OPENTHINK INITIATIVE

Progress Report
October 2020

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
Dalhousie's OpenThinkers were selected from a large applicant pool with an emphasis on those who displayed prior interest in knowledge translation activities and reflected the diversity of academic disciplines and personal backgrounds that exist in the graduate student community.

- **TARI AJADI**  
  Political Science  
  Exposing bias in health care

- **NICOLE ARSENAULT**  
  IDPhD  
  Promoting sustainable food

- **CAITLIN CUNNINGHAM**  
  IDPhD  
  Putting nature into urban planning

- **NICOLE DORIA**  
  Health  
  Uncovering sexual violence in dating apps

- **TIFFANY GORDON**  
  Philosophy  
  Aiming philosophy at social justice issues

- **TAREQ YOUSEF**  
  Medicine  
  Exploring the brain behind who we are

- **PHILLIP JOY**  
  Health  
  Empowering gay men to be body positive

- **KARINNE LANTZ**  
  Law  
  Leveraging international law for human rights

- **CHRIS WHITE**  
  Engineering  
  Building the future of sustainable power

- **TAYLOR HERSH**  
  Marine Biology  
  Eavesdropping on whale conversations
OpenThinkers attended a series of professional development sessions aimed at providing the skills they need to harness a range of communications channels to share their research. Sessions included:

- Writing about research: Pauline Dakin, Assistant Professor and Associate Director, Journalism, University of King’s College
- Harnessing social media: Terra Tailleur, Assistant Professor, Multimedia, University of King’s College
- Working with journalists: Kristan Hines, Senior Vice-President, Public Affairs and Tara Wickwire, Associate Vice-President, NATIONAL Public Relations
- Writing editorials: David Swick, Assistant Professor, Journalism, University of King’s College
- Building your brand: Kim Pittaway, Executive director, MFA in Creative Nonfiction, University of King’s College
- Data visualization: Paul Williams, Director, Creative Services, Dalhousie University
- Writing for The Conversation Canada: Scott White, Editor-in-Chief and Hannah Hoag, Deputy Editor, The Conversation Canada
THE OPENTHINK LAUNCH

The initiative was announced with a Dal News article and was shared with the Dal community as the lead story in the university’s weekly eNewsletter. It was also shared as the lead item in FGS’s weekly eNewsletter and was the focus of a social media campaign, which introduced each of the OpenThinkers individually.

The Dal News story received 2,843 pageviews and, the 10th most read story of 2020, and the social media campaign supporting the launch was widely shared by Dalhousie leaders, departments and the faculties where OpenThinkers study.
THE OPENTHINK BLOG

OpenThinkers have tackled a wide range of topics in their blogs from the limits of renewable energy to quackery in the vision industry to sexualized violence enabled by the internet. They also used their research perspectives to investigate issues related to COVID-19 and to help people make sense of the racialized violence and systemic discrimination that has recently grabbed headlines.

Since its launch in May, the OpenThink blogging platform has been visited more than 10,000 times, with each OpenThinker attracting hundreds of readers.

Email promotion

To ensure the graduate community remains engaged, FGS regularly shares the initiative’s blogs and activities via the faculty’s weekly eNewsletter delivered to an audience of close to 5,000 Dalhousie graduate students, faculty and staff. In total, 11 eNewsletter items have been published since May, resulting in more than 300 clicks through to blog posts and other content.

SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

To support the OpenThink initiative, FGS launched a social media strategy to amplify the content production and activities of the OpenThinkers. The strategy included the establishment of a dedicated OpenThink Twitter account to disseminate new blog posts. The Faculty of Graduate Studies Twitter and Facebook accounts were also used to promote the initiative.

To date, this activity has generated:

- 225 retweets
- 366 likes
- 64,416 impressions
- 29 posts
- 802 engagements
- 14,007 impressions

This tabulation does not include the extensive social media engagement driven by the OpenThinkers themselves in the name of the program, or the extended ripple effect of FGS posts. A key aspect of the strategy has been to engage Dal faculties and external organizations to whom OpenThinker research will be of interest.
MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

The OpenThink Initiative has opened the door for OpenThinkers to share their expertise and research via the media including coverage in print and broadcast news.

Print

- Chris White – Chronicle Herald: Reused car batteries could help renewable power grid
- Nicole Arsenault – Cape Breton Post: COVID-19 highlights instability in food system
- Nicole Doria – Halifax Examiner: Researcher: ‘Feel no shame, sext your quarantine away’ but be safe
- Tari Ajadi – Chronicle Herald: How anti-Black racism affects the health of Nova Scotians of African descent

Radio and television segments

- Tiffany Gordon on “cancel culture”, CTV News Atlantic
- Phillip Joy on men who buy steroid supplements for Sputnik News Agency.
- Tari Ajadi on what defunding the police would look like, CBC Radio Information Morning
- Tari Ajadi on prison reform, News 95.7 Sheldon McLeod Show

THE CONVERSATION CANADA

OpenThinkers put their professional development training focused on editorial writing to work for The Conversation Canada, a source of news and views, from the academic and research community, delivered direct to the public. The three articles published were pitched during a workshop with the editor-in-chief and have received a total 58,584 pageviews as of early October.

- Karinne Lantz, "What a Dutch Supreme Court decision on climate change and human rights means for Canada"
- Phillip Joy (co-written with Stefan Heinze-Milne), "Men are buying potentially risky steroid substitutes online to get the ‘ideal body’"
- Tareq Yousef, "There's no evidence that blue-light blocking glasses help with sleep"
OUTREACH

As part of their mandate, OpenThinkers pursue opportunities to share their research through public presentations. While COVID-19 did create some hindrance, OpenThinkers found venues to connect with the community online in unique and powerful ways.

Panels

• Tari Ajadi and fellow Dalhousie PhD student Keisha Jefferies organized an anti-Black racism panel to kick off Black History month
• Tiffany Gordon was a panelist at the Dal-hosted “Speak Truth to Power: Forum on anti-Black racism”

Presentations

• Tareq Yousef won Dalhousie’s 3 Minute Thesis competition
• Caitlin Cunningham has made numerous presentations to teachers and students as part of the “Skype a Scientist” series, with her next appearance scheduled for October 21st. She can also be seen in ‘No Time like the Presentation’ on the Skype a Scientist YouTube channel (Caitlin’s presentation begins at the 42:30 mark of the video)
• Nicole Arsenault submitted a poster and presentation for October’s virtual LCA Food 2020 conference
• Nicole Doria hosted a presentation for the Brown University Center for Digital Health, “How are online spaces affecting sexual health”
• Tareq Yousef presented a graduate student workshop on science communication at ComSciConCan 2020
• Taylor Hersh was selected to present at the 2020 Explorers Club Annual Dinner Grantee Symposium on October 10th in New York City
This year’s group of OpenThinkers has set a high bar for engaging with the public and sharing their diversity of knowledge and informed views. They have also been effective brand ambassadors displaying a passion for research and inspiring prospective students across a range of disciplines. We asked some of them to provide their thoughts on their experience.

In the OpenThinkers’ words

The OpenThink initiative and the training that it provided has made me more comfortable with disseminating my ideas and giving me a stronger “public voice”. I am hopeful that my outreach has helped to spur readers to think about some new ideas or to engage with issues in a new and interesting way. I look forward to using the skills that I am developing to communicate the law and public policy in a manner that makes it more accessible, while also encouraging people to think about the role of law and its ability to effect positive change at home and abroad.

OpenThink has taught me invaluable communication skills that have made me a much better science communicator. Through the OpenThink blogs I have had opportunities to make technical renewable energy topics more accessible and digestible for the public. Going through the process of simplifying these topics has also deepened my own understanding in ways I didn’t expect. Thanks to the OpenThink platform, my writing has reached a much wider audience including local news media.

Since joining OpenThink, I have learned how to make my work more accessible to the public and effectively engage with social media. I have also learned the importance of using the skills that I have developed as a graduate student to provide a critical lens on contemporary issues of concern. Finally, I now have access to a community of supporters who have encouraged me throughout this process and championed my work. Participating in this program has been a great experience, and I would highly recommend it to other graduate students who are interested in knowledge translation.

Participating in OpenThink has been a great opportunity for me. The learning we’ve done as a group to help us make our work more accessible to a wider audience is extremely valuable, and we’ll continue to benefit in the future. On a personal level, I’m so grateful for the community I’ve built with my fellow OpenThinkers – it’s not often that we get to form friendships and collaborate with students from outside of our little academic bubbles, and doing so has broadened my intellectual horizons and helped me to situate my research within a larger societal context. This community has also helped me navigate the unique challenges that have arisen during 2020.

Our society’s obsession with media has created a nebulous and difficult to navigate public dialogue. The OpenThink program permits entry into this world through its curation of expert-led workshops and support in editorial publication. The collaboration and freedom offered by the program has allowed students from disciplines to benefit from this—even someone who studies fish eyes.