

**An interview with Laura Macdonald, Director of the Institute of Political Economy about the Institute's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration on Friday, May 24<sup>th</sup>.**

**What do you see as the most significant achievement of the institute to date, and where do you see it five or 10 years from now?**

The main achievement of the Institute has been its capacity to bring together faculty and students from many different disciplines into a scholarly community that fosters critical and engaged research. Our MA and Collaborative PhD programs are unique in Canada so we attract students from all provinces.

We have been making strides in strengthening our relationships with community-based scholars in the Ottawa area – in government, union research offices, NGO research units, advocacy and policy organizations. This is an aspect of the Institute we'd very much like to see expand in the future as a way to bring together academic and community-based research and ideas.

**What was it like to be able to celebrate 20 years of graduate teaching and research at the Institute of Political Economy?**

It was a lot of fun! We had four panels of speakers – Institute faculty (including two returning Visiting Professors), Political Economy faculty from other Canadian universities, current students, and alumni. The expertise collected in these panels covered the breadth of Canada – and several generations of political economy scholarship. The day provided a wonderful opportunity to think back on the achievements of the Institute, and also to engage in broader reflection about the past and future of political economy.

**What was the high point of the day for you?**

For me personally, the high point was reconnecting with so many of my former students – some from my first years at Carleton in the early 1990s. These included Kevin Skerrett (class of '94), now a senior researcher at the Canadian Union of Public Employees, Fuyuki Kurasawa (class of '95), who teaches in Sociology at York University, and Stephanie Ross (class of '95), who also teaches at York, in her case in Social Sciences. All of the alumni present spoke movingly about the difference the Institute made to them both personally and academically, as a place that nurtured them as budding scholars, as social critics and as human beings. They all spoke of the strong sense of community they experienced in their days of the Institute and their fond memories of their professors and fellow students.

**There were two new Institute student scholarships awarded - can you say something about these new scholarships and who were the first recipients?**

Yes, all five of the faculty members who have been Directors of the Institute (Michael Dolan, Wallace Clement, Rianne Mahon, Janet Siltanen, and myself), decided to create two new scholarships to support Institute students over the next five years. One of the scholarships (for \$500) goes to the student who is deemed to have written the best paper in the Collaborative PhD core course. This prize was won by Sabrina Fernandes, a first year PhD student in Sociology, who graduated with her MA in Political Economy in 2012. The other prize (for \$1500) goes to an outstanding second year MA student who combines academic merit with strong contributions to activities on campus and in the broader community. This prize was won this year by Christina Muehlberger, who will be starting the PhD program in Sociology in the fall.

**Your current students did a session modeled on the 3 minute thesis - how did that go?**

The panel was a great way to convey the broad range of excellent work our students are doing. Nine participating students presented a diverse and timely set of research topics from Canada's participation in the Trans Pacific Partnership, to increasing tuberculosis rates among Aboriginal populations, to the commercialization of University campuses, to alternative economic strategies of market women in Nairobi, Kenya.

**Several speakers reflected on the future of political economy scholarship in Canada - can you capture a few of their main messages for us?**

There was a broad consensus that in the current period of global financial crisis and widespread austerity policies, the political economy approach is more important than ever. There was also broad agreement on the need for creative rethinking of some of the long-standing assumptions and understandings within the political economy discipline to better integrate such issues as migration, relations of care and reproduction, organizational sources of social transformation, gender inequality, race, and the re-shaping of global economies. A particularly powerful plea was made by Professor Andrew Biro, CRC in Political Ecology and Environmental Political Theory at Acadia University and Visiting Professor to the Institute in 2011 for a political economy analysis of the anthropocene – given that we are the first organisms in history to be consciously and actively altering the planet. Inspiring stuff – and we all came away encouraged to take on these challenging issues.