



Walking the
Path of Hope:
Climate Anxiety & the Healing Forest

Co-hosted by:
UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO | FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENT | WATERLOO Climate Institute



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

FACULTY OF
ENVIRONMENT

ANNUAL REPORT

COMMUNICATIONS & STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

ABOUT US



The Environment communications team (ECT) manages the Faculty's communications platforms and liaises with other units to access channels and resources they manage. ECT produces all manner of content – written stories and copy, photography and video - for earned, owned, and shared media for the Faculty and University (re: our Faculty and community members). The team supports other Environment teams with communications and marketing plans, content production, and distribution. ECT is also responsible for internal and executive communications in the Faculty, liaises with University Relations on crisis communications and media relations, and leads major communications and marketing projects, such as web migration and redesign, and rebranding.

The team comprises two communications managers, Chantal Vallis and Harminster Phull, and a director, strategic initiatives and communications, Rebecca Wickens. In addition to communications activities, the director takes part in creating and ensuring consistency between Faculty strategy and communications and marketing strategy; coordinating with other units, Faculties and UR to achieve mutual goals and access resources where needed; and overseeing/supporting large communications and strategic initiatives.

Part of the larger communications ecosystem, the team participates in committees and communities of practice to represent the Faculty's interests, build relationships, and remain up to date on marketing, branding, media relations, digital communications, infrastructure, and integrated planning initiatives at the University.

2025

HIGHLIGHTS



With Harminster Phull joining the team in March 2024, the team was able to start addressing infrastructure, collaborating on content with other units, adding to video and photography assets, and undertaking other strategic projects, while continuing to grow the content and engagement on key channels. Highlights include:

Completed Phase 1 and 2 of the Faculty brand refresh.

Analyzed website architecture, traffic and requirements and started redesign to reflect ENV2035.

Produced targeted content for LinkedIn, Instagram and website, increasing followers and views (see below). Secured handle for BlueSky.

Published two new issues of ENVision newsletter (September 2024, April 2025).

Updated headshots for faculty members and student-facing staff members, and refreshed event and field course photography assets.

Produced several videos, including to advertise new climate change program, commemorate June 2024 convocation, welcome applicants, and promote researchers' work.

Clarified listserv purposes following University protocols. Worked with IST on challenges with listservs.

Moved from paid subscription for Airtable to IST-supported Jira account to schedule and track digital communications and news stories.

Supported transition from Foleon to the new Ceros platform for digital magazines/brochures. Working with IST on issues with and migration away from Scholar websites.

2024-2025

STORIES & SOCIALS



LinkedIn

(May 1, 2024 - April 30, 2025)

Primary audiences: partners, alumni, parents, students (as professionals)

Purpose: profile building, relationship stewardship, celebrating achievements, sharing research and news

Followers: 4,232 (+42%)

Posts: 247 (+11%)

Interactions (likes, comments): 5,240 (+22%)

Impressions (views): 290,242

News stories

(May 1, 2024 - April 30, 2025)

Published/Issued: 18 press releases, 50 stories on the Environment website, 25 stories on Waterloo news website

Selection of Media Releases:
[Climate change limits progress on cleaning up the River Thames: study](#)

[Warm seawater speeding up melting of 'Doomsday Glacier,' scientists warn](#)

[Teens benefit from "forest bathing" – even in cities](#)

[Snapshot of Antarctica's past helps predict future climate](#)

Instagram

(May 1, 2024 - April 30, 2025)

Primary audiences: students, faculty, staff, alumni, prospective students

Purpose: community engagement, showcasing student life, entertainment, sharing university information

Followers: 7,009 (+15.6%)

Posts: 397 (+142%)

Interactions (likes, comments): 21,304 (-16%)

Impressions (views): 612,061

2025-2026

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES



INITIATIVE 1 | Faculty Brand Refresh

About: As Environment 2035 progresses and the core elements of what the Faculty pursues evolve, so must the brand evolve to communicate who we are and want to be, and what differentiates us from competitors. A brand committee led by Chantal Vallis, with representation from across Environment and including faculty, staff and students, was formed to oversee the Faculty's brand refresh.

Progress 2024-25: completed background research, self study, focus group consultations, draft vision and mission.

Milestones 2025-26: present draft vision and mission to annual general assembly, lead reflection on Faculty's values, analyse Faculty's position in marketplace, develop key messages.

INITIATIVE 2 | Website Redesign

About: The Faculty completed the required transition to WCMS3 in 2023. As part of the transition, Chantal Vallis conducted an audit and worked with page owners to clean up Faculty-level webpages. However, the WCMS transition impacted the look, feel and navigation of the site, and the audit identified many webpages that needed content updates.

With Harminster Phull's arrival in 2024, he began the research necessary to understand the architecture, traffic and stakeholder requirements, and started to design and create content for the new site. The intent is to streamline pages, improve navigation and user experience, integrate with University-level pages, and better reflect Environment 2035 and the brand refresh.

Progress 2024-25: audited website architecture and traffic, developed test pages for design feedback, consulted with Faculty-level page owners on requirements, secured development site to build new pages and architecture (without impacting existing site), started creating new content.

Milestones 2025-26: complete content and design refresh, conduct user experience testing, consult with departments and schools on their pages.

INITIATIVE 3 | Marketing & Communications Plan (IMCP)

About: Once the refreshed brand has been established, the Faculty needs to integrate the brand into communications and marketing for key audiences (e.g., prospective and current students, faculty, staff, alumni, prospective and current partners). Integration will increase brand recognition, create a consistent experience for audiences, enhance engagement and trust, allow for repurposing of assets, and help achieve strategic goals associated with building a community of change makers and collaborating across sectors to find solutions. Having an integrated plan also helps the Faculty to allocate resources where they are most needed to achieve strategic goals.

Progress 2024-25: completed background research and competitor analysis, completed phases 1 and 2 of the brand project.

Milestones 2025-26: complete brand project, assemble steering group for IMCP, conduct any additional market analysis necessary, draft plan for feedback and approvals, decide on KPIs and monitoring frequency, implement plan.

INITIATIVE 4 | Integrated Planning

The University is adopting integrated budgeting and planning, and has been piloting various tools and processes for the past two plus years. The intention is to reduce duplication across units, increase cooperation and interdisciplinary research and teaching, and ensure resources are allocated to achievement of University and unit strategic plans. The director, strategic initiatives and communications supports the Dean's Office with integrated planning.

Progress 2024-25: Completed 2024 Faculty plan for review by president and vice-president group (PVP) and discussion at executive council (EC) retreat. Completed 2025 plan in new digital planning tool for review by PVP and discussion at EC retreat. Collaborated with Dean's Office on presentations for EC retreats. Planned annual FLIE retreat to advance Environment 2035. Created Faculty-level reporting template based on the University's, which can be used for integrated planning and annual reporting at the Faculty-level.

Milestones 2025-26: Pilot Faculty-level reporting template for 2025 annual general assembly. Improve template based on feedback. Organize annual FLIE retreat. Support integrated planning process for 2026.

INITIATIVE 5 | High Impact Events

The ECT supports other Environment and University teams with event communications planning and execution. For example, convocation, TD Walter Bean, orientation, and gift or partnership announcements. The director, strategic initiatives and communications is also supporting the Climate Change interdisciplinary fund project, which involved the launch of a new graduate diploma, exploration of lifelong learning opportunities, and hosting three-four speaker events in partnership with the Waterloo Climate Institute. Last year, Environment also secured funding to host a half day conference in 2025 on bridging the green skills gap.

Progress 2024-25: new graduate diploma and foundation course offered for the first time September 2024, first speaker event - Chris Turner, How to be a Climate Optimist - held October 8, tentative plans for two more speaking events and a panel have been agreed, steering committee for the conference have been meeting and agreed on format and theme.

Milestones 2025-26: support hosting and marketing of speaker events, panel and conference, consider longer-term plans for speaker series and global futures "skills gap" events.

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