

Mir Centre for Peace

Highlights 2025-2026

Prepared By: Jennie Barron, Chair, Mir Centre for Peace

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Message from the Chair

For the Mir Centre, this past school year began with a very sombre reflection on the catastrophic atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki 80 years ago. It continued with diverse efforts to repair other historical and contemporary harms, and to build understanding and skills so that we may, collectively, do better going forward. To see the profound wrongs of the past (and present) and let them inspire us to do better is a hopeful thing. It affirms that we have the capacity to learn and grow, and that acts of peace and cooperation can and do exist even amidst blatant and pervasive violence. Time and again, ordinary people have demonstrated the ability and desire to come together and act in solidarity for the sake of justice, equality, and the common good. So, we hold up the peacemakers, the truth-tellers, those who resist the forces that would divide and harm us, and those who labour for a peace they may never see. We persist in believing that we must – and *can* – do better. In the eloquent words of Indian author and activist, Arundhati Roy, *“Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”*



Selkirk International students marking the International Day of Peace. Many thanks to instructor Shana Rablah.

International Day of Peace – September 21

In August 2025, *hibakusha* (survivors) and advocates for peace and nuclear disarmament around the world commemorated the 80th anniversary of the devastating atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Aug 6 and Aug 9, 1945). On September 21, on the International Day of Peace, we marked this solemn occasion by planting a “peace tree” – a ginkgo grown from a seed from one of the very first trees to re-sprout at Ground Zero in Hiroshima and kindly given to us by local Rotarian Tom Schneider. We were joined by a special guest, local Japanese-Canadian author [Diana Cole](#), who spoke about her family’s history, including time spent in an internment camp, where she was born. Attendees then enjoyed an activity inside the Mir Centre, folding paper cranes with Selkirk International students Rin, Shiori, and Alana, and watching the film, “[The Beginning of the End of Nuclear Weapons](#)”. Thank you to all who took part. To learn more about the movement to abolish nuclear weapons, please check out the [Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#).



Selkirk Reads!

For our annual exploration of Indigenous authors, Selkirk College employees kindly stepped forward to champion and read six books from diverse genres: ***The Place of Scraps*** by Jordan Abel (Sarah James); ***My Heart Fills With Happiness***, by Monique Gray-Smith (Allison Girvan); ***The Shoe Boy: A Trapline Memoir*** by Duncan McCue (Dylan Sargent); ***Thunder Through My Veins*** by Gregory Scofield (Marta Abel); ***The Lesser Blessed*** by Richard van Camp (Brier Albano); and ***True Reconciliation: How to Be a Force for Change*** by Jody Wilson-Raybould (Sarah Lechthaler).

Through *Selkirk Reads!* we deepen our collective understanding of our shared histories, Indigenous realities, and what it will take to eventually find justice, healing and reconciliation.



Mir Lecture: Duncan McCue

Learning from the Land: A Journalist's Reflection on Place-Based Storytelling

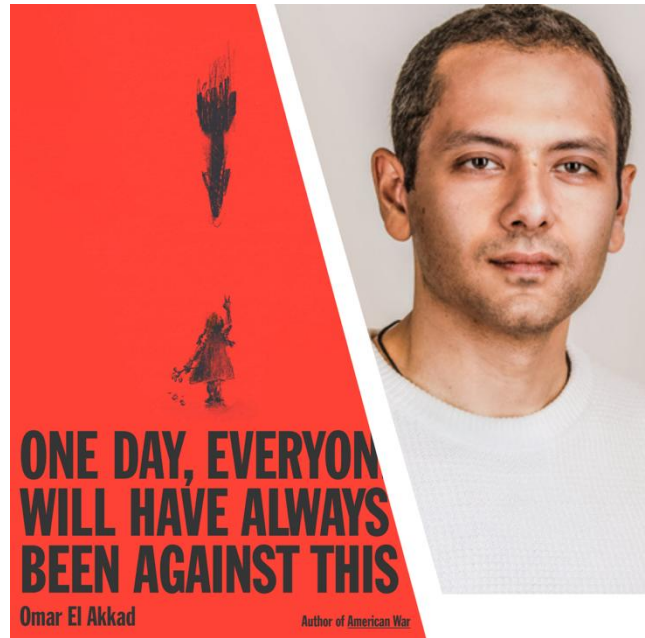
In late October, we welcomed award-winning CBC broadcaster, author and now professor of journalism at Carleton University, Duncan McCue. A member of the Chippewas of Georgina

Island First Nation in Ontario, McCue worked for 25 years with *CBC News*, both as the host of *Cross-Country Checkup* and as a regular correspondent for *The National*. He was also the driving force behind an award-winning eight-part podcast series on residential schools, called "Kuper Island." Duncan spoke about his own personal coming-of-age story when, as a 17-year-old, he spent a year on a trap-line in northern Quebec. He also shared about his current work to incorporate land-based learning into a university curriculum. We thank the SCFA (PD Fund) and the School of Environment and Geomatics for their sponsorship. We were delighted to see so many young people in the audience, and grateful that Duncan was also willing to visit J.L. Crowe Secondary in Trail where students were thrilled to meet him.

Mir Lecture: Omar El Akkad

One Day, Everyone Will Have Always Been Against This

In May, we welcomed multi-award-winning author, winner of the 2025 (U.S.) National Book Award, and long-time investigative journalist, Omar El Akkad to give a Mir lecture at the Brilliant Cultural Centre. In front of a large, warm crowd, he offered a heartfelt message, searing truth-telling and a call to conscience in response to the genocide in Gaza and ongoing brutality against Palestinians in the West Bank, as well as our complicity in violations of human rights and structures of inequality everywhere.



As a promotional initiative, we drew the names of two ticketholders and invited them to have dinner with Omar the night before the event. The winners were Karen Lee and Shana Macdonald - congratulations! Omar also delighted in speaking to two classes of high school students at Stanley Humphries Secondary School, where he was very well received.



Many thanks to the [Brilliant Cultural Centre](#), the [Selkirk College Faculty Association \(SCFA\)](#) (Common PD Fund), and the [Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC's Human Rights and International Solidarity Committee \(HRISC\)](#) for their generous support of this event. We also thank Rayya Liebich, Katelyn Keeling, and Jennah Al Hanafy for speaking, and student volunteers for help with tickets, mic running and book sales.

The Nathan & Anna Fund for Peace & Reconciliation

This year, we began the exciting process of awarding monies to support staff and students of Selkirk College who propose and carry out projects that further truth, reconciliation, pacifism, peacebuilding, and the strengthening of community relationships. We are able to do so thanks to Rundle and Dorothy Wilkinson, who set up the Nathan & Anna Fund in memory of their son, Dr Myler Wilkinson, who, together with his wife, Linda, spearheaded the establishment of the Mir Centre for Peace.

This year, we were delighted to award monies to two projects: The first was a ceremony, held in April, to welcome to the Castlegar campus a very special wood carving called "Coyote Bringing Us Salmon." It was created by Slocan Valley Blackfoot artist Chad Thompson in collaboration with acclaimed Russian carver



Dmitrii Klimenko and gifted to the college by the Salmo Streamkeepers Society. We believe this carving will honour First Nations, bring beauty and inspiration to students, strengthen awareness of the ecological benefits of salmon reintroduction to the Columbia River, and recognize our long-standing partnership in advancing community-based stewardship and aquatic ecosystem health.

The second recipient of Nathan & Anna Funds was the newly announced Selkirk College program in Tourism & Destination Management (TDAM) in the School of Hospitality and Tourism. The awarded funds will support Indigenous perspective and cultural protocol training for students and faculty, including expenses for travel and guest speakers.

We look forward to reviewing more project proposals in the fall and thank the Wilkinson family for their ongoing support of peacebuilding & reconciliation efforts through this very generous gift.

Nonviolent Communication (NVC)



Twice this year – in both fall and spring - we offered Levels 1 *and* 2 of our ever-more-popular NVC course, taught by instructor Holly Hume. The courses teach skills for self-expression and sharing the full range of feelings we all experience - from anger and frustration to joy and satisfaction - clearly and accurately in a non-critical way. Through interactive activities, and personal reflection exercises, students learn how to hear hard messages in a less defensive way, becoming more empowered to tackle tricky conversations and situations in their personal and professional lives. Here is just some of the positive feedback we've received:

- *"I learned so much more than I anticipated. I expected to improve communication in difficult situations but realized that I could make improvements when trying to communicate gratitude also. I see this as a way to deepen relationships. Excited to practice in real life."*
- *"This training is very impactful. The work on our language is super beneficial and humbling to know how little language we regularly use to describe real feelings."*
- *"The flow of learning concepts and activities created such a balanced and engaging experience. Highly recommend!"*

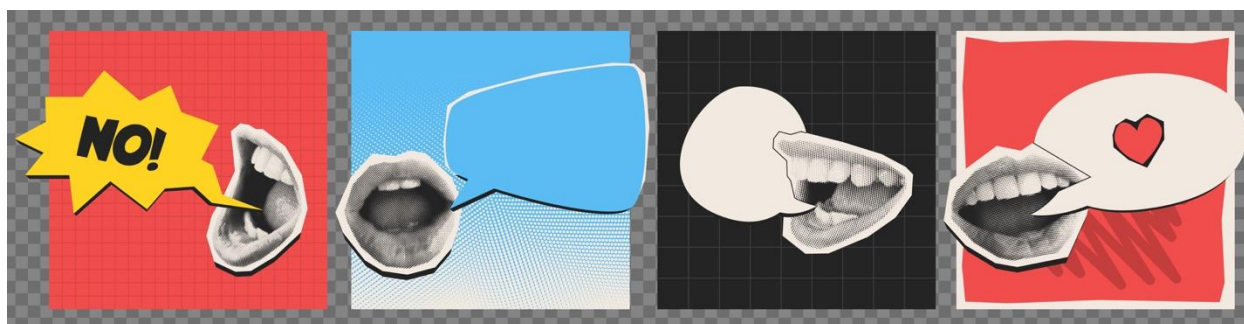
Interested? To hear when future courses are scheduled, please email mircentre@selkirk.ca

Courageous Dialogues for Classroom, Campus & Community

After a year's hiatus from our applied research project, *Courageous Dialogues*, which ran from 2021-2024, we were very pleased to be awarded more funds from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for a second, three-year stint of research. This project responds to the growing challenge of polarization in post-secondary institutions, libraries, and literacy organizations—spaces meant to uphold intellectual freedom but increasingly marked by conflict, censorship pressures, and ideological hostility. Our goal is to strengthen the skills, knowledge, and resilience of students, instructors, and community educators so they can navigate contentious issues with competence, confidence, and care.

Project objectives include:

- 1) Understanding how polarization is experienced in classrooms and community settings.
- 2) Building participants' personal and professional capacities for dialogue across divides.
- 3) Introducing and experimenting with pedagogical tools for overcoming division.
- 4) Modeling structured, facilitated dialogue across divides.
- 5) Establishing a national network of academics, educators, and practitioners who carry out similar work, so that we may learn from each other.



We are working with post-secondary students, faculty, workers in the community literacy field, and librarians (both academic and public). From September to June, our two project leads – Jennie Barron (Selkirk College) and Diana Twiss (Capilano University), hired two student research interns, Victoria Usman (Selkirk College) and Ashley Moradi (Capilano University). Together, supported by a 12-member cross-Canada Advisory Committee, we obtained ethics approvals, recruited students, held seven focus groups (four with students and three with librarians), gave five presentations, established new community partnerships, and began the first round of qualitative data analysis.

In the next year of the project, we will conduct surveys, offer trainings, initiate communities of practice, and continue our ongoing work to develop a Teaching Toolkit for Courageous Classrooms. The project will culminate with a Learning Symposium, drawing participants from across BC.

We are grateful for the ongoing support of our respective institutions and partners in the non-profit sector: Selkirk College/Selkirk Innovates, Capilano University, Vancouver Community College, Decoda Literacy Solutions, the Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy (CBAL), and the Continuing Education and Training Association of BC (CETABC).



Compassionate Justice Video Speaker Series



In February and March, we hosted a six-part video speaker series by prominent Canadian thinkers on themes related to legal and social justice. The series was put on by Eglinton St George's United Church (Toronto) and sponsored by *The Globe & Mail*. If you missed these excellent talks, you can still find them freely available online at www.compassionatejustice.ca.

Katherine Hensel - *Bringing our Children Home*

Katherine's talk focused on Indigenous governments' recovery of jurisdiction over their children, territories, citizenship, and languages.

Sponsored by the [Social Service Worker Program](#)



Brian Greenspan - *The Press, The Public, and The Presumption of Innocence*



Defence lawyer Brian Greenspan spoke about the importance of the presumption of innocence in our judicial system and how it has been challenged and attacked by the media, social media and politicians. Sponsored by the [Law & Justice Studies Program](#).

Lisa M. Kelly, PhD - *The Unfinished Revolution of Youth Justice*

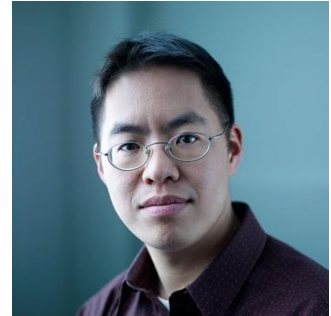
Dr Lisa Kelly spoke about the dramatic improvements in youth incarceration rates in Canada since the introduction of the Youth Criminal Justice Act over 20 years ago. Sponsored by the [Social Service Worker Program](#).



Compassionate Justice Speaker Series

Dr. Vincent Lam - *Drug Addiction: A Front Row Seat*

Dr Vincent Lam is an emergency physician and director of an addiction clinic in downtown Toronto as well as an award-winning author of fiction. He spoke about having compassion for those who live with drug addiction, based on his direct experience with those afflicted. Sponsored by the [Rural Pre-Medicine Program](#).



The Honourable Rosalie Abella - *Putting Compassion into the Service of Justice*



The Honourable Rosalie Silberman Abella, retired Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, explored what it means to put compassion back into the service of law and law into the service of justice, particular for those in vulnerable circumstances. Sponsored by [Law & Justice Studies](#)

John Ralston Saul - *Democracy on the Line*

John Ralston Saul, Canadian writer, political philosopher, and Companion of the Order of Canada spoke of the effort required to maintain a healthy democracy in the light of never-ending changes in technology, economics, and Canada's relationship with the USA. Sponsored by the [School of University Arts & Sciences](#)



Supporting Immigrants & Refugees

Community Forum on Immigration

In March, the Mir Centre was invited by the West Kootenay Local Immigration Partnership (WKLIP) to take part in the annual forum in Castlegar, a public discussion around immigration and building supportive communities. Mir Chair, Jennie Barron, gave a presentation about polarization as it relates to immigration, and how we can rise above it. Carlo Alcos from Intercultural Kootenays then presented on services available to people experiencing racism or discrimination in the area. We enjoyed facilitated small-group discussion, refreshments, and informal networking.

Refugee Week Film Fest

Against the global backdrop of growing antipathy and violence towards immigrants, we joined the WKLIP again in June to screen four short films honouring the courage and resilience of those seeking refuge around the world.



- ***Aziza***: Ayman, a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, teaches his wife how to drive—their car being the last remaining piece of home. A surreal journey through memory and longing.
- ***Infancia Desterrada***: A moving documentary about unaccompanied children who are forced to flee their countries alone, and the resilience they must find.
- ***Migrants***: Driven from their habitat by climate change, two polar bears embark on a journey into unfamiliar territory, where they encounter brown bears and must attempt to coexist.
- ***Tskaltubo***: After 30 years living as refugees in an abandoned sanatorium, Irakli and Nana must confront whether it is too late to begin again.

Student Award Winners

Peace and Human Rights Award

In recognition of Doukhobor and Tolstoyan ideals, the Peace & Human Rights Award promotes the ideals of peace, international and local unity, and the dignity of work and service on behalf of humanity.

Awarded to: Fiona Giroux



Myler Wilkinson Memorial Scholarship in Peace Studies

This award is given to a student with a high grade-point average who demonstrates passion and commitment to the field of peace studies.

Awarded to: Kiana Dyke



Alex P Relkoff Scholarship

This award for academic excellence goes to a student who is entering their second year of Peace & Conflict Studies.

Maurilia Coc Macs Memorial Scholarship

This scholarship, established by Randy Janzen and Mary Ann Morris, commemorates a little girl in Guatemala who dreamed of learning to read and write. It supports the opportunity for others who want to study and learn more about building cultures of peace.

Both Awarded to: Zachary Pierce



Thank You!

It takes a village to work for peace! Whether as colleagues, funders/sponsors, book champions, or event volunteers, your efforts, time and care are always much appreciated!

Aaron Korbacher

Alana (Lanxin) Yu

Alice Fitzsimons-Quail

Allison Alder

Allison Girvan

Ashley Moradi

Auriel Wingender

Axel Krause

Bella Palmer

Brier Albano

Bronwyn Krause

Carlo Alcos

Claire Philipson

Crystal Shullman

Diana Cole

Diana Twiss

Duff Sutherland

Dylan Sargent

Emily Macpherson

FPSE – HRSIC

Ganesh Sanjivi

Hannah Lisgo

Iryna Mykhaylova

Jamie Bliss

Jannah Al Hanafy

JJ Verigin

Jocelyn Templeton

Jonathan Vanderhoek

Joslyn Sharp

Kamala Melzack

Katelyn Keeling

Katie Comrie

Kerri Webb

Kiana Dyke

Kootenay Men's Group

Majid Behrevar

Maria Bonito

Marta Abel

Melissa Dory

Michael Cheveldave

Michele Morin

Morag Carter

Noah Cannon

Pablo Pastor

Peter Wood

Rayya Liebich

Rena Vandenbos

Renee Harper

Rhonda Belczyk

Rin Matsunaga

Rodney Noskiye

Sarah James

Sarah Lechthaler

Selkirk College Faculty Association

Shana Rablah

Shiori Kuwano

Stephanie Gobin

Takaia Larsen

Taya Whitehead

Todd Kettner

Tom Schneider

Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ

Victoria Usman

Yann Troutet

Mir Centre for Peace Mission

Understanding and building cultures of peace through learning

Vision

The Mir Centre for Peace at Selkirk College is a place of learning and dialogue where peoples of diverse cultural and historical backgrounds are welcome to safely and compassionately enquire and seek pathways to peace. This vision is built on a commitment to the peoples, histories and landscapes of our region from which cultures of peace may grow.

Team Mir 2025-2026

CHAIR, MIR CENTRE FOR PEACE: Jennie Barron

DEAN, MIR CENTRE FOR PEACE: Allison Alder

MIR CENTRE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT: Laura McAllister/Crystal Shullman

ADVISORY COUNCIL AND/OR WORKING CIRCLE MEMBERS: Aaron Korbacher, Ahna Berikoff, Bella Palmer, Bronwyn Krause, Carlo Alcos, Duff Sutherland, Dylan Sargent, Ganesh Sanjivi, JJ Verigin, Joslyn Sharp, Kiana Dyke, Maggie Matear, Majid Bahrevar, Michele Morin, Morag Carter, Noah Cannon, Pablo Pastor, Peter Wood, Rhonda Belczyk, Sarah James, Taya Whitehead, Todd Kettner

