



# The VADA Program

Visual and Automated Disease Analytics  
Graduate Training Program

# NEWSLETTER

## LETTER FROM THE VADA PROGRAM PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR



Greetings – I hope you find yourself as we make our way through a new year unlike most others.

While it would be wonderful to be able to gather in person, the VADA Program has been able to continue in an entirely remote set up rather seamlessly. I expect that most, if not all program components, including this year's summer school, will continue remotely until the University of Manitoba and the University of Victoria have re-opened. Until then, we will continue to do our best to offer valuable learning, training and collaboration opportunities to our trainees and faculty.

I am incredibly impressed with all of the impactful research, internship projects and meaningful contributions trainees and faculty have made in the effort to understand the effects of COVID-19 and its spread. This is reflected both in the breadth of research funding offered to our faculty as well as the types of internship work undertaken by our trainees.

Thank you to all of our trainees and faculty for their valuable contributions over these past number of months. I appreciate how difficult it can be right now to manage the balance of work and home life and I am inspired by each and everyone's patience as we go through these trying times.

### Summer School

Planning for Summer School 2021 is being led by University of Victoria leadership Drs. Andre Kushniruk and Elizabeth Borycki.

### Applications

The application cycle for the next intake of trainees and faculty is well underway. The application deadline closed on January 29<sup>th</sup> and over 40 trainee applications were received. The Recruitment and Selection Committee has their work cut out for them as they evaluate the applications and will be making their recommendations to the Leadership Team by the end of February. Applicants will be contacted in March when results are announced.

Due to COVID-19 students who were offered admission but were located internationally were offered the chance to defer until 2021/22. These students are guaranteed a place in the incoming cohort.

### Internship Placement Opportunities

The Internship Committee and program coordinator have been hard at work to identify placement opportunities both within and outside of the VADA Program. For a list of current opportunities, trainees can reference this [page](#). Faculty who have a project available and do not yet have the opportunity listed on the page can connect with the program coordinator to have them listed.

If trainees know what type of organization and project they would like to take part in and require support in identifying a potential host, they can connect with the program coordinator. The Internship Committee can brainstorm on potential connections.

### NSERC Reporting

The VADA Program will conclude its fourth year of funding on March 31<sup>st</sup> 2021 and will be required to submit a progress report to NSERC later this year. The progress report is comprehensive and is intended to capture all program outputs. This includes training opportunities offered, employment status of alumni, internships undertaken, awards won, conference presentations and publications accepted/published. All trainees are asked to provide the program coordinator with an update should they receive an award or have their work accepted for publication or at a conference.

### The VADA Program on Social Media

The VADA Program is now on [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#). Feel free to follow and connect with the program coordinator if there is something VADA related you feel could be shared on these platforms.

### Upcoming Conference Opportunities

- The Canadian Society for Epidemiology and Biostatistics will be hosting their [annual conference](#) online this year from June 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> 2021

### Conference Funding

In recognition of the impact that COVID-19 has on student travel to attend conferences and workshops, the VADA Program will be extending the deadline to use the \$500 allotted to each student to support conference-related expenses. Current students now have until the end of August 2021 to use their allocated funds for conference registration (including for online conferences), travel expenses, and accommodation expenses.

**Funding requests cannot be made retroactively.** Students interested in applying can contact Allison to request an application form.

### Recent Awards and Features

- Margot Henry was featured in [UMToday](#) for her work as a junior epidemiologist with Manitoba Health.
- Jhannelle Francis was featured in [UMToday](#) for her research into detecting COVID-19 in wastewater.
- Dr. Julien Arino received the Radio-Canada Scientist of the Year Prize. Dr. Arino was recognized for his work as part of Canadian data modelling teams whose work has supported, informed and guided decision-making by public-health bodies and governments relative to management of the COVID-19 pandemic response. You can learn more about his contributions [here](#).
- Dr. Lisa Lix has been named a Fellow of the American Statistical Association for excellence in advancing statistical methods for chronic health condition research and surveillance and for highly impactful research





# The VADA Program

Visual and Automated Disease Analytics  
Graduate Training Program

# NEWSLETTER

collaborations and outstanding leadership of educational and statistical activities of national importance. The title of Fellow of the American Statistical Association is its highest honorary grade of membership.

- Dr. Lisa Lix is a co-applicant (principal applicant is T. Sajobi, University of Calgary) on a successful CIHR grant titled Unsupervised Machine Learning to Improve Patient-Reported Outcomes Measures which will run 09/2020-08/2023 and is valued at \$367 200.
- Dr. Azad was awarded the Women's Executive Network (WXN) Canada [Top 100 Most Powerful Women of 2020](#) and the Canadian Society for Clinical Investigation [Joe Doupe Young Investigators Award](#).
- Dr. Azad was also awarded a \$1.7 million award from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and Research Manitoba will allow CHILD researchers to study how individuals and families across Canada have been impacted directly by COVID-19 infection and indirectly by pandemic-related social and economic upheaval.
- Dr. Laura Cowen is principal investigator on a [project](#) to model un-detected COVID-19 infections in order to be better prepared for the second wave.
- Dr. Xuekui Zhang is co-leading a \$6.35 million [project](#) funded through Genome Canada to develop a rapid and cost-effective test to ensure cleaner grapevines for healthier vineyards across Canada.
- Dr. Pourang Irani is principal investigator on an NSERC funded project to examine the trust with, and adoption of contact tracing apps for mitigating the spread of COVID-19.



University  
of Manitoba



NSERC  
CRSNG



University  
of Victoria