



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Emeritus College

UBC EMERITUS COLLEGE;
REPORT TO SENATE FOR THE YEAR 2020-2021

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Principal, 2020-2021



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Emeritus College

It is easy to report that the year 2020-2021 was an unusual, even “unprecedented” one for the UBC Emeritus College. But what would this claim mean? The Emeritus College is barely two years old; it has a very short past, as a college, and we cannot know what the future holds. Moreover, many of the challenges faced by the College and its members were widely shared in UBC and the larger community.

Despite the pandemic that seemingly changed everything, the Emeritus College achieved a great deal in 2020-2021, and is well poised going forward.

Although 2019-2020 ended inauspiciously, with the necessary postponement and then cancellation of a two-day symposium on the theme: “Searching for the Perfect City” (with out-of-town guest speakers and panels featuring emeriti, current faculty, community members and UBC students) scheduled for May; the postponement (until 2022) of the annual CURAC (College And Universities Retirees Association of Canada) Conference that we were to host in May 2020; and the sudden shift of our Annual General Meeting to an online format, the staff, leadership and Members of the Emeritus College adapted effectively to the new reality ahead.

Sustaining the camaraderie and connection that are among the essential benefits offered by any successful college when people were unable to meet in person, was of course a challenge, and one that was never entirely met. Nonetheless – and remarkably for a constituency with a demographic that (by definition as emeriti) include no so-called “digital natives” -- adaptation was the order of the day: established programs were remodelled, new initiatives were implemented, and participation in college affairs increased.

Some examples. *The Senior Scholars Series*, initiated by the UBC Association of Professors Emeriti (that preceded the College) as a program of lectures held in the Green College Coach House, in which emeriti reflected on their careers, was reshaped for online presentation with Emeritus Professor Jerry Wasserman [English & Theatre] interviewing the following emeritus colleagues on Zoom (Tony Dawson [English], Nancy Gallini [Economics], Kay Teschke [Population & Public Health], Jane Coop [Music], Michael Klein [Family Practice & Pediatrics] and Carl Walters [Oceans & Fisheries]. Attendance ranged from the 30s to the 80s and included in some instances, people from clear across the continent. Copies of these interviews are available on the websites of Green College: (<https://greencollege.ubc.ca/2020-21-lecture-series>), and the Emeritus College.

The Emeritus College Conversations: a new initiative, also on Zoom, featuring a panel of three emeriti and an emeritus moderator presenting short statements about pressing current issues (eg Pandemics; Writing Lives; Intergenerational Trauma; Climate Change), engaging one another in discussion and opening conversation with the audience (copies available on the UBC Emeritus College website: <https://emerituscollege.ubc.ca/events/videos>).

We also shifted five general meetings online. These variously featured visiting speakers and presentations from emeriti about their artistic passions and endeavours, as well as the

presentation at the AGM of Emeritus College awards. In October, colleagues serving as liaisons between the Emeritus College and almost every academic unit in the university were invited to participate in and share ideas through an online meeting. All of these events were well attended. With the assistance of the Ceremonies Office and UBC President Santa J Ono, we also held a very successful and much appreciated New Emeriti Welcome Reception online in the fall.

Addressing our mandate to assist members through the retirement spectrum, we also organized and delivered, online, a series of three lectures on financial issues pertinent to the pandemic times and a special lecture on the “Medical Legal History of Assisted Dying in Canada” in the occasional *My Health, My Responsibility* series.

Existing Special Interest Groups – Travel; Photography; Film; and Poetic Odysseys – switched their formerly in-person gatherings to online events. For some there were challenges, for others large benefits. Attendance at some Travel Group events reached triple digits; the launch of Philip Resnick’s collection, *Pandemic Poems* (Ronsdale Press, 2021) online attracted a far-flung audience (at least one of whom expressed a desire to join the College).

Our website (<https://emerituscollege.ubc.ca/>) and our *Newsletter* are the centre-pieces of our communications with Emeriti. Five lively issues of the Newsletter are normally published online between September and May, and they are much appreciated by members. This year we ran a sixth (Covid-special) edition. Content ranges widely, from announcements and summaries of events to “thought-pieces”, lists of recent publications by emeriti, acknowledgment of recognitions received by colleagues, and often-stunning photographs taken by our members. Copies can be found at: <https://emerituscollege.ubc.ca/newsletter>. The website includes an interactive calendar listing all Emeritus College events, and readily-accessible pages providing information about the College, about successful retirement, about Health and Travel benefits, and about immediately up-coming events and meetings. It also serves as an archive of College activities.

Preparation of a history of the UBC Association of Professors Emeriti is underway and the work will be posted online when completed. We also plan to enhance our communications strategy by employing a student through the work-learn program to assist in publicizing (and managing) our growing programme of events and activities.

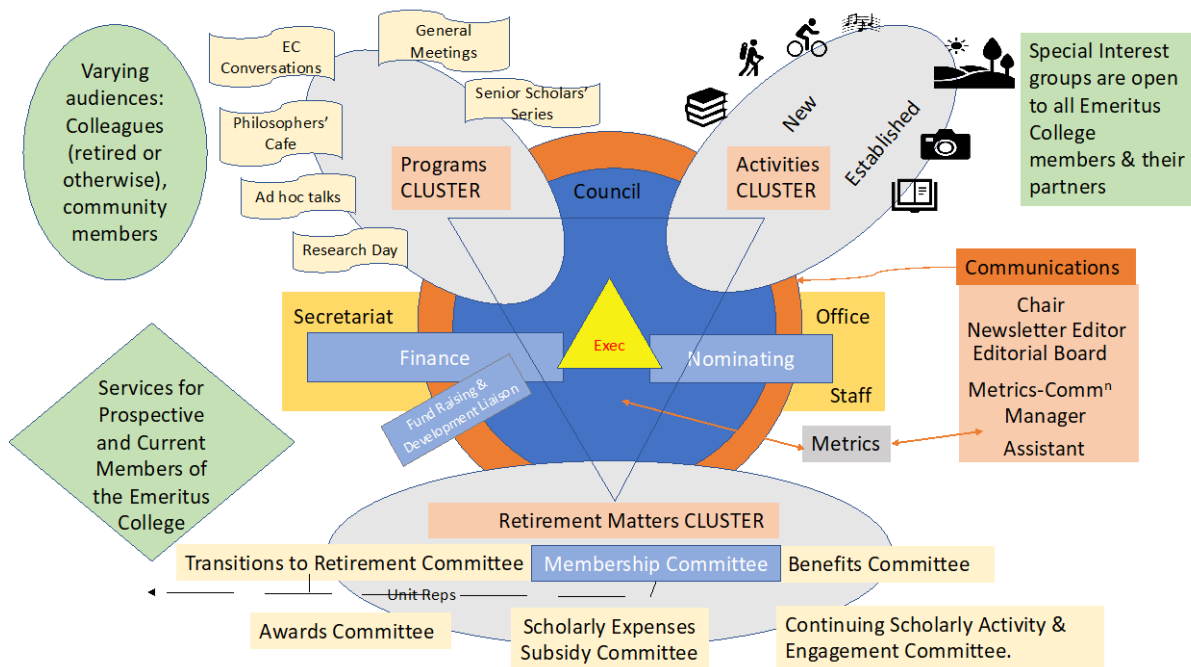
Incoming Vice-Principal Anne Junker organized an online survey of our membership, following but expanding upon earlier, similar UBC Association of Professors Emeriti surveys in 2012 and 2017. In May 2021, invitations to participate in the survey were sent to 1227 Emeriti for whom we have viable email addresses (some 500 of those who hold UBC Emeritus status are no longer reachable by this means). We received 456 replies – a response rate of 37 percent – fully representative of the larger group in gender, age, and length of retirement. In addition to statistical data (a report on which will be posted on the Emeritus College website in due time), open-ended responses included observations such as: “being a member of the college it has

made a difference in my transition to retirement “; “The Emeritus College has been a very positive factor in my transition to retirement”; and “I have found retirement to be a most wonderful experience.”

In concert with the mood of introspection occasioned by the pandemic, the UBC Emeritus College also turned inward in 2020-2021, to evaluate and ultimately to systematize and reshape its internal operations and (in the broadest sense) its organizational structure. Built loosely upon a structure developed and procedures followed over the years by the Association of Professors Emeriti, but with a clear commitment to refining and expanding its mandate, the Emeritus College has codified its operations to clarify its purposes, to establish clearer lines of administrative responsibility, and to establish both terms of reference for and terms of service (generally 2-years renewable) on its various committees and for its co-ordinator roles. These deliberations engaged the Council of the College through several iterations and were reported to the membership along the way before they were finally adopted.

The diagram below summarizes the new organizational structure – and also well represents the range of services and activities that the College provides.

UBC EMERITUS COLLEGE SCHEMATIC VISUALIZATION



As COVID-19 restrictions have eased during the summer, a new Special Interest Group (the “Easy Riders”, a recreational cycling group) has formed, attracted about 40 interested

colleagues, and enjoyed a number of social rides. A book club (focusing initially on fiction about university life) is being organized to meet (on Zoom) in the fall. A third new SIG – focusing on Volunteerism) will also meet for the first time come September-October. The *Senior Scholars Series* and the *Emeritus College Conversations* will continue on Zoom and schedules and speakers are in place for the upcoming year. We are also starting a new annual Thematic Series, jointly sponsored with Green College, to be held in the Coach House when permissible. The theme for 2021-2022 is *Intergenerational Trauma*. The two-College agreement covering this series is initially for three years.

In the next year, we anticipate a proposal or two from our newly established Fund Raising and Development Liaison Committee, relating to fund-raising initiatives that will serve the university and assist in its community outreach. We are also in the process of appointing colleagues to a newly agreed upon Awards & Recognition Facilitation Committee that will seek to promote worthy UBC Emeriti for awards and recognition within their discipline and on provincial and national stages, as appropriate.

Many of the considerable number of emeriti who continue active research programs have (like others) found their opportunities curtailed by pandemic restrictions on travel etc. in the last year. Yet we note with considerable pleasure that the recent survey revealed that over half of respondents continued active engagement in research, teaching, and mentoring; it is worth special note that more than 100 colleagues aged 80-89 years continue with their research (and another 7 aged in their 90s also do so). Others report their involvement in scholarly society administration, peer reviewing, and journal editing. The subsidy for partial reimbursement of research expenses incurred in pursuit of these activities is much appreciated and has surely contributed to this striking level of continuing scholarly engagement.

Confirming the old adage that all work and no play make Jack and Jill dull souls, many of those who responded to our recent survey indicated their interest in new Special Interest Groups encompassing a range of activities from the physical (hiking, urban exploration), through community orientated foci, to art and culinary appreciation. We anticipate the emergence of new groups in the next year or two.

Overall, we should count 2020-2021 as a year of considerable achievement for the UBC Emeritus College. Our programs have been enthusiastically received and well-regarded. Yet we still have work to do – including increasing our visibility, improving appreciation of our role within UBC, and the development of better connections with and integration of our colleagues in the newly established UBC-O chapter of the Emeritus College. We need to find the right balance between online and in-person activities. Though all appreciate the good work of College staff to facilitate online communication, only half of our survey respondents found the transition to Zoom-life easy. Many colleagues have missed in-person programs necessarily suspended during the last year (Philosophers Café, Research Day, and Guided Tours of UBC



venues), and others note that they do miss visiting the campus and taking part in events/activities. All these things may soon be possible, and routine, again.

Reflecting the overwhelming consensus of those responding to our recent survey – only 2 percent reported that they were dissatisfied with their retirement experience and most acknowledged the contributions of the College to their current sense of well-being – one colleague offered the following comment:

“Hugely impressed with how the Emeritus College has taken flight and expanded its offerings. I am also relieved that it is a home for those with divergent interests and is not focused predominantly on colleagues who continue to pursue research endeavours. It is a great model for other academic institutions across the province, nationally and even internationally. Well done!”

It is, then, with satisfaction, and gratitude for the support of almost innumerable emeritus colleagues, university administrators, and the two part-time Emeritus College staff members, that I pass the helm of this lively and valuable enterprise over to our new Principal, Joost Blom, and wish him, the College, and colleagues every success in the adventures ahead.