YORK RESEARCH
innovative, interdisciplinary & collaborative research

URBAN RESEARCH
URBAN RESEARCH AT YORK UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH & INNOVATION

York researchers are undertaking visionary research of local, national and international significance. York is a leading force in the development of new knowledge that provides insight into the scientific, economic, social and cultural issues affecting our world. Our interdisciplinary and collaborative research tackles real-world challenges with real-world solutions in areas like health, sustainability, international studies, and culture and entertainment. York’s interdisciplinary and collaborative research focus enables York researchers to push beyond traditional research methods and develop truly unique solutions. By challenging the ordinary and delivering the unexpected, York research is redefining university research in Canada.

“York University is a key partner in our urban strategies within the Town of Markham, The Regional Municipality of York, and the Greater Toronto Area. Its relevant, real-world urban research is the basis for knowledge exchange within our community and has an important impact on our region’s socio-economic issues.”

W. Donald Cousens
Mayor
Town of Markham

RENOVED URBAN RESEARCHERS

York’s urban researchers are creating new knowledge and understanding. York University has extensive basic and applied research strengths in the broad area of urban research and world-renowned expertise in the study of all aspects of city life, including housing, air quality and pollution, homelessness, politics and governance, crime and security, diversity, transportation, immigration and global cities, the urban economy, community capacity-building, citizenship, public and community health, the impact of technology on cities, arts and culture, entertainment, and sustainability. York facilitates the work of leading urban researchers. Below is a sampling of those scholars and the urban research strengths at York.

Canada Research Chairs

Engin Isin, Canada Research Chair in Citizenship Studies researches cities as spaces of citizenship in both contemporary and historical – as well as Western and non-Western – societies. He also directs the Citizenship Studies Media Lab, an innovative conduit for collaborative research.

Janine Marchessault, Canada Research Chair in Art, Digital Media and Globalization, studies the role played by artist communities and cultural industries in the life of cities such as Toronto, Helsinki and Mexico.

Jianhong Wu, Canada Research Chair in Applied Mathematics, has assembled a national team of mathematicians, virologists, infectious disease experts and leading health policy experts to map the spread of SARS throughout global cities. Using complex computer simulations to track and predict the pattern of infection members of the team are already
starting to build comparison models to better understand the spread of SARS, West Nile virus, anthrax, HIV, and malaria across cities.

Vincent Tao, Canada Research Chair in Geomatics Engineering, develops innovative solutions and technologies for satellite image-based 3D urban mapping and modeling. This technology has important real-world applications to emergency response, disaster management, and telecommunication. He is on the Board of Directors of the Urban and Regional Information Systems Association.

**Researching the Urban Environment**

Roger Keil researches urban politics, governance, and urban ecology in major global cities such as Toronto, Los Angeles and Frankfurt, and along with Gene Desfor has recently completed a new book, titled *Nature and the City: Making Environmental Policy in Toronto and Los Angeles*. In addition, Keil is embarking on a major collaborative project with Harris Ali that will investigate how processes of globalization have affected the transmission and response to SARS within the context of Toronto as a global city.

David Wiesenthal studies traffic congestion and driver behaviour in the urban environment, and has developed the “Driving Vengeance Questionnaire” to gauge a motorist’s potential to commit violence against other motorists. He also researches tactics for stress reduction, safety aspects of cellular telephone use, and a variety of objectionable driving behaviours.

York also recently hosted a major interdisciplinary, international research project on the Culture of Cities, led by Alan Blum, that brought together researchers in fields as diverse as economics, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, law, literature, and the visual arts in a comparative analysis of urban environments in several cities across the world.

Researchers at York are also studying urban environments through the perspective of science and engineering, applying their scientific expertise, for example, to improve urban air quality. For example, Diane Michelangeli uses sophisticated, three-dimensional computer models to chart air pollution while Geoff Harris, Director of the Centre for Atmospheric Chemistry, develops spectroscopic methods and instruments that can be used to detect chemicals involved in regional and urban oxidant formation. In addition, the Canada Foundation for Innovation recently awarded a multi-million dollar infrastructure grant to a team of York University researchers, led by John McConnell and the Centre for Research in Earth & Space Science, to undertake multi-scale air quality modeling and forecasting. Infrastructure for the project will consist of atmospheric sensors, facilities for the development of advanced sensors, and computers to improve the forecasting of air quality on urban, regional, and global scales.

**Researching Urban Diversity & Social Justice**

Barbara Rahder has been researching urban issues for almost 30 years, with an emphasis on participatory social research and planning with urban residents, particularly women marginalized by poverty, racism, sexism, and other experiences. Much of her work has focused on issues of access to affordable housing and community services.
Marc Stein researches gender and sexuality in urban politics and urban geographies, and is the author of *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972*. He is also on the editorial board of *H-Urban*, a moderated, multi-disciplinary forum for discussion and dissemination of scholarship on urban history and urban studies. Co-author with Engin Isin of the book *Citizenship and Identity*, Patricia Wood researches the relationship between the City of Calgary and the T’suu T’ina First Nation. Wood also studies citizenship, identity politics, and diversity in cities and their relationship to urbanization.

Joseph Mensah, author of *Black Canadians*, researches Ghanaian immigrants in the City of Toronto, while Lucia Lo uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) tools to map the settlement of immigrants, and to help develop public policies on immigrant services. In particular, she is studying the preferences of Chinese immigrant consumers for local, ‘ethnic’ businesses, and how larger, ‘mainstream’ businesses are attempting to compete with the ‘ethnic’ economy. Valerie Preston is a social geographer currently investigating public debates concerning the impact of immigration on the landscapes of Canadian and Australian cities, immigrant women’s integration in urban labor markets, and the ways transnational migration affects citizenship in Canadian cities.

Ranu Basu, meanwhile, uses GIS to explore issues of inequality, social justice, and public service provision in cities. Her work focuses on the geographies of collective action, neoliberalism and educational restructuring in Ontario’s cities.
Demonstrating York’s commitment to urban research on a global scale, Lisa Drummond researches Vietnamese cities, with an emphasis on popular culture and social norms of femininity and womanhood while Linda Peake explores the articulation of social relations of class, gender, race and sexuality in relation to urban places in both the North and the South. Author of De-Coca-Colonization: Making the Globe from the Inside Out, Steven Flusty studies the cultures of globalization in cities around the world.

**Researching Urban Development & Change**

Warren Crichlow explores the changing nature of the city, with a particular emphasis on the reclamation of abandoned buildings and warehouse spaces for new cultural uses. Jon Caulfield studies the redevelopment of deindustrialized space in Toronto and the history of nineteenth-century inner Toronto church buildings. Shelley Hornstein studies concepts of place and spatial politics in architectural and urban sites. Her current work looks at travel and our fascination with buildings and places.

Gene Desfor is researching changing urban waterfronts by drawing together researchers from social scientific, humanities and scientific disciplines, on a project that investigates Toronto’s waterfront during the past hundred years.

Gerda Wekerle, in collaboration with Anders Sandberg and Liette Gilbert, researches the Oak Ridges Moraine – examining issues related to urban sprawl, environmentalism and citizen planning initiatives. Wekerle’s recent publications focus on urban agriculture and planning, the cultural landscapes of immigrants’ urban gardens, the security agenda and anti-terrorism in cities, and exurban movements to limit sprawl.

**Shaping Urban Policy & Building Community Partnerships**

York’s urban researchers are closely connected to their immediate environments and have a relevant and beneficial impact on their communities – influencing public policy and, by extension, individual lives.

For example, Peter Mulvihill is leading an action-based research project that focuses on Dufferin County, part of the Headwaters Country region north of Toronto, in which York University is part of a network of partners engaged in a range of sustainability initiatives. The project aims to develop effective sustainability strategies in ex-urban and rural areas faced with a daunting array of sustainability challenges, resulting in large part from their proximity to sprawling urban regions.

Bryan Massam, Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, is engaged in the search for meaningful definitions and interpretations to determine what exactly constitutes, ‘quality of life.’ His work helps academics, government officials and the general public to incorporate this concept in their deliberations concerning urban public policy issues such as equity, sustainable development, and global flows of capital, labour and information.

Stephen Gaetz is committed to research on homelessness, youth culture, criminal victimization, and community development within urban settings. He coordinating the highly successful 2005 Canadian Conference on Homelessness, the first national interdisciplinary research conference on homelessness to be held in Canada. Over 700
people attended the conference, which enabled those who conduct research, provide direct services, develop programs and formulate policy a unique opportunity to share their research, analysis, and insights into homelessness in Canada. While the conference delivered a set of recommendations, it also provided a forum to figure out how research can better be utilized to support future solutions to homelessness.

Susan McGrath, Director of the Centre for Refugee Studies, is developing a university-community research partnership with the Jane and Finch community, which surrounds York University’s Keele Campus. McGrath is also a member of the Black Creek West Community Planning Project. She has written on issues related to social planning and community development, and has extensive experience as a community worker in social service agencies and advocacy organizations including child welfare, parent education, social housing, child poverty, social planning, and settlement services.

The Canadian Century Research Infrastructure is a pan-Canadian, multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional effort to develop a set of interrelated databases centered on data from the 1911-1951 Canadian censuses. These databases will then be joined to other existing databases covering earlier and later periods. The project – with a York University site directed by Gordon Darroch – will permit unprecedented analysis of how Canada has become one of the most urbanized nations on earth, ultimately providing a new foundation for the study of social, economic, cultural and political change.

York’s urban research also touches the immediate community through a number of initiatives, such as the York Region Human Services Planning Coalition (HSPC), a high-level strategic planning agency, of which York University is a member, that brings together representatives from schools, hospitals, religious groups, and others to improve the quality of life in the Regional Municipality of York. With the help of the Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement, Paul Anisef is currently undertaking a study of immigrants to York Region – a study that will be disseminated by the HSPC and lead to better policy formation, decision-making, and strategic planning. Anisef recently edited, with Michael Lanphier, The World in a City, a collection of essays that explores Toronto’s ability to sustain a civic society in the face of immigration and multiculturalism.

Along with the National Research Council of Canada, RBC Royal Bank and the Town of Markham, York University is one of the founders of the Innovation Synergy Centre in Markham (ISCM). ISCM utilizes research undertaken by York’s Schulich School of Business to help accelerate the growth of Small and Mid-Sized Enterprises in the Greater Toronto Area, and, by extension, to improve the Canadian economy in urban areas and beyond.
RENOWNED CENTRES & STATE-OF-THE-ART FACILITIES

World-class facilities enable world-class research
York houses a number of centres and facilities that serve to coordinate and focus research in the broad area of urban research.

In addition to the Centre for Atmospheric Chemistry and the Centre for Research in Earth and Space Science – both of which facilitate important urban research on air quality and pollution – York is home to the Geospatial Information and Communication Technology Lab, a leader in developing technologies for satellite image-based 3D urban mapping and modeling.

One of four national centres in Canada, the Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS) is a consortium of Toronto-area universities, immigrant service agencies, community groups, and planning councils. Formed to generate information about the social impact of immigration, CERIS influences policy and practice in order to help facilitate the integration of immigrants into the Greater Toronto Area and Canadian society.

The Institute for Social Research undertakes fee-for-service research and analysis on behalf of researchers, government, and communities in many areas that touch upon urban issues such as education, housing, gender issues, energy and the environment, health and medical services, politics, law, and other social issues.

Researchers at York’s Institute for Research and Innovation in Sustainability examine many issues of urban sustainability, while the Citizenship Studies Media Lab undertakes and supports urban research on issues of citizenship concerning aboriginal rights, women’s rights, civil rights, sexual rights for gays and lesbians, animal rights, language rights and disability rights.

RENOWNED JOURNALS
York researchers also edit a number of high profile, internationally renowned journals that draw together the knowledge and expertise of academics from across the world to explore urban issues. Prestigious publications such as Public; Topia; Refuge; Citizenship Studies; Studies in Political Economy; the Canadian Review of Social Policy; the International Journal of Urban and Regional Research; Gender, Place and Culture; and Capitalism Nature Socialism are providing a forum for new ideas and critical thinking in many areas of urban research.
TRAINING THE URBAN LEADERS OF TOMORROW

With many graduate and undergraduate programs related to urban studies, York’s academic programs are helping to develop Canada’s next generation of Highly-Qualified People. Students participate in a wide-range of research endeavours.

York offers undergraduate programs in urban studies, geography, environmental science, environmental studies, earth and atmospheric science, and ecology – all with focuses on urban settings and cities. York’s Faculty of Environmental Studies (FES) offers an undergraduate BES degree that features “Urban and Regional Environments: Analysis, Planning and Design” as one of its Areas of Concentration. Students also have certificate options in Environmental Landscape Design and Geographic Information Systems, enabling them to acquire critical professional knowledge for the urban studies field.

With graduate degrees in a number of areas, including geography and environmental studies, York’s Master’s and PhD programs boast a significant number of student researchers undertaking cutting-edge work on urban issues in geography, political sciences, sociology, environmental studies, atmospheric chemistry and many other disciplines. York is also renowned for urban planning: many Master’s students in FES graduate with a Professional Planning Degree recognized by the Canadian Institute of Planning. Many PhD students within FES and in other units, such as the Department of Geography, focus on urban planning and policy.

Additionally, York recently launched the first Ontario university program in emergency management, which will provide professional education in an area of particular importance within urban environments.

To learn more about research at York University, contact Dr. Stan Shapson, Vice-President Research & Innovation, 200 York Lanes, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M3J 1P3, 416-650-8207 (phone), 416-650-8197 (fax), vpri@yorku.ca.

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