



UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA

Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities

ANNUAL REPORT

2022-23





The University of Alberta respects the sovereignty, lands, histories, languages, knowledge systems and cultures of First Nations, Métis and Inuit nations.

Augustana is located in (asiniskaw sipisis - Stoney Creek) Treaty 6 territory; a travelling route and home to the Maskwacîs Nêhiyawak, Niitsitapi, Nakoda, and Tsuut'ina Nations, the Métis and other Indigenous peoples. Their spiritual and practical relationships to the land create a rich heritage for our learning and our life as a community.

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Message from the Director

The 2022/23 reporting year was another busy, exciting, and ultimately quite productive year for the ACSRC! We have continued important work on a wide range of rural-focused projects, were successful on several research grant applications, engaged in many new partnerships with researchers and organisations, and laid the foundation for much success going forward.

Some exciting new projects that we have embarked on include two new SSHRC-funded projects, one an ACSRC-led rural ethnography project aimed at better understanding public opinion in rural communities across Canada and the second, led by Dr. John Parkins of the University of Alberta, focussed on the potential inherent in community-owned green energy projects for rural communities. We were also pleased to issue two public reports this year on aspects of social service delivery in rural areas, and we continue to work on, and share key results from, projects aimed at supporting sustainable economic development in rural Alberta.

The ACSRC has also continued our tradition of community outreach, ensuring that valuable information is shared with the rural Alberta communities who need it most. Over the past year, we hosted three well-attended online webinars on topics of significance to rural communities in addition to several public presentations, publications and media hits. We are especially excited about our upcoming in-person conference, 'Reimagining Rural Economic Development: Cooperative Innovation & the Future of Our Communities', to be held at the Jeanne & Peter Lougheed Performing Arts Centre at the Augustana Campus in Camrose in October 2023.

I am also happy to report that the ACSRC employed eight University of Alberta students as research assistants on various projects over the year, hired our first post-doctoral student, and supervised one "Rural Pathways" summer student intern.

I invite you to read, in more detail, about these and other endeavours undertaken by the ACSRC in the pages that follow. I also invite you to our website uab.ca/acsrc, for even more details! Finally, I would like to personally thank all those who have supported the ACSRC over the past year and encourage those new to our work to consider supporting us going forward. Many of our future plans rely on those who care about rural communities and are willing to financially support our work in these important areas. I wish you all a great year ahead and, as always, do not hesitate to reach out to us!

Clark Banack
Director, ACSRC

About the ACSRC

The Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities (ACSRC) at the University of Alberta has, since its founding in 2009, assisted rural communities in meeting diverse challenges across many areas of public policy through fostering constructive dialogue, promoting interdisciplinary and collaborative research, and developing partnerships.

The Centre's mission is to link the research, outreach and educational capacity of the University of Alberta with students, researchers, rural communities, rural community organizations and policy makers at multiple levels across the province, nationally, and internationally in order to support the improved sustainability of rural communities and populations.

To read more about us and the work we do, please visit uab.ca/acsrc

ACSRC TEAM

In addition to the many student research assistants, we employed over the year, the ACSRC is pleased to count the following individuals as key participants in our work:

COORDINATOR

Kate McConnell, ACSRC & Special Initiatives Coordinator

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos, PhD (Dean & Executive Officer, Augustana Campus)

Stanford Blade, PhD (Dean, Faculty of Agricultural, Life & Environmental Sciences, University of Alberta)

Debra Davidson, PhD (Professor, Faculty of Agricultural, Life & Environmental Sciences, University of Alberta)

Rebecca Purc-Stephenson, PhD (Professor, Faculty of Psychology, Augustana Campus)

Brent Swallow, PhD (Professor, Faculty of Agriculture Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Alberta)

Joseph Wiebe, PhD (Director of the Chester Ronning Centre, Associate Professor, Fine Arts & Humanities, Augustana Campus)

ADVISORY COUNCIL

Gerald Rhodes (Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties)

Cathy Goulet (Northern Alberta Development Council)

Arnold Hansen (Battle River Alliance for Economic Development)

Patricia MacQuarrie (City of Camrose)

New Projects

Understanding Social & Political Attitudes in Rural Canada via Ethnography

Funding Source: SSHRC Insight Development Grant (\$74, 594)

Project Lead: Clark Banack (ACSRC)

Role of ACSRC: Principal Investigator

Project Dates: November 2022 - December 2024

Building on Dr. Banack's pilot study completed in rural Alberta ([read here](#)), and in partnership with Dr. Dionne Pohler (University of Saskatchewan), and University of Alberta PhD Candidate and ACSRC Research Fellow Laticia Chapman, this SSHRC-funded project utilizes a political ethnographic method to better understand political opinion formation in rural communities across Canada. The research team has already completed 2-week "immersions" in Digby, NS, Minden, ON, and Dawson City, YK, and anticipates completing additional fieldwork in rural British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan over the upcoming year. Initial research findings will be presented to the Canadian Political Science Association's Annual Conference in Montreal in June 2024, and various papers will be written by the team for academic publication.

Via SSHRC's Special Response Fund for Trainees (Ukraine) Program, the research team was also able to add Post-Doctoral Student Olena Mykhailenko to the project. Olena attained her PhD in Industrial Economics at the Research Institute at the Ministry of Economic Development of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine, and brings a wealth of experience working on rural development projects in Europe, most recently with the Goethe Institute in Ukraine.

Pathways to Energy Democracy in Canada

Funding Source: SSHRC Insight Grant (\$338, 337)
Project Lead: Dr. John Parkins (University of Alberta)
Role of ACSRC: Co-Applicant
Project Dates: May 2023 - December 2024

This 5-year SSHRC-funded project includes interdisciplinary scholars from across Canada who are committed to conducting research that can help realize more equitable and accessible forms of energy production and distribution that can support local communities and local livelihoods. Focused specifically on community-based renewable energy projects, the ACSRC's role in this work is to explore how energy transitions can happen while still meeting the needs of diverse and evolving rural communities, while also considering ways to overcome instances of political polarization that threatens to impede the development of community-based renewable energy projects.

Exploring the Economic Development Potential of Dark Sky Tourism in Rural Alberta

Funding Source: University of Alberta SIG Grant (\$5, 250)
Project Lead: Clark Banack
Role of ACSRC: Principal Investigator
Project Dates: November 2022 – December 2023

The ACSRC, in collaboration with Dr. Glen Hvenegaard (University of Alberta, Augustana) is researching the economic development potential associated with Dark Sky Tourism for rural Alberta communities. Over the past year we have completed over 20 interviews with individuals knowledgeable in this field, in addition to the completion of a participant observation study of the Jasper Dark Sky Festival in October 2022. Dr. Banack presented some of the research findings at the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundations Annual Conference in Lethbridge AB and he and Dr. Hvenegaard anticipate submitting an academic article for publication and authoring a public report highlighting the key findings related to rural economic development potential in the upcoming year.

Co-creating Best Practices for Implementing Work-Integrated Learning Programs across Rural Canada

Funding Source: Mitacs (\$30, 000)

Project Lead: Clark Banack

Role of ACSRC: Principal Investigator

Project Dates: March 2023 - December 2024

Working in collaboration with The Rural Development Network (RDN), the ACSRC is undertaking a project to uncover lessons learned and methods to:

- illustrate best practices for implementing rural-based Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) programs at post-secondary institutions that currently don't have programs or are looking to enhance their offerings;
- identify trends, government policies, and relevant contributors to support the WIL landscape in rural Alberta; and
- strengthen collaboration between post-secondary institutions and employers across Canada, with a focus on rural and remote communities.

Ongoing Projects

Innovative Local Co-operatives and Rural Development

Funding Source: Alberta Real Estate Foundation Investment Grant (\$59, 920)

Project Lead: Clark Banack (ACSRC)

Role of ACSRC: Principal Investigator

Project Dates: January 2021 – November 2023

Funded by the Alberta Real Estate Foundation, the ACSRC has continued its work on this research and outreach project that explores the potential inherent in new and innovative local co-operatives to act as significant stimulants in rural economic development and service delivery throughout the rural regions of the province. Considering examples across North America and Europe, the overarching goal of this project is to answer the following questions:

- Which examples of successful rural co-operative models elsewhere are best positioned to be replicated in rural Alberta communities?
- What are the “best practices” associated with ensuring the success of these co-operatives?
- How can governments, local, provincial and federal, best support the establishment and growth of these local co-operatives in ways that ensures they generate good jobs and enhance service delivery in rural communities?

Over 40 interviews have been completed with individuals involved in a wide-variety of rural-based co-ops across Western Canada, Nova Scotia, Wisconsin, and the United Kingdom. Dr. Banack has presented aspects of this work to various municipalities and rural-based organizations in addition to attendees of the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundations Annual Conference in Lethbridge AB.

This project will culminate in October 2023, when we will host a two-day Conference ‘Reimagining Rural Economic Development: Cooperative Innovation & the Future of Our Communities’ in Camrose, AB. We will present our research findings and host presentations from a collection of Canadian and American academics and co-op developers who specialize in co-operatives and rural economic development. We will also host presentations from founders/members of select successful cooperatives from rural regions across North America. The final public report will be published in November 2023, and an academic article based on this work will be submitted for publication

More information about the conference can be found on the [event website](#).

Mobilizing Knowledge for Co-operative Energy Success

Funding Source:

University of Alberta - University of Sheffield Seed Grant Program(\$25, 050)

Project Lead: Dr. John Parkins (University of Alberta)

Role of ACSRC: Research Partner

Project Dates: January 2022 – September 2023

In collaboration with Dr. John Parkins (Professor, Department Chair, Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sci - Resource Economics & Environmental Sociology, University of Alberta), and a team of scholars from the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom, the ACSRC is working on a project on Green Energy Cooperatives in rural regions with a focus on: how knowledge is gained and how it enables the community to act, and how energy cooperatives realize their motivations and work towards transforming energy practices. Field work has been completed on two comparative case studies, the Bow Valley Green Energy Co-operative in Canmore, AB, and Sheffield Renewables in Sheffield, UK, and the research team is currently writing an academic paper for publication.

Supporting the Mental Health of Alberta Farmers

Funding Source:

Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, and Rural Economic Development Project

Project Lead: Dr. Rebecca Purc-Stephenson (University of Alberta)

Role of ACSRC: Collaborator

Project Dates: October 2022 - December 2024

Work continues on this important project with the creation of the Alberta Farm Mental Health Network, AgKnow, that connects people working in healthcare, the agricultural industry, and researchers to bridge communication gaps, optimize services, and to stimulate research on farmers in Alberta. Dr. Purc-Stephenson, Professor of Psychology and a Research Associate of the ACSRC, is leading the research branch of the initiative that involves investigating the factors impacting mental health and wellbeing among farmers, as well as ways to build their resilience to the ongoing stressors.

Read more about this project at agknow.ca

Neoliberalism and the Rural Populist Project

Funding Source: SSHRC Insight Development Grant (\$66, 050)

Project Lead: Dr. Lars Hallstrom (University of Lethbridge)

Role of ACSRC: Research Partner

Project Dates: May 2021 – April 2024

Working in collaboration with Dr. Lars Hallstrom (Director, Prentice Institute, University of Lethbridge), this project examines the resurgence of populism in Canada (but also internationally) from a primarily theoretical, rather than socioeconomic, standpoint, in an effort to understand not only the changing political landscape of rural communities in Canada, but in particular the ways in which the broader developmental and political trajectories of neoliberalism have contributed to that landscape, the politics of resentment, and the emergence of pronounced anti-government sentiment from communities and sectors (agricultural and conventional energy) that have historically been deeply reliant upon public sectors spending, policy and support. Drs. Hallstrom and Banack continue to work on this project and, this past year, have presented various conference papers on aspects of this project, at the Prairie Political Science Association Annual Conference in Banff, AB; the Western Political Science Association Annual Conference in San Francisco, CA; and the Canadian Political Science Association Annual Conference in Toronto, ON. They continue to work on various papers for eventual academic publication.

Understanding Barriers - Canadian Map of Language Attitudes

Funding Source: University of Alberta KIAS Cluster Grant (\$60, 000)

Project Lead: Dr. Juhani Jarvikivi (University of Alberta)

Role of ACSRC: Collaborator

The ACSRC is happy to bring a “rural” voice to an ongoing multi-disciplinary project led by Dr. Juhani Jarvikivi (Professor, Faculty of Arts - Linguistics Dept) that explores the question: How can better understanding factors driving these attitudes contribute to a fairer society? The aim of this project is to create equitable, real-world informed research into language attitudes in Canada by building a citizen science (CS) network, a network of experts, and a technological infrastructure, the Canadian Map of Language Attitudes and Use, that will support engagement and inclusion of speakers from diverse regions and backgrounds as both research creators and beneficiaries.

Completed Projects

Exploring the Challenges Faced by FCSS offices in Rural Alberta

Funding Source: Rural Municipalities of Alberta

Project Lead: Clark Banack (ACSRC)

Role of ACSRC: Principal Investigator

Project Dates: November 2022 – June 2023

In conjunction with the Rural Municipalities of Alberta, the ACSRC completed a study exploring the challenges faced by Family and Community Support Services in rural Alberta. Drawing on the completion of 20 semi-structured interviews of individuals knowledgeable about this topic, and a wide-ranging online survey of 80 different FCSS program directors across rural Alberta, the ACSRC authored a final report that highlights three key challenges faced by rural FCSS programs in Alberta:

Key Challenge 1: Insufficient Provincial Funding

Key Challenge 2: The Increasing Inaccessibility of Provincial Social Services in Rural Alberta

Key Challenge 3: Changing and Increasing Social Needs in Rural Communities

In addition, the report includes four concrete policy recommendations:

- 1. Increase Core Funding from the Province**
- 2. Increase the Accessibility of Provincial Social Support Services for Rural Albertans**
- 3. Ensure that Future Public Policy Related to Social Service Delivery in Alberta is Approached via a Rural Lens**

[Read the full report](#), authored by Dr. Banack and University of Alberta PhD Candidate and ACSRC Research Fellow Laticia Chapman.

Evaluating the Mental Health Benefits of Men's Sheds in Rural Alberta

Funding Source: University of Alberta KIAS Team Research Grant (\$6, 940)

Project Lead: Clark Banack (ACSRC)

Role of ACSRC: Principal Investigator

Project Dates: January 2021 – March 2023

In collaboration with Dr. Kyle Whitfield (Associate Professor in the Faculty of Science-School of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Alberta) and Serena Isley (Master of Science program in Medicine at the University of Alberta and ACSRC Research Assistant), the ACSRC completed a project that evaluates the mental health benefits of Men's Shed participation in Rural Alberta with an initial exploration of Sheds in Cold Lake and Camrose.

A public report 'The Mental Health Benefits of Men's Sheds in Rural Alberta' was released in April 2023 - [read the research report.](#)

Project collaborators Kyle Whitfield and Serena Isley gave a presentation of findings in Cold Lake in May 2023, and Clark Banack presented to an audience in Camrose in July 2023. An academic publication based on this research is currently under review.



Webinars

In April and May of 2023, the ACSRC presented three, one-hour presentations focussed on topics of significance to rural communities including:

Community Led Development in Camrose: What can we learn from the Viking Cup?

April 2022

A hybrid online/in-person evening in conversation with Viking Cup Coordinator LeRoy Johnson and Committee Chair Verlyn Olson.

[Watch](#)

Rethinking Craft for Community Development

May 2022

In this webinar, Dr. John Parkins (University of Alberta) links contemporary thinking on craft and craftsmanship to concepts in community development.

[Watch](#)

Examining the Outcomes of Zero-fee Education in Building a Resilient, Inclusive Economy in Drayton Valley

May 2022

University of Alberta Postdoctoral Fellow Alexa Ferdinands and Research Assistant Dana Wagner discuss the zero-fee tuition program in Drayton Valley.

[Watch](#)

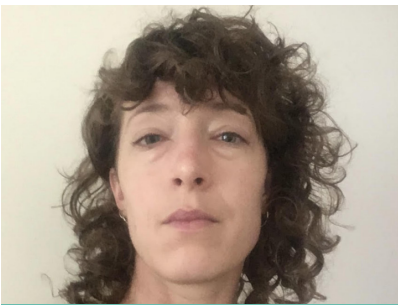
Rural Pathways Summer Internship Program

The ACSRC oversees the Rural Pathways Summer Internship Program at Augustana Campus. Established with a generous gift from an alumnus, this competitive program provides compensation to rural and Indigenous students to complete career-related internships with organizations in their home (or similar) communities over the summer. Program placements are as diverse as our students and their communities, with students posting about their placements on our Pathways blog throughout each summer.

The ACSRC is currently working with Augustana's Development Office and the Student Advising and Experiential Learning Office to re-envision the Pathways program in order to increase the number of Pathways internships, increase community engagement, and diversify investment opportunities to ensure sustainable growth. If you are interested in supporting this important initiative, please [contact](#) the Development Office.

Student Research Opportunities at the ACSRC

A significant goal of the ACSRC is to secure external funding to allow for the hiring of student research assistants to work on a wide range of our projects throughout the year. We are pleased to report that the ACSRC was quite successful on this front over the past year and we were very happy to employ the following students on several of our key projects:



Laticia Chapman
 Graduate Research Ass't
 (U of A PhD Candidate,
 Political Science)



Dr. Olena Mykhailenko
 Post Doctoral Student
 (PhD Industrial Economics, Research
 Institute at the Ministry of Economic
 Development of Ukraine, Kyiv,
 Ukraine)



Kirsten Schmidt
 Project Intern (Bachelor of Science,
 Class of 2023)

PROJECTS:

Exploring the Challenges Faced by
 FCSS Offices in Rural Alberta
 Understanding Social & Political
 Attitudes in Rural Canada via
 Ethnography

PROJECTS:

Understanding Social & Political
 Attitudes in Rural Canada via
 Ethnography

PROJECTS:

Co-creating Best Practices for
 Implementing Work-Integrated
 Learning Programs Across Rural
 Canada



Darby-Anne Swanson

Research Assistant (Political Science, 4th year)



Serena Isley

Research Assistant (BSc with a double major in Biology and Psychology, Augustana, Class of 2022) Master's of Science, Medicine, University of Alberta



Josie Middleton

Research Assistant (Sustainability Studies, 4th Year)

PROJECTS:

Neoliberalism and the Populist Project in Rural Alberta
Innovative Local Co-operatives and Rural Development

PROJECTS:

Exploring the Mental Health Benefits of Men's Sheds in Rural Alberta
Innovative Co-operatives & Rural Economic Development

PROJECTS:

Exploring the Economic Development Potential of Dark Sky Tourism in Rural Alberta

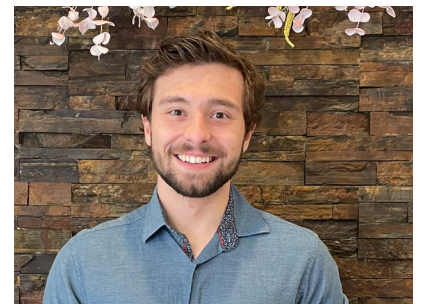
Ethan Haveroen

Research Assistant, (Bachelor of Science, 3rd year)



Joel Frank Usiri

Research Assistant (Global and Development Studies, Augustana, Graduate Class of 2022) Masters in Public Health (Epidemiology), University of Washington



Joshua Saskiw

Research Assistant (Political Studies, Augustana, Graduate Class of 2023) - Currently enrolled as a Master's of Public Policy student at the University of Saskatchewan

PROJECTS:

Neoliberalism and the Populist Project in Rural Alberta

PROJECTS:

Exploring Rural Development Opportunities in Dark Sky Reserves
Innovative Co-operatives & Rural Economic Development

PROJECTS:

Innovative Co-operatives & Rural Economic Development

Publications, Presentations & Media

ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS

Banack, Clark and Jim Farney. [Faith, Rights, and Choice: The Politics of Religious Schools in Canada](#), University of Toronto Press, 2023.

Banack, Clark, and Dionne Pohler, eds. [Building Inclusive Communities in Rural Canada](#), University of Alberta Press, 2023.

POPULAR PUBLICATIONS

Clark Banack, Kyle Whitfield, Serena Isley. [The Mental Health Benefits of Men's Sheds in Rural Alberta](#).

Clark Banack & Laticia Chapman. [Understanding and Responding to the Challenges Faced by FCSS Programs in Rural Alberta](#).

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

Clark Banack, "The Challenges faced by FCSS Programs in Rural Alberta", Rural Municipalities of Alberta Spring Convention, Edmonton, AB, March 2023.

Clark Banack, "What Can Rural Resilience Look Like in Alberta?" Rural Alberta Education Symposium, Edmonton AB, March 2023.

Clark Banack, "Rethinking Rural Development," Beaver County Public Council Meeting, Viking, AB, February 2023.

Clark Banack, "How Co-ops can Spur Economic Development in Rural Spaces," Alberta Community and Co-operative Association annual meetings, Edmonton, AB, November 2022.

Clark Banack, "Political Resentment in Rural Alberta," Parkland Institute Annual Conference, Edmonton AB, November 2022.

Clark Banack and Lars Hallstrom, "How Populist is Rural Alberta?" Prairie Political Science Association Annual Conference, Banff, AB, September 2022.

Clark Banack, "Resilient Communities in Rural Alberta," Alberta Developers Association Annual Conference, Camrose AB, September 2022.

Clark Banack, "Innovative Co-operatives and Rural Economic Development in Alberta," Alberta Economic Developers Annual Conference, Kananaskis, AB, April 2022

MEDIA

New Trails Magazine Feature: <https://www.ualberta.ca/newtrail/ideas/rural-frontiers.html>

Building Inclusive Communities in Rural Canada, Literary Review of Canada Review: <https://reviewcanada.ca/magazine/2023/07/beyond-the-city-limits/>

Financial Summary Year End Mar 31, 2023

From ACSRC Annual Declaration 2022

OPENING BALANCE	\$87,089
External Funding Received	\$107,300
University of Alberta Funding Received	\$152,240
Program Spending	\$82,026
General Administration (including Director)	\$144,107
CLOSING BALANCE	\$120,496

Leading with Purpose.



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Augustana Campus**

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