

UFV History's *Now and Then* and Public History

Since 2022, I have been fortunate to edit the UFV History Department newsletter, *Now and Then*. It was previously edited and produced by Dr. Molly Ungar (now retired) through 2017. As the editor who has solicited most of the content you see here as well as in recent issues (with some help from numerous esteemed colleagues), I am the one to be blamed for its recent arrangements and representations.

In some respects, the newsletter has become an extension of the kinds of questions, assignments, and public-facing practices that students encounter in the University of the Fraser Valley History 301: Introduction to Public History and in some of the other courses I teach in mainly American history. Rather than simply reporting departmental news, *Now and Then* has evolved into a space where students, alumni, faculty, and community contributors can experiment with the promises – and confront the challenge – of historical writing for public audiences. Profiles of student projects, alumni stories, faculty research, local film series, social events, oral history initiatives, and community collaborations all appear alongside reflections about how we, as historians, can communicate beyond classrooms and university settings. These writings, usually accompany plenty of visuals and images.

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[HTTPS://WWW.UFV.CA/HISTORY/](https://www.ufv.ca/history/)



Featured Professor

Professor Ian Rocksborough-Smith (he/him) has taught history at the University of the Fraser Valley since 2013, joining the department as a full-time faculty member in 2019. His teaching and research explore the intersections of race, labour, religion, public history, and politics in the modern United States. He is the author of *Black Public History in Chicago* (2018) and is completing a second book on race and religion in Cold War suburban Chicago. At UFV, he is committed to experiential learning and community-engaged historical research. He often teaches History 301: Introduction to Public History - a course he mainly reflects on in this faculty feature.

Faculty Feature

At a moment when public debates about history are increasingly polarized, I feel that this kind of work matters immensely. Public history is not merely about making the past “accessible.” As Thomas Cauvin argues in *Public History: A Textbook of Practice* (2016), public historians must continually grapple with the stakes of representation, evidence, ethics, and power in how we share about the past. Students in History 301 are therefore asked not only to study public history, but to practice it themselves through assignments that emphasize interpretation, collaboration, and critical personal reflections. In a modest way, the newsletter has also reflected those same pedagogical goals.

History matters because it is about both the past and present, simultaneously. Whether students are writing short reflective pieces, sharing visually-enhanced research projects, or discussing public-facing heritage institutions, they are encouraged to think carefully about how historical narratives circulate in digital and community spaces. They are also asked about the obligations historians carry when engaging contested histories in public realms – which can also include their own families and their own communities.

One of the strongest examples of this pedagogical approach can be found in the course’s “found history” assignment (see image below). Students are invited to critically analyze forms of history encountered in everyday life – letters, photographs, postcards, family heirlooms, oral histories, podcasts, digital collections, or community artifacts – and to consider how meaning is created through preservation, storytelling, and interpretation.

On right: Students from History 301 showcase their “found history” items from presentations in the Winter 2026 term.



Faculty Feature

The emphasis on local and regional history is especially important within the Fraser Valley / Stó:lō Téméxw. Students at UFV are uniquely positioned to study a dynamic region shaped especially by Indigenous histories, migrations, agriculture, religions, labour struggles, environmental changes, and rapid settlement and urban growth. History 301 explicitly encourages students to examine how municipalities, museums, archives, and heritage organizations represent these histories to the public. Through critical reviews of museums and heritage sites, students are asked to evaluate questions of audience, evidence, omission, and narrative structure (some of these projects are profiled in this issue of the newsletter). These assignments encourage students to think critically about how power operates through historical representation – who is remembered, who is marginalized, and why.

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The course's emphasis on oral history and storytelling underscores ethical historical methodologies, Indigenous storytelling traditions, and community memory. These efforts remind students that historical authority does not reside exclusively in institutional archives and locations. Public history often involves listening carefully to lived experiences and recognizing the value of memory, testimony, and cultural knowledge from community members. This is particularly meaningful in the valley, where Indigenous, immigrant, racialized, and working-class communities have frequently had their histories marginalized or excluded from dominant narratives. The newsletter provides a modest but significant potential venue where alternative perspectives and community histories can be highlighted and shared in collaboration with UFV's History program.

Below: A pamphlet handout from a group presentation in the Winter 2026 term project focused on a study of how Yellowknife, Northwest Territories presents “public history.”



Faculty Feature

Equally important is the course's sustained attention to media and digital history. History 301 asks students to examine podcasts, online exhibitions, comic book popular histories, filmic representations, audio and visual productions, and digital archives as forms of historical practice. Students are encouraged to think critically about how history circulates in an era of social media, digitization, and misinformation. The final reflective "blog"-style assignment, which asks students to combine written analysis with images and digital presentation, reinforces the idea that historians today must be able to communicate across multiple platforms and audiences. *Now and Then* has functioned as one such platform: a modest space where students can experiment with concise, accessible, visually engaging, and ethically grounded forms of public historical writing and reflective thought. I hope colleagues and students can experiment with more of these platforms in the years to come.

At its best and broadly speaking, the UFV History program encourages students to see historical thinking as an active civic practice that extends beyond the classroom. Through experiential learning, study tours, collaborative research, museum critiques, oral history work, and public writing assignments, students are asked by myself and my great colleagues to imagine how historical knowledge might contribute to a more democratic and equitable society. The department newsletter reflects and reinforces those goals. It offers students and alumni an opportunity to engage broad audiences while also recognizing the challenges and responsibilities involved in interpreting contested pasts carefully and ethically.

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In an era shaped by digital misinformation, political polarizations, shrinking public trust, and increasingly fragmented media landscapes, these lessons are more important than ever. The work students engage in in History 301 and many other courses in our program, demonstrates that studying history is not simply about preserving the past; it is also about understanding how historical narratives shape public life in the present. It is our collective hope as history faculty at UFV, that we can help foster meaningful collaborative spaces for our students that bridge many divides — ones that model not simply how to study history, but how to share it thoughtfully, critically, concisely, and responsibly with the wider world and community.

Alumni Highlights

The Path Ahead: How I Found My Confidence in History

By Maggie Meyers

If you had told me when I first started university that one department would have such a profound effect on my life, I would have laughed in disbelief. Yet here I am writing a piece on how a department had such an impact on me for said department's semesterly newsletter.



Back in 2017, I walked into UFV's doors filled with excitement and uncertainty. I had just graduated high school and wasn't entirely sure what I wanted to do with my life, but I was excited to see what university life had in store for me. I always had a passion for history, but I was worried I wouldn't be able to financially sustain myself. I took Criminology 12 and Law 12 in high school and enjoyed them enough to pursue a degree in Criminal Justice. Even though I couldn't dedicate a lot of time to history, I was still taking history courses whenever I could. While I did branch out into other areas of history, I mainly took courses on U.S. history. I am happy to say that I took almost every single U.S. history course offered by the time I graduated.

As the semesters went on, I still had no idea what I wanted to do once I graduated. I was toying with the idea of grad school, but I didn't know what I wanted to study. I know this is a common experience for many undergraduate students, but it frustrated me beyond reason at the time. I felt that I was falling behind my peers as I slowly realized I didn't enjoy criminology as much as I thought I did. I had similar realizations all throughout the COVID-19 pandemic when I found myself with a lot more time to be with my thoughts. It wasn't until 2022 when I finally started looking at history as the solution to my uncertainty.



On left: For context, the “Maggie for Vampire Overlord” badge was created and circulated by History Honours student and AHS stalwart, Danika Thomson.

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Alumni Highlights

During the Winter 2022 semester, I took HIST 301: Introduction to Public History with Ian Rocksborough-Smith. HIST 301 very much changed my life. Ok, maybe that was a bit too dramatic, but it definitely set a lot of things in motion for me. After completing this course, I became more involved on campus. I had the opportunity to complete a work study term with Ian (you can read about my research in the [Fall 2022 issue of this newsletter!](#)). I learned about the History Honours program, which had a significant impact on my life that I will get into shortly. I started working at the Academic Success Centre as a Peer Tutor/AIM Mentor and had several opportunities stem from that. I joined the Association of History Students as the Social Media Coordinator and met some of my favourite people. I finally found a community where I felt like I belonged and I no longer felt the uncertainty I was battling with for five years.

My last few semesters as a UFV student were truly transformative. I joined the auxiliary pool in November 2024 and began my journey as a UFV employee where I worked in the Student Rights and Responsibilities Office. In my last semester, Winter 2025, I completed my honours project on the New England Vampire Panic. In my final paper "Where the Dead Must Go: Vampires of the White Death in 18th and 19th Century New England," I told the story of Mercy Lena Brown and her family and discussed how vampires served as a metaphor for disease. The project and semester ended with me having the opportunity to present my research along with my fellow honours students at the annual History Honours Conference. I mentioned earlier that the honours program had a significant impact on my life. While I always knew I wanted to go to grad school, I didn't know if I could actually do it. After I completed my honours project, I finally found the confidence I needed to seriously consider grad school.

In June of 2025, I crossed the stage at Convocation with a BA in Criminal Justice and a BA in History Honours. After graduating, I continued working as an auxiliary and worked in UFV International, Student Services, and the Academic Advising Centre. I am grateful that I was able to work in departments that provide direct support for students. It was, and continues to be, a great way to give back to the campus community.



Above: Maggie with Prof. and History Department Chair Adrianna Bakos at UFV graduation in June 2025.

Student Highlights

By Cameron Phillips

One Mask, Six Worlds: Visualizing the Psychological Self in Buddhist Cosmology

Created for Dr. Eiji Okawa's course on “Life and Death in East Asian Religion”, this artwork explores the relationship between Buddhist cosmology, Japanese aesthetics, and the fluid nature of human consciousness. The piece centers on a single Noh mask that contains within its surface the six realms of Rokudō (Samsara—The Wheel of Rebirth): hell, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, asuras, and heavenly beings.

While these realms are traditionally understood as destinations within the cycle of rebirth, my project approaches them through a psychological lens. Rather than depicting six separate worlds, I sought to represent them as emotional and existential states that arise within a single human life. Rage, craving, jealousy, ambition, animal instinct, reflection, clarity, and enlightenment are not experiences confined to different beings or different lives; but rather, conditions that emerge, overlap, and transform within our own consciousness.

The Noh mask provided an ideal visual metaphor for this interpretation. In traditional Japanese theatre, a Noh mask does not possess a fixed expression. Though crafted with an intentional stillness and ambiguity, subtle changes in light, angle, and movement bring the mask to life, allowing it to appear sorrowful, serene, joyful, or troubled. In this sense, calmness and chaos are not opposites; they coexist. This fluidity mirrors the Buddhist understanding of life and the self as impermanent and constantly changing. The mask remains one face, yet contains many possibilities; just as the mind remains one consciousness while continually shifting through different states of being.

Student Highlights

Surrounding the mask are falling maple leaves, inspired by the Japanese concept of Mujō (impermanence). Like the changing seasons, no emotional state remains permanent. Moments of suffering eventually pass, just as moments of peace and clarity inevitably change. The leaves serve as a reminder that transformation is a constant feature of the human experience.

Ultimately, this piece argues that the six realms of Rokudō need not be understood solely as distant cosmological destinations. They can also be viewed as reflections of the inner landscape of the mind. In this sense, Samara is not somewhere we go. It is something we move through.



Student Highlights

By Richard Paul

Slahal: The Ancient Institution of Salish Sovereignty

Slahal, known commonly as the “bone game” or “stick game,” is frequently categorized by Western observers as a simple recreational pastime or a game of chance. A synthesis of archaeological evidence, oral history, and contemporary Indigenous scholarship reveals that slahal is a sophisticated legal, diplomatic, and spiritual institution that has thrived in the Pacific Northwest since the Ice Age. The discovery of the “Richey-Roberts Clovis Cache” in East Wenatchee, containing carved bone rods dating to approximately 13,800 years ago, provides physical evidence of the game’s deep antiquity.¹ While Western archaeologists initially debated the function of these artifacts, Indigenous elders immediately recognized them as gaming pieces, asserting a cultural continuity that predates modern recorded history.² Far more than a game, slahal serves as a mechanism for conflict resolution, a vessel for spiritual power, and an act of what scholars call “survivance,” active repudiation of colonial erasure through presence and practice.³

The spiritual significance of slahal is rooted in a cosmology that defines the relationship between humans and the natural world. According to origin stories, the game began as a primordial contest between “animal people” and “human people.”⁴ The humans’ victory in this game established the natural law that allowed them to hunt animals for sustenance, fundamentally ordering the world and ensuring human survival.⁵ This origin story stresses an “Indigenous philosophy of holism,” where the game is not separate from the spiritual world or natural worlds but is an enactment of interrelatedness.⁶

This spiritual dimension remains active in contemporary gameplay through the use of specific songs. Elder William Charlie explains that songs are not merely accompaniment but carriers of “spirit power” and identity.⁷ He describes the “winning song” of the Sts’ailes people, which was historically used to defeat a rival shaman named Isidor Tom.⁸ The song itself carried the power to make the opposing team feel defeated.⁹ The game further involves ritualistic elements for protection and clarity. Charlie recounts using “pumpus” (snowberry) as a spiritual “shield” to protect players from the bad medicine or psychological influence of opponents.¹⁰ This demonstrates that slahal is a contest of spiritual and psychological strength as much as it is a game of chance, requiring players to listen with their “whole being” (ears and heart) to navigate the seen and unseen forces at play.¹¹

Student Highlights

Socially, slahal acts as a powerful force of unity for Indigenous communities. As noted in the *Seattle Times*, gatherings for the game bring together tribal families from across the region to celebrate a shared culture that has survived millennia.¹² In the face of colonization, the game functions as “survivance.” By playing, communities resist the “victimry” often associated with colonial history and instead assert an active, living presence.¹³

The preservation of this community institution relies entirely on the oral history, which fosters intergenerational relationships. Rose Kempf stresses that these teachings are passed “mouth to mouth to mouth,” creating a living archive that exists outside of written texts.¹⁴ This resonates with the argument in “Collecting and Preserving People’s Stories” that oral history is essential for “fill[ing] in the gaps in document[ing] history,” particularly for underrepresented (or attempted erased) histories whose perspectives have been absent, despite the availability of traditional archives.¹⁵ This aligns with the methodology described by Gwen Point, who teaches that listing is the first lesson of the oral tradition. À’aliya Point notes that elders are “libraries” and that the transmission of knowledge, whether about cedar or slahal, requires a “symbiotic relationship” between the giver and the receiver.¹⁶ By continuing to play slahal, communities engage in a collective act of (re)membering, ensuring that their identity and history remain vital.¹⁷ The game is inclusive, teaching values of kindness, generosity, and humility to the younger generation, ensuring the “cultural continuity” of the people.¹⁸

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Economically, the game served as a method of redistribution and high-stakes exchange. In historical contexts, hunting/fishing grounds, the hop yards, or trading centers, slahal was a primary economic activity where wealth changed hands. Charlie recounts games where the wagers were so large that money had to be “tied up in a scarf” and stacked high, indicating the game’s central role in the economic circulation of the community.¹⁹ During the period when traditional potlatches were outlawed by colonial governments, slahal became a covert way to continue the “survivance” of Indigenous economic systems.²⁰ Tribes incorporated colonial currency as surrogates for traditional items, effectively taking control of imposed economic systems to maintain their own cultural practices.²¹ This adaptation demonstrates the game’s role not just in gambling but in preserving Indigenous sovereignty over their own economic and social exchange.

Student Highlights

Slahal is a complex institution that encompasses the legal, spiritual, and economic life of the Salish Peoples. To view it merely as a “gambling game” is to ignore the “indigenous philosophy of holism” which underpins its importance. As scholars, Jackson et al. argue in *Research as (re)vision*, we must challenge Western definitions of research to recognize that oral traditions are valid, rigorous methodologies.²² The stories of Elders like William Charlie and the analysis of Indigenous scholars demonstrate that slahal is a living library. It is a testament to a legal system that prioritized peace over war, an economic system that adapted to survive colonization, and a spiritual practice that has ensured the resilience of a people since the retreat of the glaciers. Engaging with slahal, we are witnessing history not as a static written record, but as a living, breathing practice of sovereignty.



Above: Slahal being played at Vancouver's Summer Live festival in 2011

Student Highlights

Notes

- 1 Lynda V. Mapes, "Tribalgathering celebrates unifyingculture of an ancient game," *The Seattle Times*, May 5, 2012.
- 2 Mapes, "Tribal gathering celebrates unifyingculture of an ancientgame."
- 3 Jonathan Tomhave, Jeanette Bushnell, and Tylor Prather, "How Do You Say Watermelon?," *Transmotion*, (2017) 52.
- 4 Tomhave et al., "How Do You Say Watermelon?," 47.
- 5 Tomhave et al., "How Do You Say Watermelon?," 48.
- 6 Tomhave et al., "How Do You Say Watermelon?," 50-51.
- 7 William Charlie, interview by Richard Paul (2026).
- 8 William Charlie, interview by Richard Paul.
- 9 William Charlie, interview by Richard Paul.
- 10 William Charlie, interview by RichardPaul.
- 11 Stó:lō Signal podcast, "This is Who We Are: Storytelling and Tradition," (October 2021), w. A'aliya Warbus' conversation with Dr. Gwen Point, 02:08.
- 12 Mapes, "Tribalgathering celebrates unifyingculture of an ancientgame."
- 13 Tomhave et al., "How Do You Say Watermelon?," 52.
- 14 Mapes, "Tribalgathering celebrates unifyingculture of an ancientgame."
- 15 Thomas Cauvin, Ch. 3 "Collecting and Preserving People's Stories: Oral History, Family History, and Everyday Life," *Public History: A Textbook of Practice* (2016), 91.
- 16 Stó:lō Signal podcast, "This is Who We Are," 13:36.
- 17 Ilesha Jackson, Doris L. Watson, Claytee D. White & Marcia Gallo, "Research as (re)vision: laying claim to oral history," *International Journal of Research and Method in Education* (May 2022), 335.
- 18 Mapes, "Tribalgathering celebrates unifyingculture of an ancientgame."
- 19 William Charlie, interview by RichardPaul.
- 20 Tomhave et al., "How Do You Say Watermelon?," 58-59.
- 21 Tomhave et al., "How Do You Say Watermelon?," 59-60.
- 22 Jackson et al., "Research as (re)vision," 331.

Honours May 2026



HISTORY HONOURS STUDENT CONFERENCE

TUESDAY, MAY 19TH, 2026

1:00-3:00PM

UFV ABBOTSFORD CAMPUS

BUILDING K, ROOM K180

Student Panelists:

Danika Thomson

Aidan Spence

Jakob Petersen

Ryan Crawford

Ina Van Dijk

The UFV History Department hosted its annual majors, awards, and graduating students (MAGS) celebrations May 19, 2026, featuring five excellent presentations from our honours program.

Research Awards - MAGS, 2026



At MAGS, we annually award excellent student researchers with book awards that also often come with some monetary compensation. Dept. Chair Adrianna Bakos is pictured here introducing and congratulating 2026 award recipients.

Grad Photos June 2026





Above right and center right: History program students on the Japan Study tour on the streets of Tokyo (Spring 2026). The tour was organized by Prof. Eiji Okawa (and supported by Prof. Steven Schroeder).

Bottom right: Having donuts with AHS in D3006.

Bottom left: 2026 History Trivia Night Winners! (organized by Prof. Seb Huebel and Prof. Chris Hyland)



If you are a current student or alumnus and are working on something you might like to have profiled in this newsletter, consider submitting ideas to *Now and Then*. We would love to hear from you! **Contact:** historyinfo@ufv.ca