



Ontario's Strategic Research Initiative



In early December, 2006, Premier Dalton McGuinty announced in the Provincial Legislature a consultation on the proposed Strategic Plan for the Ministry of Research and

Innovation (MRI) and, by inference, the setting of direction for research in the province of Ontario.

This is the first time that the Province of Ontario has explicitly set out goals and objectives for investments in research and innovation – people, ideas and infrastructure. Although initially a technology-centric approach, Ontario universities' VPs Research asserted strongly the need to ensure that the full spectrum of research and scholarship in our universities is valued equally and that the Province must nurture the very strong foundational base of scholarship and science that is the key to providing support for research and innovation. Universities are the engines of knowledge development and innovation.

The Province strongly desires to ensure Ontario's leadership in research in Canada and internationally. MRI will be conducting a province-wide as well as an on-line consultation on the Strategic Plan. It is important that as many people as possible review the plan and express their opinions on the directions for research focus and investment.

For more information on the content of the Strategic Plan see <http://www.mri.gov.on.ca/english/strategy/documents/strategyPlan.pdf>. To participate in the on-line consultation, go to http://www.mri.gov.on.ca/english/strategy/ontario_plan_qc.asp.

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Not all fun and games: The serious business of play and leisure

Not surprisingly, as the President of the Association for the Study of Play, Ann Marie Guilmette sees a wide application for the study of humour. But, she also needs to combat some misconceptions. Unfortunately, play has a bad reputation.

Guilmette's research interests revolve around the therapeutic and empowering effects of humour and leisure, and especially for those she calls "vulnerable populations – the elderly, women, and aboriginal First Nation and multi-cultural populations."

Guilmette's social psychological interpretation of play supports the link between an empowered population and a healthy and vibrant society, yet "the way our society is structured doesn't necessarily make play welcome."

Play often seems disrespectful; it challenges the hierarchy of society and "allows us to see each other as human beings, as equals." This may sound utopian, but, in a society that values titles and status, "we tend to prefer the vertical hierarchy when we know who got where because of what."

Other forms of play like games, sports and humour are seen as legitimate only under certain circumstances. Society demands that leisure time be earned and paid for -- an obvious barrier for socially-disadvantaged populations. Guilmette laments this bias toward the commodification of play and leisure experiences: "If we truly believe that play is essential, it's got to be essential for all."

Society tends to characterize play as immature, tolerated only until a certain age. So we need to use other labels to describe adult play experiences – sport, recreation and leisure, travel, humour, games, and even

gambling and astrology. "But are they really so distinct? What's the key element, the key term?" In her current project, Guilmette tackles the controversy arising from the use of so many labels. In *All Roads Lead to Play*, she will address those various experiences to form a theoretical framework for adult play.

Guilmette's interest in humour in the workplace has spawned a partnership with a Danish researcher that will compare the effectiveness of workplace wellness initiatives in Canada and Denmark.

The apparent chaos of play is frowned upon. "Chaos represents the world of

the possible – not the world as it is, but the way the world might be. And that's fundamentally what play is – it's that world of alternatives." Playful classrooms are often seen as "ineffective" because they look wild and unstructured. But, says Guilmette, "the learning experience is, in fact, richer for it."

Guilmette is happy to be part of the trend toward interactivity at many museums. The newly renovated and renamed Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, NY,

will house the Association for the Study of Play. In April 2007, the Strong and the International Play Association will co-host the TASP annual meeting. Guilmette will deliver the Presidential Address and present the Brian Sutton-Smith Play Scholar Award.

Guilmette also served as a consultant for the Canadian Museum of Civilization in the development of the International Toy Exhibit scheduled to open in February 2007. In spring 2007, Guilmette will participate in an Educational Forum in the humanities on an exploration of play, presenting "Play and Humour: Strategies for the Classroom" at the



"Play is intended to subvert the social order, the hierarchy of society."

Dr. Ann Marie Guilmette,
Associate Professor,
Recreation and Leisure Studies

~ cont'd

University of Idaho.

Regrettably, says Guilmette, elementary and secondary schools tend to undervalue play, but “universities have the capacity to enliven students. It’s what makes being a professor such an enjoyable experience.”

While Guilmette is quick to emphasize the Studies part of the Recreation and Leisure Studies Program title, she and other professors in the program deliberately bring humour into the classroom. “Students then think of you as caring because play and humour communicate that. [They] feel like they belong, their ideas are welcome, their input is valued.”

Guilmette has a healthy respect for the potential pitfalls of recreation and leisure. “People forget that there’s also a down side

to humour. It’s not all fun and games.” Youth risk behaviours are especially worrying. Yet, despite alarming numbers of youth who gamble, Guilmette remains optimistic. Her research with Lakehead University’s Bill Montelpare (formerly at Brock) may lead to a deeper understanding of the factors that allow some youth gamblers to walk away from the table.

While she acknowledges that she can sometimes seem “overwhelmingly enthusiastic,” the professor of “sex, drugs and rock ’n’ roll” takes humour seriously. The key, she says, is to understand “the context in which legitimate leisure experiences can be beneficial and the times when they can be harmful.”

~by Jeannie Mackintosh

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The Spirit of Tecumseh: Perspectives on aboriginal education and research

For two years now, the Tecumseh Center for Aboriginal Research and Education has been strengthening knowledge of aboriginal culture and language in both the native and non-native communities. The Centre is set up like a family, with a community of researchers working together to effect change. “Ideas like community connectivity, the control of indigenous knowledge and reciprocity are all fundamental when conducting aboriginal research,” says aboriginal Research Officer, John Hodson.

The Tecumseh Centre positions Brock as a leader in promoting aboriginal culture and heritage education by supporting researchers and scholars who are interested in working with and in aboriginal communities. Hodson sees the Centre as “the bridge between university professors and aboriginal communities,” offering researchers “cultural, technological and educational” research support.

The Centre also aims to influence attitudes towards aboriginal communities. Hodson acknowledges recent “significant changes around aboriginal research made by the Tri-Council favour aboriginal cultural norms.” Mutual respect and understanding between the people who know and the people who want to know facilitates the research process. The Centre encourages scholars to make a contribution through their research to the healing process of indigenous peoples. “The research must have benefits for aboriginal communities as well as researchers,” says Hodson.

The application of research strengthens the Centre’s other main focus: education. Brock University has welcomed approximately 300 aboriginal students to its campus and a further 100 throughout the province. So far, undergraduates make up the bulk of the enrolment, but graduate students continue to join the Brock family. In the words of Janie Hodson, Administrative Officer for the Centre, “we want to protect and assist each one of those students because aboriginal communities need them desperately. The Center focuses on supporting those indigenous students so that they reap the full benefits of education.”

The Centre “takes a broad view of what education means in the aboriginal community,” says John Hodson. The Centre liaises with all faculties at Brock to support its multi-disciplinary approach. Additionally, the Centre’s growing network affords non-aboriginal and aboriginal teachers alike access to new and necessary resources to their scholarship. Collaborations with CIDA, York University, the Ministry of Education and aboriginal institutions will result in the development of elementary curricula for aboriginal education.

Ideally, Hodson hopes that “Ministry of Education-sponsored



Tecumseh Centre staff (from left to right):

**John Hodson, Michelle Sherry, Sarah McGean,
Michael Manley-Casimir, Lyn Trudeau, Janie Hodson**

resources for non-aboriginal teachers around the whole issue of aboriginal learning and teaching” will further enhance that mutual understanding in Ontario’s classrooms. He notes that “all levels of government have begun to see the benefits of providing funds for aboriginal research and education in an effort to promote change.” The Tri-council and the Province of Ontario have increased their investment, funding research within the Faculty of Education as well as other faculties.

Ultimately, the Tecumseh Centre aims to revive hope within aboriginal communities. “There is a great emphasis on education based on decolonization and healing,” says Hodson. “Part of that education is research and learning about the aboriginal communities and then using that [knowledge] to counter what is essentially a colonial residue. By looking at socio-economic and cultural realities, we can engage programming that disrupts unhealthy cycles. Brock University, has demonstrated a willingness to support the Tecumseh Centre, and by extension aboriginal communities.”

“I think aboriginal communities are the world’s hope for the future. There is knowledge in aboriginal communities that the mainstream has ignored,” says Janie Hodson. “The first step is to support the healing of the communities. Engaging mainstream faculties and universities [is] part of that healing process.” Acting Director, Dr. Michael Manley-Casimir, believes that the Tecumseh Centre is a concrete example of a social justice initiative that Brock can support. “Clearly Aboriginal people in Canada have many serious issues that plague their communities that are connected to colonization. Bringing the power of culturally informed research and education to bear in an effort to disrupt those realities is what the Tecumseh Centre is all about.”

~ by Eustace Wallace

Eustace Wallace is a student of Political Science at Brock University.