

Peel Social Lab Report
Prepared for the UTM Office of the Vice-Principal Academic and Dean
Department of Sociology, University of Toronto Mississauga
September 2020

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	2
Support for Faculty and Student Research on UTM and the Peel Region.....	3
1. Faculty-led research on Peel and connected regions	3
2. Faculty-facilitated but student-driven research on Peel and connected regions	4
3. Pedagogical programs and novel institutional linkages in Peel	5
Outputs from PSL Funded Projects.....	6
UTM Student Survey	8
Future Plans	9
PSL Committee Members	11

Executive Summary

Spearheaded by the University of Toronto Mississauga, Department of Sociology, the Peel Social Lab (PSL) is dedicated to gathering, analyzing, and sharing data on the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM) and the broader Peel region. Since its inception in 2015, the PSL has become a critical resource for strengthening the ties that bind together our university, student body, and community. The key idea underlying the PSL is to strengthen the linkages between research, teaching, and community building. The lab remains strongly committed to engaging UTM students in this process.

The PSL has two core objectives: 1) Enhancing undergraduate education through involvement in the research process; and 2) Increasing understanding of, and outreach to, the Peel and connected regions. The lab has been able to support a wide variety of initiatives that realize these objectives.

- PSL grants have helped launch twenty-three (23) faculty-led projects relevant to the UTM community and residents of Peel and connected regions.
- Student research assistantships (RAs) have provided valuable opportunities for our students to develop hands-on research and administrative skills that have proven beneficial for later educational program and job placements.
- PSL research projects have delivered approximately twenty-six (26) UTM undergraduate research assistantships (RAs) and twenty-two (22) graduate RAs. The large uptick in undergraduate research assistants, in particular, has contributed to a broader shift in research culture within sociology. Undergraduate students have become far more engaged with faculty than they were before the PSL existed.
- PSL classroom-based projects have provided hundreds of UTM students the opportunity to develop their own research projects on Peel.
- UTM students have been able to expand their networks and deepen their connection to the Peel region and its organizations and community groups.
- PSL supported initiatives have provided tangible, research-based benefits to Peel region organizations and community groups.
- The PSL annual survey of UTM undergraduates provides an empirical basis for our understanding of our student body and for improving their classroom experiences.
- The PSL data repository fosters the growth of a rich pool of data that can further our understanding of Peel and strengthen ties between UTM, its faculty and students, and its surrounding communities.

In the last five years, the Office of the Dean's support has enabled the PSL to develop into a hub for social scientific research on the Peel region utilized by researchers, students, and community leaders to enrich understanding both of this diverse region and larger population dynamics.

Support for Faculty and Student Research on UTM and the Peel Region

The research interests of sociologists draw on connections across our campus, student body, colleagues, and the region where we live and work. UTM's sociology faculty study migration processes, culture, crime, labour and employment, the environment, Indigenous peoples and issues, politics, law, social change, and much more. Support for faculty research projects on Peel and connected regions is central to the PSL's mission to integrate social science research and teaching and to provide students with diverse learning opportunities in the classroom and beyond.

Since 2016, the PSL has provided support to twenty-three (23) different faculty-led projects, with a total of twenty-eight (28) grants that engage our student body with Peel and connected region social dynamics. Of the 23 different projects, more than half, or thirteen (13) in total, are course-based in the sense that they directly engage with students enrolled in a formal UTM course, providing models for pedagogically-informed research practice. Current and past project descriptions are available at <https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/peel-social-lab/faculty-research-projects>.

The PSL typically provides support in the \$3,000 to \$6,000 range per grant year. These “seed grants” help launch projects that are relevant to the UTM community and to residents of Peel and its connected regions. In many cases, PSL grants have been used to launch larger and more ambitious projects that have been funded by federal grant agencies like the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). Professor Jerry Flores, for example, credits the PSL with enabling him to subsequently acquire both a Connaught Fund (\$20,000) and a SSHRC Insight Grant (\$298,189). He reported that, “PSL helped me land the Connaught and a SSHRC. I used PSL funds to pay four undergraduate students to help collect pilot data for the subsequent grants.” Similarly, Professor Neda Maghbouleh reported, “The pilot study, supported by PSL, allowed me to scale the project out and subsequently apply for a SSHRC Insight grant, which was funded from 2018-2023 at \$349,000.”

PSL funded projects have covered a very wide array of substantive issues, research and pedagogical designs, and methodological approaches. They can be grouped into three models, as follows:

1. Faculty-led research on Peel and connected regions

The most common model is to provide UTM undergraduates an opportunity to engage directly with faculty on a research project related to Peel and connected regions, providing assistance on literature reviews, data collection, developing a database, or analysis. Past projects in this model cover an enormous swath of topics and social issues - sustainable food consumption in Peel; Syrian newcomer mothers and teens in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA); community perceptions of class inequality and multiculturalism; urban ethnography of missing and murdered indigenous men and women in the GTA; and the role of far-right conspiracy theories on sustainability planning.

A good example of this approach is Professor Cynthia Cranford's multi-year and longitudinal study of immigrant labour markets in Peel region. This project focuses on how immigrants are sorted into jobs characterized by growing and deepening precarity. Professor Cranford and her students have been building The Peel Migration and Employment Database (PMED), which is made up of interviews collected by UTM undergraduate students as part of two fourth year courses (SOC460H5 and SOC 412). The PMED was created by undergraduate students for their own learning and research. Piloted in 2016, additional data collection took place in 2018-19 and is now underway for 2020-21. To date, forty-one (41) students have done at least one of the interviews that make up the database. For these students, the PMED represents the outcome of a process of experiential learning that in its collective form is a data resource on a substantive topic related to their coursework. UTM sociology students have also analyzed subsets of these data in the required Qualitative Analysis (SOC387H5) course. The PMED is used in class and for tutorial exercises to teach about how to make a qualitative interview guide and the importance of active listening and probing. Approximately fifty students enrolled in SOC387 have used the database in their final papers. In addition, two sociology doctoral students are working with Professor Cranford to develop an analysis of the multifaceted experiences of these immigrant workers, with the goal of creating conference presentations and writing articles for publication.

Another example of this model is Professor Josée Johnston and sociology graduate student Merin Oleschuk's interview-based project on the cultural repertoires of meat eating among consumers in Peel. This project tasked UTM students in a research seminar to address when, where, and why a highly diverse community of eaters decides to consume or to avoid eating meat products. UTM students carried out in-depth qualitative interviews with four friends and family members. Two UTM undergraduates then worked as research assistants by developing a coding sheet for interview data, coding, and helping the researchers think through the results. Professor Johnson worked with the undergraduate RAs to write up an executive summary of the project to give to widely disseminated to interested community groups, media, and individuals. The first paper from this project was published in 2019 in a leading disciplinary journal, *Sociological Forum*, with additional articles now under review. Oleschuk, the project's graduate RA, completed her dissertation and took a postdoctoral fellowship at Guelph University. She will start an appointment as Assistant Professor of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in January 2021.

2. Faculty-facilitated student-driven research on Peel and connected regions

A second model for PSL funded projects involves faculty facilitation of student-driven research on the Peel region. These projects have covered research-intensive courses in sociology and crime, law, & society; vegetarianism in Peel; sustainability and environmental risk; and cultural representations of migrant groups. PSL funds are typically relied upon to defray the costs of student research such as the purchase of reference materials, the costs of survey administration, transportation, coffee with interviewees, or interview transcription.

The PSL has been able to support an enormous variety of student-driven research through two senior research seminars in sociology (SOC439) and crime, law, & society (SOC440). These courses have been facilitated by Professors Sid Liu, Kristin Plys, Luisa Farah Schwartzman, and Hae Yeon Choo. Examples of student projects include analysis of gender inequality in the Peel Region police force, the division of labour in a Mississauga law firm, the mental health and wellbeing of correction officers in the GTA, or the experience of Muslim candidates in the recruitment of the Toronto Police Services. At the completion of their projects, students had the opportunity to contribute a blog post to the Peel Social Lab's blog Peel Urbanscapes and report on their findings to the general public. The PSL funding was used to cover student research expenses and support a graduate student to manage the Peel Urbanscapes blog and work with the undergraduate students to edit their blog posts.

In other examples, faculty facilitated but student-driven research has paired UTM students with Peel community organizations. Professor Steve Hoffman's course on sustainability and environmental risk, for example, linked student groups enrolled in a senior research seminar (SOC411) with one of five different Peel region organizations working on environmental education and risk assessment. Several students partnered with the Association for Canadian Educational Resources to develop data instruments to gauge why people volunteer for sustainability initiatives. Another student group partnered with the City of Brampton's Emergency Management Office on an initiative promoting neighbourhood-level disaster preparedness and resilience training. At the environmental education organization, Ecosource, UTM students engaged with educational programs and identified ways that internal organizational planning was constrained by the diverse interests of the organization's funders. Students also partnered with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority to develop a survey of residents and homeowners who live in flood-prone areas. Finally, two students worked with the Environmental Affairs Program on campus to enhance student awareness of sustainability programs and develop new initiatives. At the end of the semester, students delivered their final research reports at a two-day symposium on UTM's campus that brought in representatives of all five partner organizations for feedback and further engagement. Professor Hoffman has continued to work with the City of Brampton on food security programs and resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic, which he plans to integrate into his popular course on the sociology of disaster (SOC463) in the spring.

3. Pedagogical programs and novel institutional linkages in Peel

A third set of projects use PSL funds to focus on building up pedagogical and research-based programs that forge novel institutional linkages between the university and Peel region institutions. A poignant example can be found in Walls to Bridges program, which brings together students with incarcerated people. In UTM's version (SOC450) of this program, half the students are criminology, law and society majors or specialists at UTM, and half are incarcerated people at a jail or prison in the GTA. The latter are enrolled, for the term, as UTM students. The intimate space of the classroom established mutual equality and respect across the two student groups, the integration of experiential and academic knowledge, collaborative and inclusive opportunities for teaching and learning, and the development of friendships; all

combined, these contributed to students' understandings of SOC450 as creating a community. Many students expressed the belief that universities and prisons should have a central role in creating educational opportunities for both prisoners and students – a collective responsibility toward building healthier communities more generally. Similar examples of PSL funded projects focused on building new institutional linkages have focused on nursing home services for older Chinese Canadians living in Peel, community organizations working with indigenous women and sexual assault survivors, or how recent immigrants to the Peel region rely on English as a second language courses for community and network building.

Outputs from PSL Funded Projects

As the three main models for PSL supported projects suggest, the lab has contributed to meaningful integrations of faculty research into our classrooms and provided diverse experiential learning opportunities for UTM students. Students gather to analyze data, communicate findings, pursue their own research questions, work with community organizations on research goals, and engage in internships. Faculty have been able to strengthen ties to Peel and connected regions and to community groups and organizations relevant to their research portfolios. This further contributes to their classroom instruction by forging greater local awareness of Peel Region social issues and dynamics.

In providing a hub for these kinds of synergies, the PSL has helped members of the UTM community to produce a large volume of scholarly outputs. PSL funded projects have yielded a book contract with Stanford University Press and over two dozen journal articles, research-based essays, book chapters, and conference proceedings. Several of these publications have included undergraduate and graduate student co-authors, such as Shyon Baumann's recently published article, co-authored with UTM undergraduate student and PSL-funded RA Hannah Majeed, which can be found at <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-020-0418-3>. In another example, Professor Neda Maghbouleh recently co-authored a journal article with sociology graduate student RA, Laila Omar, based on their PSL supported project on Syrian refugee mothers. Professor Maghbouleh's project was conducted in partnership with Dixie Bloor Neighborhood Centre, a leading newcomer services organization in Mississauga. The 2019 journal article, published in *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* and available at <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/746132/pdf>, is now assigned reading in Professor Cynthia Cranford's undergraduate qualitative methods course at UTM (SOC387). Furthermore, Maghbouleh and Omar presented the results of this study to local high schoolers in Mississauga and to visiting students and educators from China as part of several initiatives at UTM Experiential Education and the Office of the Dean.

In addition to scholarly publications, faculty recipients and students have organized several workshops and conference sessions and presented on their PSL funded projects across Canada, the United States, and internationally. For example, Professor Hoffman ran a virtual session in August 2020 at the joint annual meeting of the Society for the Social Studies of Science & European Association for the Study of Science and Technology that brought together an international group of scholars focused on critical disaster studies. Hoffman's session and the panel of scholars it organized was deeply informed by his PSL funded initiatives in sustainability,

environmental risk, and disaster management in the Peel Region. PSL funded projects also played a prominent role across sessions at the UTM hosted and Masters and Sustainability Management run conference on “Sustainability: Transdisciplinary Theory, Practice and Action.” Professors Baumann, Berrey, Hoffman, and Johnston, along with several of their students, discussed their PSL funded projects at this conference. PSL funded projects have also been presented at conferences organized by the American Sociological Association, the Canadian Sociological Association, the American Society of Criminology, the Latin American Studies Association, the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, the Law and Society Association, and numerous other international and national conferences and workshops.

Overall, the PSL has provided funds for forty-eight (48) student research assistantships focused on projects and initiatives covering Peel and connected regions. Over half of these RA positions (26) have been taken by UTM undergraduates. This is a significant ramp up in the number of undergraduate RA positions offered in Sociology. In 2015-16, for example, Sociology and its faculty hired a total of five (5) undergraduate RAs. In 2019-20, Sociology and its faculty hired a total of thirty-two (32) unique undergraduate students as RAs. Large number of students initially supported with PSL funds get re-hired under larger external grants. While not all of these undergraduate RAs were with PSL funds, of course, but the PSL model has contributed to a noticeably shift in departmental research culture in which undergraduates are increasingly engaging with faculty. In fact, a large number of students initially supported with PSL funds get re-hired under larger external grants.

Our undergraduates have benefitted from these opportunities. For example, after contributing to Professor Maghbouleh’s PSL funded project on Syrian refugee mothers in Mississauga, UTM undergraduate Anmul Shafiq went on to complete a fully-funded Masters in Public Service at University of Waterloo and now works for the federal government. Similarly, Professor Ellen Berrey used PSL funds to support Fatima Al Saadie, a standout UTM undergraduate and double major in Sociology and Criminology, Law, & Society. These funds made it possible for Ms. Al Saadie to complete data collection on a project focused on the anti-sustainability backlash movement. In summer of 2020, Ms. Saadie received both a University of Toronto Excellence Award (UTEA) and a Mitacs award in recognition of her stellar work in collaboration with Professor Berrey. Now Berrey and Al Saadie are drafting a paper for publication, which they will present at the University of Toronto sociolegal workshop, deliver at the 2021 Law & Society Association Annual Meeting, and submit to the leading subfield journal, *Law & Society Review*. Finally, Ms. Al Saadie plans to apply to the University of Toronto sociology graduate program this winter.

PSL supported initiatives have also developed into innovative publishing venues for student research on Peel. Peel Urbanscapes is a primary example, available at <https://peelurbanscapes.wordpress.com>. Peel Urbanscapes is a blog site that launched within Professor Hae Yeon Choo’s Urban Politics and Ethnographic Writing course blog, *Diaspora Food Memories*, which was developed with the support of the PSL. The blog has continued to provide an outlet for the student-driven projects in SOC439 and SOC440. The blog showcases wide-ranging student projects linked to social inequality and urban politics in the Peel Region and the

GTA. Student-led and written, it features topics like food security and justice, housing, gentrification, law, and the criminal justice system.

PSL supported graduate RAships have also proven fortuitous. Graduate students have been funded through PSL projects led by Professors Baumann, Choo, Cranford, Flores, Hoffman, Johnston, Korteweg, Liu, Plys, Schwartzman, and Zhang. Graduate students acquire faculty mentorship and professionalization. Many go on to establish themselves as independent and active scholars in their own right by publishing, acquiring SHHRC grants, and disseminating research findings related to Peel and connected regions. Professor Cranford's graduate RAs, for example, have made significant progress since the project on immigrant worker labour markets in Peel was launched with PSL funds. Yang-sook Kim recently defended her dissertation of which a key component is related to this project's qualitative analysis of migration and work histories. Yongrong Lee has incorporated similar work and migration history questions into her own interview guide for her dissertation research. Both students will be publishing with Professor Cranford and the undergrads who were involved in collecting the data. Another good example is Merin Oleschuk, who worked on Professor Johnston's project on sustainable food consumption, and begins her career as an Assistant Professor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign this coming January.

UTM Student Survey

Beginning in 2017, the PSL has conducted an REB approved, yearly survey of students enrolled in our Introduction to Sociology course (SOC100). Since that time, we have collected data from nearly 3,000 students on topics such as multiculturalism, disability, perceptions of resistance, choosing a field of study, moral attitudes, and self-reflective cognition. We plan to recontact students in their final year at UTM and again a year after graduation. This will provide invaluable insight into their collegiate experiences and post-graduation experiences.

The PSL survey provides valuable data on our students as representatives of the Peel region, and is available to the community through the PSL web site. We are also using this data to better understand student experiences in our classrooms so that we can improve our programs and facilitate student success at the University of Toronto Mississauga and in the workforce.

Results and highlights of these surveys can be found at <https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/peel-social-lab/student-surveys>. Included for each year is the survey codebook, downloadable data files, and data highlights. Here are a few highlights from the 2019-20 results:

- 32% of students surveyed were currently working for pay, with 22% of working respondents working 20 or more hours a week.
- Most respondents lived in Mississauga (60%), and 74% of those in Mississauga lived off campus
- Respondents were most likely to report having "no religion" (27%). Of those with religious affiliation, Islam was the most common (21%), followed by Roman Catholicism (20%)

- When asked about their caregivers, 82-83% of the first two caregivers respondents identified were foreign-born, and 39% of them had at least a Bachelors degree (or equivalent)
- 79% of respondents rated their health as at least “good”, but fewer (although still a majority) rated their mental health as at least “good” (60%)
- Around a third reported often feeling “helpless” dealing with life problems (30%) or “pushed around in life” (37%)
- Respondents were most likely to report interest in working in the fields of law (25%), medicine (23%), and science/technology (23%)
- 20% report wanting to start their own business
- 21% of respondents believe that people with disabilities are discriminated against in school, and 43% are unsure
- 91% believe that people with disabilities are “sometimes” or “often” discriminated against when looking for a job.
- When asked about what considerations are relevant to them when deciding “whether something is right or wrong”, the highest-rated consideration was “Whether or not someone was denied his or her rights”

Future Plans

With continued support from the Dean’s Office, the PSL has been able to make a profound impact on our students and the department. The PSL Committee has developed the following plans to build on these successes:

1. *PSL Data Repository Development*

A key goal over the next few years will be to further build up the PSL Data Repository with the rich results and scholarly outputs of PSL funded projects. Cleaning and anonymizing shared data, particularly open-ended interview and ethnographic data sets, is resource and labour intensive. We are currently developing an initiative to provide PSL funded projects with additional research assistantships and related supports for doing this work. We aim to make the data repository a central resource used by researchers, community leaders, and activists to further enrich understanding of this diverse region and inform innovative social policy.

2. *Build up our web presence and extend our public visibility*

We are in the midst of redeveloping the PSL website in order to turn it into more of a resource for the UTM community and the Peel region. We are working on the migration to the new shell. The updated website will provide insight into the varied work done by the PSL, including findings from our ongoing multi-year survey and faculty-student research projects. In addition, it will be populated with the accessible PSL Data Repository for use in classrooms and by researches and/or community members. We will also work to produce a “glossy” magazine style annual report listing our major

achievements, including highlighting the work and career trajectories of students who participated in PSL projects.

3. *Expand University-Community linkages*

We will work to increase the opportunities of integrating community organizations into our research and teaching efforts. Strengthening the PSL will enable us to support and expand on projects such as the Walls to Bridges course and other fourth-year courses, such as the seminar on sustainability and environmental risk course where students were placed with Peel region community organizations working on disaster preparedness. Other ideas include organizing an annual PSL workshop, open to university-community members on a topic of research covered by PSL. In addition, there is interest in developing opportunities for community organizations to work with our faculty and students to do targeted research to benefit those organizations, including working with Indigenous organizations in our region.

4. *Increase the reach of our multi-year student survey*

Our future plans for our ongoing student survey are three-fold. First, the student survey that starts with students in our first-year introductory courses is in the process of being extended into follow-up surveys for students who reached year 4 and graduation +1 year. Second, we will integrate data from the Registrar's Office to (anonymously) match reported facts with educational outcomes. This effort has been approved by the Office of the Registrar but not yet implemented for lack of resources. Third, we will develop a series of reports outlining the findings of the survey in a fourth-year methods course that teaches students to write publicly accessible research briefs based on their analysis of PSL data.

5. *Integrate the PSL more strongly with our newly redesigned specialist programs*

Our newly revised Sociology and CLS specialists program emphasize training and engagement in research. We will be working with the departmental curriculum committee to integrate the PSL more tightly into the specialist programs. For example, specialists in our required fourth-year research project course will be encouraged to use PSL data or to use PSL resources to facilitate their research projects.

PSL Committee Members

2020-21

Chair: Steve Hoffman

Members: Jennifer Adese, Shyon Baumann, Anna Korteweg and Andrew Miles.

Research Assistant: Sagi Ramaj

2019-20

Chair: Steve Hoffman

Members: Josée Johnston, Anna Korteweg, Andrew Miles and Luisa Schwartzman.

Research Assistant: Sagi Ramaj

2018-19

Chair: Andrew Miles

Members: Steve Hoffman, Anna Korteweg, Ashley Rubin and Luisa Schwartzman

Research Assistant: Cinthya Guzman

2017-18

Chair: David Pettinichio

Members: Steve Hoffman, Andrew Miles, Ashley Rubin and Luisa Schwartzman

Research Assistants: Lawrence Williams and Cinthya Guzman

2016-17

Chair: David Pettinichio

Members: Josée Johnston and Andrew Miles

Research Assistant: Lawrence Williams

2015-16

Chair: Erik Schneiderhan

Members: David Pettinichio and Josée Johnston

Research Assistant: Lawrence Williams