

SABBATICAL REPORT 2017-18

From the Arctic to the United Nations to India & Australia

I was privileged to undertake my fourth sabbatical since I joined York University's Biology Department as an Assistant Professor in 1990. This newsletter gives an overview of my academic activities from July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018. I will upload it to Yorkspace, York University's Open Access Institutional Repository under a Creative Commons License.

The past academic year was my most ambitious sabbatical to date, in terms of travel, networking, and research. I was motivated by having regained pain-free mobility after experiencing a back injury in April 2015, that was so severe that I canceled all of my 2015 field work & research, and seriously pondered taking long-term disability. Thanks to York University's excellent health benefits and the support of the Employee Well Being office, I was able to undertake my teaching duties in January 2016. Over the next two years, I slowly built up my capacity to undertake 14-hour plane journeys.



I received a warm welcome when I spoke at the Centre for Women's Studies, Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan, West Bengal, India. I was introduced by a student, which was great!

I gave my talk, *One Biology professor's experience with raising the conversation about ongoing barriers faced by Women in STEM in Canada* at the Indira Gandhi Centre Conference Hall!

In 2016, while recovering my mobility, I hosted Professor Shibani Choudhury, on sabbatical from Visva Bharati, one of India's most famous universities. This national, public university was founded by renowned polymath and Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore.

Shibani invited me to continue our collaboration at her laboratory, and I was a visiting professor in the Department of Environmental Studies, Faculty of Science for three months (Jan-March 2018).

During the first 6 months of my sabbatical, July to December 2017, I was based in Toronto, making several field trips to the arctic and to universities in Canada. I also attended the United Nations

Climate Change annual conference for the first time since I obtained observer status for York University as a non-governmental organization in 2009, when I was director of IRIS. I have been accrediting students, faculty and staff to attend these negotiations as observers, since COP15.

Timeline of my Activities:

July to August 2017

Science Communication & Ecotourism: I was the onboard botanist for *Heart of the Arctic & Arctic Explorer* expedition cruises with Adventure Canada. This women-led, second-generation Canadian family company, is guided by sustainability principles and ethical practices.

The two 11-day trips ran back-to-back from mid-July to mid-August. Being an Ecotourism practitioner requires obtaining multiple qualifications akin to the WHMIS training that we receive at York University.

As onboard botanist, I gave talks about plant ecology, ethnobotany, and taught passengers to identify arctic plants.

September 2017

I hosted Dr. Shah Khalid at York University, for one month (mid-September to mid-October). Dr. Khalid is an early career botanist, and Lecturer at Islamia College, Peshawar, Pakistan. In 2015, he had contacted me about possible research collaborations during the 6-month

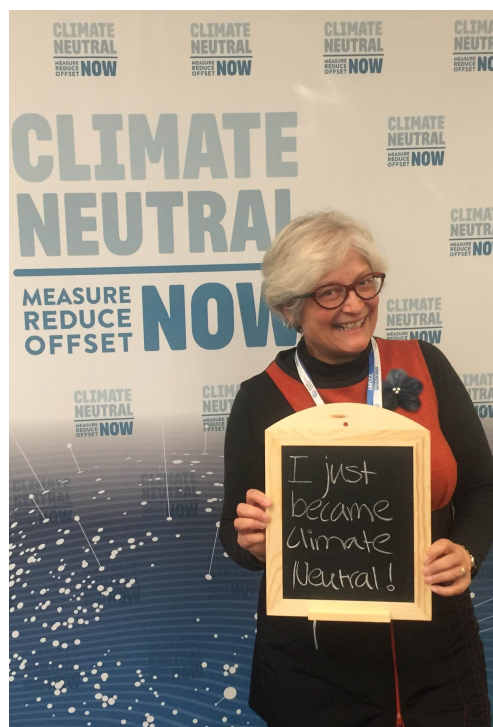
period that he held a visiting Phd Studentship at Harvard Forest. He learned that I was a Bullard Fellow at the forest during my previous sabbatical (September 2011- February 2012).

“Where the world makes a home in a single nest.”

- MOTTO OF VISVA BHARATI, SANTINIKETAN, WEST BENGAL

During his York University stay, Dr. Khalid learned about biodiversity issues in Ontario, along with Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity programmes and policies in Canada, and various Women in STEM initiatives that I founded or support. I am grateful to Claudia McPherson, York University’s Affirmative Action Immigration and Relocation Officer, with whom I worked closely on Dr. Khalid’s visa invitation letter.

I participated as a role-model and mentor at the Ecospark: Sparking Science event for young, female, Grade 9 students from the Pickering area, held at the University of Toronto, Scarborough.



Learning about the UN-verified Carbon Offset programme at COP23 in Bonn, Germany.

Read my guest blog about [being a responsible international traveller for the popular tourism website, Monkeys & Mountains.](#)

October 2017

I co-organized the October 13, 2017, Canada-India symposium with Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies and YCAR research associate Dr. Nivedita das Kundu. A CanadaWatch magazine, about the event is currently being finalized (November 2018).

University of Calgary Faculty of Education Professor Gabriela Alonzo-Yanez invited me to be a resource person and mentor for a week-long career development workshop on science policy and sustainability, funded by the Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research. I subsequently wrote up my talk on stakeholder engagement, as an article for the Ecuadorian peer-reviewed, open access journal, Vínculos.

I presented at the 19th Century Botany in Canada conference held at the Ontario Archives. This SSHRC-funded event was organized by York University History Professor Emerita Rusty Shteir.

I co-organized York University's 4th Annual International Ada Lovelace Days with Marisa Sterling, Lassonde Engineering School and John Dupuis, Steacie Library.

English and Film Studies Professor Alice Ridout of Algoma University invited me to participate in the Canada150 series, Algoma Reads, modelled on Canada Reads. I shared a platform with indigenous activist, Candace Day Neveau and I spoke about the importance of The Right to be Cold by Sheila Watt-Cloutier, in the context of climate change in Canada's arctic.

November 2017

I attended COP23, the annual conference of the parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change for two weeks, in Bonn, Germany.

While at COP23, I finally authored a column for The Conversation Canada. I was one of the academics who supported colleagues bringing The Conversation, which is an international online magazine with platforms in Australia, the UK, Africa and the USA, to Canada.

The article that I wrote with YorkU colleagues, Professors Idil Boran and Sapna Sharma: How Citizens are fighting Climate Change on the Global Stage, has been highly viewed.

December 2017

Although I was on sabbatical, I represented the Biology Department and York University at the annual meeting of the Ontario Universities Program in Field Biology.

I gave a guest lecture to the first-year Biology course students at Guelph University. Professor Shoshanah Jacobs, with whom I am writing a paper on the Experiential Education benefits of field courses, and developing a new field course in which Biology students visit the United Nations annual climate change talks, to observe science-policy-politics in action, kindly invited me.

January to March 2018

I was a visiting professor at Visva Bharati, with a three month appointment in Department of Environmental Studies, Faculty of Science. While there I gave many talks, including several at nearby state university, the University of Burdwan, where, in early January, I gave the plenary lecture at the International Conference on Mother Earth entitled, Biodiversity: From Local to Global.

I undertook field trips to the Sundarbans mangroves of the Bay of Bengal, to observe Ecotourism in action, to a local steel mill, and to local wetlands and forests. I lectured in the Biodiversity and Conservation course of the Master's in Environmental Studies programme. I also gave three workshops on Science Communication.

The Acting Vice-Chancellor of the university invited me to return and we are currently exploring visiting professor programmes supported by the Government of India.

April 2018

I was a visiting professor in the Biology Department at Monash University for a month, hosted by Professor Joslin Moore's group. I gave a research seminar, a science communication workshop and I also spoke about women in 19th century Ontario botany at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.

May 2017

In the first two weeks, I visited Lahore, Pakistan where Dr. Shah Khalid arranged for me to give two talks about Science Communication at: Government College University & the University of Education.

I participated in Professor Ann Dale's online Biodiversity e-dialogues. A report has been delivered to Nature Canada's Women for Nature group.

ArcticNet 2018 conference issued a call for symposia, and with Memorial University Archaeology Professor, Lisa Rankin, I proposed an Ecotourism session, which was accepted.

June 2018

I was the onboard botanist for the *Scotland Slowly* and *North Atlantic Saga Expedition* Adventure Canada expedition cruises. I worked with new academic colleagues, including University of Glasgow's Dr. Steve Gillespie, an expert on Alternative Tourism. Along with Visva Bharati colleagues, he contributed to the December 2018 ArcticNet session: How Forms of Alternative Tourism, Such as Ecotourism, Can Provide Sustainable Development Opportunities for Arctic Communities.

I prepared to give two public science talks in the Toronto Public Library's Fragile Planet series, to which I had committed in January 2018. These took place in July and September 2018. No wonder I'm so tired since I got back. I'm focussing on finishing 2 major writing projects.