

LETTER FROM THE VADA PROGRAM PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR



Welcome back to the winter term! I hope you had a rejuvenating and relaxing holiday break.

We are now nearing the end of our third year of the NSERC CREATE VADA Program, and I would like to highlight some of our achievements, while sharing our direction

over the next few months.

This fall has seen growth and change in the program – much of it guided by lessons learned in the wake of our first report to our funder NSERC. Among these changes are new efforts to promote diversity within our program cohort, including promoting the program directly to under-represented groups and capturing statistics on our cohort makeup in terms of diversity. We have also worked closely with immigration and co-op work term administrators at both institutions to ensure that students, particularly ones who hold study permits are able to find placements that align with any restrictions on their permits. Work is now underway to find and support opportunities for trainee placements. So far, many of this year's placements are with new hosts and it is exciting to see such a wide variety of learning opportunities open up for trainees.

We are also gearing up for our summer school, which will take place in Winnipeg at the Fort Garry campus this year. Given our large cohort, the summer school will be mainly tailored for students in the VADA program. The summer school committee has been working diligently to ensure a strong program, and I am looking forward to another successful summer school. Discussions are also underway for holding our summer school away from Winnipeg in 2021. Stay tuned for the official announcement!

Student application submission is now closed for the 2020/2021 academic year. The recruitment committee is working at selecting our new cohort for the upcoming year. Given the rise interest, we will have a significantly more competitive selection this year. Applicants and their advisors will know of the outcomes before the end of March.

Finally, I would like to thank all team members for their tremendous efforts on committees and leading the many VADA program initiatives. I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible, along with our students this summer, in Winnipeg!

2019/20 Committees

Summer School Committee

- Dr. Lisa Lix – University of Manitoba - Chair
- Dr. Natalie Knox – University of Manitoba
- Dr. Elizabeth Borycki – University of Victoria
- Dr. Julien Arino – University of Manitoba
- Shamsia Sobhan – University of Manitoba

Internship/Lab Exchange Committee

- Dr. Pourang Irani – University of Manitoba - Chair
- Dr. Farouk Nathoo – University of Victoria
- Dr. Alex Thomo – University of Victoria
- Dr. George Tzanetakis – University of Victoria

Research Excellence Committee

- Dr. Andre Kushniruk – University of Victoria
- Dr. Gary Van Domselaar – University of Manitoba
- Dr. Laura Cowen – University of Victoria
- Dr. Natalie Knox – University of Victoria
- Naomi Hamm – University of Manitoba

Sustainability Committee

- Dr. Gary Van Domselaar – University of Manitoba
- Dr. Laura Cowen – University of Victoria
- Dr. Pingzhao Hu – University of Manitoba
- Depeng Jiang – University of Manitoba
- Dr. Natalie Knox – University of Manitoba
- Eugene Opoku – University of Manitoba

Recruitment & Selection Committee

- Dr. Pingzhao Hu – University of Manitoba - Chair
- Dr. Depeng Jiang – University of Manitoba
- Dr. Karen Kobayashi – University of Victoria
- Dr. Jason Leboe-McGowan – University of Manitoba
- Dr. Xuekui Zhang – University of Victoria
- Mohaiminul Islam – University of Manitoba

Victoria Visit

Dr. Lisa Lix and Allison Poppel travelled to Victoria over January 9th and 10th to meet with students, faculty and stakeholders. Dr. Lix led a session of the Foundations of Disease Analytics course from Victoria on the 10th as well as a program information session for interested students at University of Victoria. Thanks to the work of program committee chair Dr. Wendy Young, they were also able to meet with a variety of people from both Vancouver Island Health Authority and the British Columbia Ministry of Health to discuss the program and how different departments might host trainees for internships.

Program Committee Update

The VADA Program is happy to announce a change to the program committee with Dr. Wendy Young now serving as committee chair while Drs. Andriy Koval and Melanie Tory continue to serve as members. Program alumni Ali Neshati has been added to the committee to provide a student perspective while Dr. Irani is a non-voting member of the committee.

VADA Program Features

As the application period opened, the program has been promoted through various mediums including two wonderful features of program students:

- Viktoriya Vasylykiv (2019 MSc alumni) was featured in [UM Today](#)
- Amr Farghali (2020 MSc student) was featured on the Department of [Health Information Science page](#)
- Marcello Nesca (2019 MSc alumni) was featured in [UM Today](#)

Conference Funding Opportunities

The VADA Program has funding available for trainees to attend conferences. Up to \$500 annually has been allotted for eligible conference registration, travel and related expenses. For more information please see the form [online](#).

Upcoming conferences which may be of interest to students include:

- Digital Health Canada [e-Health 2020 Conference and Tradeshow](#) – May 31st-June 3rd in Vancouver
- [Statistical Society of Canada 2020 Annual Meeting](#) – May 31st – June 3rd 2020 in Ottawa
- [Western Canadian Universities Big Data Health Conference](#) – March 26th – March 27th in Vancouver
- [International Population Data Linkage Network Conference](#) – October 27th – 29th 2020 in Adelaide, South Australia

Equitable Artificial Intelligence for Public Health

The inaugural Artificial Intelligence for Public Health Summer Institute will be hosted by the McGill School of Population and Global Health and MILA over July 20th – 24th 2020 in Montréal. Senior doctoral students, post-doctoral students and early career researchers are encouraged to apply and more information can be found at [ai4ph.ca](#)

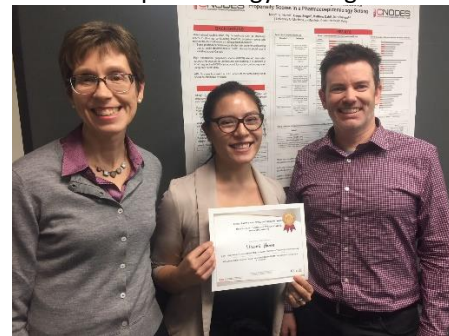
APPLICATIONS FOR 2020/21

Applications to the VADA Program for the 2020/21 academic year closed on January 31st and the program received 37 student applications (19 MSc, 12 PhD, 6 returning PhD) as well as 6 faculty applications. This is an increase over last year in which there were 33 student applications. The Recruitment and Selection Committee will be deliberating on applications

in mid-February with the results being communicated to applicants by the end of the month.

RECENT STUDENT PUBLICATIONS AND AWARDS

The VADA Program aims to foster research excellence. Since September 2019, students have published two papers, presented 7 different posters or abstracts at conferences and received 5 notable awards. Most recently **Naomi Hamm** (2nd year PhD Student) was awarded the award for best oral trainee poster presentation at the 2020 Drug Safety and Evaluation Network Meeting in Ottawa for her poster presentation titled: “Assessing the Performance of High Dimensional Propensity Scores in a Pharmacoepidemiology Setting”.



From left to right: Dr. Lisa Lix, Naomi Hamm (2nd year PhD VADA trainee) and Dr. Dan Chateau (internship host of Naomi)

VADA PROGRAM SUMMER SCHOOL

June 1st – 5th 2020 | Winnipeg, MB

The dates for the 2020 VADA Program Summer School will be June 1st – 5th 2020 and it will be held in Winnipeg, Manitoba at a new location - the Fort Garry Campus of the University of Manitoba. This year the week will look slightly different with more of the week being spent on analytic skills development and a shift away from the competitive/time limited structure of the Big Data Challenge. A schedule is now being finalized and potential speakers are being contacted.

Upcoming Activities

Foundations of Disease Analytics Course Schedule for Term 2

Date	Instructor	Topic
February 14 th 2020	Dr. Lisa Lix	Visualization: R & Tableau skills session
March 6 th 2020	Ali Neshati	Visualization: R & Tableau skills session
March 20 th 2020	Dr. Lisa Lix	Responsible data science
April 3 rd 2020	Dr. Lisa Lix	Student presentations for assignment 3