

RESEARCH LEADERS

UNIVERSITY
of GUELPH

CARLA RICE

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Care, Gender and Relationships

CHANGING THE WAY WE SEE DIFFERENCES

Stories are a powerful tool for challenging stereotypes

Media open up the capacity to imagine disability differently

Guelph researchers are using arts and contemporary media such as storytelling and live performance to challenge misconceptions about disability and marginalized communities. By encouraging more nuanced and diverse representations of people, stories can help change stereotypes still held in health care, education and our broader society.

Prof. Carla Rice, Canada Research Chair in Care, Gender and Relationships, leads Project Re-Vision and the Re-Visioning Differences Media Arts Laboratory (REDLAB) at the University of Guelph. Through Re-Vision, Rice has assembled cutting-edge, arts-based research projects and a state-of-the-art media lab to explore how communities can use arts-informed research to achieve social inclusion and justice.

“We research the efficacy, potential and power of the arts in shifting our notions of disability and difference, broadly defined, as well as helping people to understand and identify shared experiences of being human,” she says.

Over the past five years, Rice and her team have used innovative arts and community-based research methods to transform the often negative views held by the public, policy-makers and health-care providers about people with mind/body differences.

One of their most successful approaches has been digital storytelling workshops. Participants create two- to three-minute videos that pair audio recordings of personal narratives with visuals.

“We’ve found that the stories have a powerful effect on people in opening up their capacities to imagine disability differently,” says Rice. “The stories that emerge generate vital conversations that move past disability as a personal tragedy or individual problem to be overcome, and enable people to connect and get in touch with their own fragilities and interdependencies.”

Now, other misrepresented and marginalized groups want to team up with Rice and the Re-Vision team to tell their own stories and address their own pressing issues.

Rice is now working with indigenous scholars and indigenous parents, teachers and students on “decolonizing” teaching approaches and curricula in Ontario public schools; with queer women on body image and body management practices; and with Inuit artists and youth on strengthening Inuit cultural voices.

Ultimately, Rice’s digital storytelling project, along with her other initiatives, is intended to promote more nuanced and positive perspectives. She hopes to establish a cutting-edge social science institute that will help us better understand difference and use multimedia technology to “disrupt dominant narratives” and invite new stories.



The current research lab team (from left): Kim Wilson, Dr. Lisa Wenger, Prof. Carla Rice, Dawn Matheson and Andrea LaMarre.

“I am guided by the insights of novelist Chimamanda Adichie, who reminds us of the dangers of a single story,” says Rice. “When told repeatedly, this story becomes the primary or only way that a person or group is known. My goal with Re-Vision is to move past the single story and replace it with an array of stories that proliferate marginalized peoples’ voices and experiences.”

By cultivating and disseminating new stories about difference, Rice says, these media projects and innovative research will continue to foster inclusive communities, and promote well-being, equity and justice in Canada and beyond.

Also working on the video project are other U of G faculty and numerous graduate students, post-doctoral researchers and senior research associates, as well as filmmakers and an artist-in-residence. All participants receive pertinent training for REDLAB research projects.

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Find out more about Project Re-Vision at projectrevision.ca/ and watch more of our stories here: projectrevision.ca/videos/.

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*This profile was written by Karen Ball and Joanne Pearce,
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The Canada Research Chairs program aims to boost the country’s capacity as a global research leader by supporting outstanding and emerging scholars and scientists. The program, administered by the federal government, invests approximately \$265 million per year in universities across Canada to attract and retain some of the world’s most accomplished and promising minds. Chairholders aim to achieve research excellence in engineering and the natural sciences, health sciences, humanities and social sciences. The program has established almost 30 research chairs at the University of Guelph.