative research, but when they leave, we hope it is to serve not just themselves or the nations from which they have come, but the world that contains us all. This has been my particular vision as Principal of St. John's. I look forward to seeing what new aspirations my successor will bring to the College, and wish him the best of luck steering St. John's toward its future.

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but with new technology comes new challenges.

"Digital video recording seems very natural, an uncomplicated preservation of oral transmis-

sion," said Linc. "The record that is formed, however, is highly mediated by the technology. It is possible to misunderstand the end product completely unless

serious consideration is given to how the technology changes relationships and understandings. My hope is that my work will help indigenous communities best

position themselves to make use of technology and to understand the impact of what they are creating and preserving."



# An evening conversation with Yu Hua

Anna Belogurova, SJC Junior Fellow

The best selling novelist Yu Hua, the first Chinese writer to win James Joyce Foundation Award (2002), spent an evening enchanting a group of Junior Fellows in the Fairmont Social Lounge last March during his visit to UBC. Author of two of the books named as the ten most influential books in China of the last decade, *To Live* and *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant*, Yu chatted about his craft and his life, telling anecdotes and cracking jokes that subtly confirmed his reputation as a charismatic storyteller.

Yu's style is famous for its simplicity, a virtue he regards highly. He declared that the more a great writer writes, the simpler his language becomes, and offered his favourite author, Jorge Luis Borges, as an example. When asked about his own use

of language, however, he reminded us that he was supposed to be in high school during the Cultural Revolution, but there were no classes to go to: "Because of that, I just don't know enough words. Simplicity had to be my style."

Though Yu refuses to regard himself as a man of high culture, he defended his ability as a craftsman. As an example, he recalled the effort it took to find a way to express the feelings of the protagonist who had just buried his son in his novel, *To Live*. He came up with this passage: "I gazed at that narrow, twisting trail that led to town and heard the sound of my son running barefoot. The moonlight was shining on the trail, giving the illusion that a layer of salt had been sprinkled

along it." In case we missed the point, Yu then clarified what he was doing: It was "like salt on wounds".

Yu famously varies his style from novel to novel. When asked how he does it, he said that his creative motto is not to maintain a style and see reality through that prism, unlike many accomplished writers. Instead, his goal is to convey reality by painting from life. He insisted accordingly that Western readers—as well as Chinese journalists—read too much politics into his fiction. "My books are about life, and life encompasses everything: politics, history, daily life, literature."

He let us sneak into his artistic kitchen when he noted that he found dialogue to be the most difficult part of novel-writing. The problem, he says, is that we cannot know how people spoke in the past. "I fear dialogue the most," he admitted. He goes to libraries to find out how people

in the past dressed, but this will not tell him how they spoke. He has been criticized for the historical inaccuracy of dialogue in his most recent novel, *Brothers*, yet he decided not to correct it, telling us that "a work of art is a work of art and cannot be changed," though he grins while saying this.

When asked why he has chosen to follow in the tradition of Lu Xun by polarizing East and West in his writing, he recalled an exchange with an American publisher who asked why his books focus on families rather than individuals: "There is no space for the individual in Chinese society," he told him, "only for the family." This was not to criticize China, only to point out how polarity helped him see his own culture. In the end, Yu Hua insisted he is not a political commentator but a storyteller, doing whatever he has to do to make us laugh with his anecdotes and weep with his characters.

## Recalling the passion of our first Principal

**SJC celebrates the inaugural visit under the Grant Ingram Visiting Lecturer program**

The inaugural Grant Ingram Visiting Lecture took place on October 22, 2009, with an evening with Professor John Borrows of the University of Minnesota, a recipient of an Aboriginal Achievement Award in Law and Justice, a Fellow of the Trudeau Foundation, and a Fellow of the Academy of Arts, Humanities and Sciences of Canada.

The evening began – most appropriately given Grant's known passion for First Nations issues – with an introduction by Musqueam Elder Larry Grant. He welcomed all those in attendance to the unceded traditional territory on which the College and University sit, and then set the stage for a performance by the Musqueam Warriors Dance Group.

The main part of the evening was Professor Borrows telling of an integrated Anishinabek Academic story, "Living Traditions: Windigo's and Indigenous Law," which delved into the intricacies of law and healing, and revealed the depth of his knowledge as a leading Indigenous law scholar. We were fortunate to share his time at this lecture and then again next morning at a

workshop on "Physical Philosophy, Mobility and Indigenous Peoples".

The Dr. R. Grant Ingram Visiting Lecturer Program was established last year to honour Grant Ingram and his countless contributions to St. John's College. Grant, who passed away in 2007, was a distinguished physical oceanographer who was recruited from McGill University to become the first Principal of St. John's College.

The Ingram Visiting Lecturer Program will bring an individual to UBC each year with expertise in one of the following areas, all of which were of enduring interest to Grant:

- Aboriginal issues, including poverty, health, education, environment, youth, and housing;



Professor John Borrows

- Environment and sustainability, including climate change, marine conservation, water resources, polar research, and biodiversity; and
- Women in science, including contributions made by women scientists, and the working climate.

The Ingram Visiting Lecturer program has been made possible by a generous donation from Professor Helen Burt, Grant Ingram's wife, and St. John's College Senior Faculty Fellow.

# International inspiration

Meet SJC alumnus Jeff Alexander



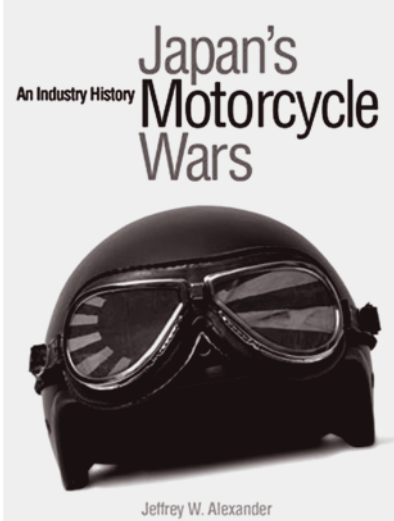
Jeff Alexander, SJC alumnus and Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside.

You never know from where inspiration will come. In the case of Jeff Alexander, SJC alumnus and Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, it may be the camaraderie and “chemistry experiments” that took place in dorm rooms during his time at St. John’s College at UBC 10 years ago.

Jeff is hard at work on his second book project about the history of Japan’s beer brewing industry. While he has put considerable time and effort into

researching Japan’s past and present brewers – including their triumphs and lesser known commercial failures – and the connection between their stories and Japan as an industrial nation, the root of his interest in this subject has a far more humble beginning.

Jeff was a Junior Fellow at SJC from 1999 – 2001. His fondest memories of that time centre around the various social engagements in the dining hall and some of the lesser known recreational activities,



including brewing beer in SJC’s back kitchen.

“We called it ‘bathroom brew’,” he explained with a laugh, “and it was all about the chemistry. We started off brewing it in the kitchen and then we let it ferment in a tank we kept in one of our bath tubs until it was time to enjoy it together at one of our many third floor barbeques.”

Jeff laughs at the suggestion that this may have been his academic inspiration, but also admits that it may not be that much of a stretch. The subject of his first book, *Japan’s Motorcycle Wars: An Industry History*, is also connected to practical experience, that being the public transit strike in Vancouver in 2001 that convinced him to buy his first motorcycle and become passionate about the vehicle’s industrial evolution within Japanese culture.

After completing his doctorate at UBC in 2005, the Ontario native cast about for a welcoming place to pursue Asian Studies. He landed at University of Wisconsin-Parkside with his wife, Carolyne and dog, Willie. He brought with him a new appreciation for international studies, people and culture, which he tries to share with his Asian history students. Jeff recalls that during his time at SJC, the residence would be home to students from up to 30 or 40 different countries.

“Every group, whether they were from Australia, West or South Africa, Iran, Turkey, etc., left their mark on the College in their own subtle way and I carry that with me today. Living at St. John’s College was a fantastic international experience,” he said.

In summarizing his research activity today, Jeff says he focuses on Japan’s major industrial, technological, and commercial transformations since the mid-nineteenth century. He translates and uses Japanese source material to illustrate such themes as how state investment in industry both before and during the Second World War laid the foundations for Japan’s rapid postwar success in consumer product manufacturing. He’s passionate about his work and believes that this examination of business history provides a revealing window into the rest of the country.

Jeff admits that once teaching and research are accounted for, he doesn’t have much leisure time. That said, he and his wife do like to try new restaurants and take in the occasional show. They are in the midst of trying to buy their first house, which has Jeff worried that he’ll have to reinvest in power tools and become more handy, but he hopes he’ll still have time for travel – for personal and professional interests. Last year the couple traveled throughout Japan for a month and they frequently return to Canada to visit family, and speak at or attend professional conferences. Their favourite guilty pleasure is tuning into Hulu.com, a free online video service that provides US-residents with access to a vast array of TV shows on demand, which works well with the demands of juggling students, research and writing. As for what’s next for Jeff Alexander, stay tuned...

# Awards and Honours

## Alumnus recognized for research

We are pleased to announce that College alumnus Muhannad Al-Darbi was recently awarded the 2009 Morris Cohen Award from the Metallurgical Society of the Canadian Institute of Mining, Metallurgy and Petroleum. The award is given annually in recognition of significant contributions to the advancement of corrosion science and engineering in

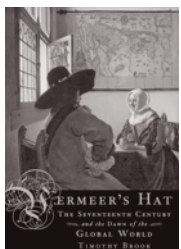
Canada. Muhannad's research has been published, highly referenced, and presented at over 25 national and international conferences and has contributed significantly to the field of corrosion and electrochemical engineering. We congratulate Muhannad on this prestigious professional honour!



College alumnus Muhannad Al-Darbi (left) receiving the 2009 Morris Cohen Award.

Do you know of other St. John's College alumni who have garnered awards in their field? If so, please let us know at [sjc.membership@ubc.ca](mailto:sjc.membership@ubc.ca).

## Brook publications honoured



Outgoing St. John's College Principal Tim Brook was recently awarded two prestigious prizes for his latest books. The

Columbia Graduate

School of Journalism recognized *Vermeer's Hat* with one of its 2009 Lukas Prize Project Awards for Exceptional Works of Nonfiction. Judges noted that: "In *Vermeer's Hat*, Tim Brook plays a dazzling game of extrapolation, looking closely at the domestic accoutrements in half a dozen paintings and demonstrating that Vermeer's ostensible subject – the provincial Dutch city of Delft – was actually a window through which we can today perceive the

rise of international trade during the 17th century and the dawn of global commerce. In masterfully erudite, lucid prose, he... argues, persuasively, that in the global world of the seventeenth century there was 'no place that was not implied by every other place.'

*Vermeer's Hat* is a bold, original, and compulsively readable work of history, a true virtuoso performance."

The other honour came for *Death by a Thousand Cuts* (Timothy Brook, Jérôme Bourgon, Gregory Blue), with the 2009 Wallace K. Ferguson Prize, awarded annually by the Canadian Historical Association for the best book in history other than Canadian. Here reviewers commented that, "At its most basic level,

*Death by a Thousand Cuts* is the history of *lingchi*, an infamous form of imperial Chinese capital punishment. But the book offers so much more than that. It situates this unique cultural phenomenon, which Chinese authorities abolished in 1905 after nearly a millennium of use, within a complex cross-cultural dialogue. The quality of the research and methodology are evident in the book's precise and intelligent prose, which is free of jargon and full of nuance. All of this makes *Death by a Thousand Cuts*, despite its gruesome subject, a unique and delightful discovery."



## The end of conflict *continued from page 2*

the Middle East. He was the perfect interlocutor for an extraordinary evening with General de Chastelain, who reflected on his experience with the Irish peace process and how parties in the Middle East might undertake similar steps to bring that conflict to an end.

Two days later, General de Chastelain gave this fall's St. John's College Lecture at the Vancouver Institute. To the question in his own title, "The Northern Ireland Peace Process 1994–2009: Is It Working?" he gave a strong yes, though he also revealed that this success could not have come without enormous tact, patience,

intelligence and not a little personal bravery on his part. In thanking the General for his time, Principal Tim Brook noted that the Nobel Peace Prize had just been awarded that week to US President Barack Obama, and wondered whether it might also appropriately honor the man who brought one of the most vicious inter-community conflicts of the century to an end.



## About St. John's College

St. John's College has roots that extend back to St. John's University in Shanghai, China. Graduates of the University—known as *Johanneans*—are able, through a blending of Chinese and Western approaches to teaching, to be at home anywhere in the world. Continuing in the tradition of excellence and internationalism of its namesake, St. John's College at UBC aims to build links between different parts of the world, and to serve as an intellectually and culturally diverse centre for its members.

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