

Bringing Research to LIFE

Upcoming Events

Café Scientifique

NATURE AND NURTURE (NOT VERSUS): THE NEW SCIENCE OF EPIGENETICISM

Epigenetics steps in where mapping the human genome left off. Nature says we inherit our genetic make-up or DNA code from our parents. Many believe this code and the genes it represents set the 'program' for who we are and what health risks we might possess. Nurture (or epigenetics) says that this program can be 'hacked' by life experience, either increasing or decreasing health risks already in our DNA code. Join our experts in a discussion about whether we can control our health destinies by controlling what we eat, drink, breathe, and where we live.

Experts:

Dr. Jim Davie
Dr. Kirk McManus
Dr. Mojgan Rastegar

Moderator:

Dr. Peter Cattini

Jan. 28, 2013 – 7pm

McNally Robinson Booksellers
1120 Grant Ave., Event Atrium

RSVP to:

Research_Communications@
umanitoba.ca or 204-474-6689

Visionary Conversations

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon:

Does the Rise of China Mean the Decline of the West?

Join our panel of experts as they discuss the implications and opportunities that the rise of China as an economic powerhouse has for western nations.

Feb. 6, 2013

Reception in gallery:

6:30 – 7 pm

Panel discussion: 7 – 8:30 pm

Robert B. Schultz Theatre
St. John's College,
Fort Garry Campus

Featured speakers:

Tina Chen
George MacLean
Hari Bapuji
Colin Robertson

RSVP to:

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A first in research: linking politicians' behaviour to increased votes

Groundbreaking study to be published in top political science journal

BY KATIE CHALMERS-BROOKS
For The Bulletin

Researcher Royce Koop has some good news for Canadian democracy: voters do in fact care about what members of Parliament do on the job, and will reward—or punish—them at the polls.

Koop is part of an international research group that discovered that MPs who introduced a private member bill had a seven per cent greater chance of winning their seat again.

"We were pretty shocked by this, shocked in a good way," says Koop, noting that study after study reveals Canadians are disenchanted by how they're represented in Ottawa. "It does seem that people are paying attention, maybe more than we give them credit for. Politicians should be aware of that."

Proving whether or not representative democracy works as it's designed to is tough. A key component of this political model requires citizens notice and respond to the behaviour of their elected officials. "But establishing that this relationship exists is actually tricky because many other variables intervene at some point," says the political studies assistant professor.

He and his research colleagues (from Toronto, San Diego, Calif., and Williamsburg, Va.) figured out a way to eliminate these variables. They were first to recognize that the way private member bills are awarded to Canadian MPs provides the element of randomness required for a natural experiment. The Speaker of the House of Commons draws from a hat the names of those chosen to present a bill dealing with an issue of the MP's choosing—from the repercussions of selling a local hospital in a particular riding to the creation of harsher penalties for offenders who wear masks during riots. The 308 MPs have an equal chance of being chosen. Since they aren't picked based on other factors—like how good a communicator they are—it creates a level playing field to measure research outcomes.

"This random element provided us with a natural experiment where we could observe whether acquiring the right to introduce a private member bill had any effect on subsequent vote shares for MPs," says Koop. "When we looked at the numbers, we were shocked to find that there was a clear effect: government MPs received a 2.5 per cent boost (in votes) solely as a result of winning the lottery and introducing one bill."

This is the first study to show experimentally that citizens respond to and reward the activities of their elected MP. The findings were recently accepted for publication in the *American Journal*



Political studies assistant Prof. Royce Koop

Photo By Mike Latschislaw

of *Political Science*, widely considered the discipline's top journal.

The study stretched five years and covered the 2006 and 2008 federal elections. The researchers also compared their findings with Election Canada survey results which showed MPs who introduced bills experienced additional benefits: more campaign donations and greater likability among constituents.

Koop is now delving deeper into the representational behaviour of MPs and city councillors. He and his research team are observing their day-to-day activities and doing interviews to better understand

how they communicate with their constituents. His goal is to provide government with recommendations for improvements and to educate the public about what these elected officials are accomplishing behind closed doors. "They're not just trained seals in Parliament, yelling at each other," Koop says.

Researchers south of the border have done a lot of this type of observational research but that hasn't been the case so far in Canada. "We're trying to be trailblazers in this area," Koop says.