



Dr. Robert Gordon, Vice-President
Office of Research Services, Wilfrid Laurier University
519-884-0710 ext. 3601 or rogordon@wlu.ca

Kevin Crowley, Director
Communications & Public Affairs, Wilfrid Laurier University
519-884-0710 ext. 3070 or kcrowley@wlu.ca

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Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grants Laurier over \$2 million in research funds

WATERLOO – How can we improve refugee resettlement? How old is the oldest sign language? How globally disruptive is ridesharing? These are some of the questions researchers at Wilfrid Laurier University are exploring, and for which they have received over **\$2.2 million** in funding through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) 2017 Insight Development and Insight Grant programs.

"This funding speaks to the high calibre of meaningful research happening in the social sciences and humanities at Laurier," said **Robert Gordon**, vice-president: research and acting provost. "We are very proud of the innovative and high-quality work our researchers are undertaking. This funding will provide the resources necessary to support impactful research experiences for our undergraduate and graduate students."

One of the funded projects will study conversations and how they impact client care industries.

Grant Packard, assistant professor in the Lazaridis School of Business and Economics at Laurier and principal investigator on the project, hopes his research will be used by service-oriented professionals in retail, healthcare, and even by artificial intelligence (AI) developers.

"One of the challenges of the AI industry is that it is dissatisfying to talk to robots," said Packard. "What we're looking at is the significance of what, how and when meaning is shared over the sequence of turns in a conversation, considering whether subtle variations in these factors impacts how people feel and what they do after the conversation."

Packard will be one of the first to examine language-related dynamics in the context of "helping" conversations. His research will analyze the semantic (words) and phonetic (sound) elements of customer service phone conversations from a fashion retailer and an airline. He will determine how cadence, pitch, volume, laughter, pauses and other elements contribute to the social reception of a conversation.

"We've started to learn about the impact of certain words in service conversations, but not the time and sound-based elements of conversation," said Packard. "For example, people strategically vary the volume of their voice throughout conversations and have different strategies to move through the stages of a conversation. These factors can impact how someone responds to the speaker."

All funded Laurier research projects include:

- **Tarah Brookfield**, associate professor of History and Youth and Children Studies, will investigate the history and legacy of 30 years of peace education on Grindstone Island (\$88,198).

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- **Jing Jing Chang**, assistant professor in English and Film Studies, will explore sex, censorship, and Hong Kong's actors and audiences in Hong Kong Cinema (\$61,922).
- **Juanne Clarke**, professor of sociology, will explore the needs, challenges and best practices of sponsorship groups and sponsorship agreement holders in settling refugees (\$51,489).
- **Nicole Coviello**, professor of marketing at the Lazaridis School of Business and Economics, will explore how marketing capabilities shape innovation success (\$135,205).
- **Nathalie Freidel**, associate professor of Language and Literature, will study women's access to writing in the 17th century (\$92,616).
- **Erich Fox Tree**, assistant professor in Religion and Culture, will use Indigenous sign language to interpret and understand ancient Mesoamerican art and iconography (\$47,206).
- **Nancy C. Freymond**, associate professor of social work, will examine the experiences, values and adaptations of young people in child placement (\$197,471).
- **Sheri Lynn Gibbings**, assistant professor of global studies, will study the effects of ridesharing services in Winnipeg and the larger city of Bandung, Indonesia (\$205,065). [Read more about Gibbings' research.](#)
- **Tripat Gill**, associate professor of marketing at the Lazaridis School of Business and Economics, will investigate the role of emotions in the adoption of innovative products (\$164,618). [Read more about Gill's research.](#)
- **Jeff Grischow**, associate professor of history, will study the history of disability rights in Ghana (\$246,266).
- **Zhenfeng Ma**, associate professor of marketing at the Lazaridis School of Business and Economics, will study consumer sentiment based on online word-of-mouth conversations (\$228,936).
- **Robert McLeman**, associate professor of Geography and Environmental Studies, will study the relationship between drought, community adaptation and rural population patterns in recent decades around the Great Plains (\$204,733).
- **Magnus Mfoafo-M'Carthy**, assistant professor of social work, will contribute knowledge about West African disability stigma (\$69,423).
- **Grant Packard**, assistant professor in the Lazaridis School of Business and Economics, will explore how conversations impact customer relations (\$61,089).
- **M. Fabricio Perez**, associate professor of finance at the Lazaridis School of Business and Economics, will examine how information is incorporated into asset prices in today's fragmented environment (\$129,800).
- **Jennifer Root**, assistant professor of social work, will examine how student disclosures of gender-based violence impact teaching and learning within the post-secondary environment (\$50,596).
- **Fang Wang**, associate professor in the Lazaridis School of Business and Economics, will study where firms should invest internally (\$53,572).
- **Michael Woodford**, associate professor of social work, will explore strengths-based outcomes such as positive wellbeing, and academic engagement and success among LGBTQ students (\$172,185).

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The federal Insight Development Grants and Insight Grants programs are designed to build knowledge and understanding from disciplinary, interdisciplinary and/or cross-sector perspectives through support for the best researchers in the area of social science and humanities research. Insight Development Grants fund innovative new approaches to research in its early stages, provide high-quality research experiences for students and mobilize research knowledge for economic and social impact. The funding will support research and student training for up to two years. Insight Grants support research excellence in the social sciences and humanities and support longer-term research programs. The funding will support research and student training for up to five years.

For more information about SSHRC's programs, and to view the news release, please [visit the SSHRC website](#).

For more information about research at Laurier, visit wlu.ca/research.