

UBC prof dives into water sustainability

Special to The Daily Courier | Posted: Thursday, August 21, 2014 7:56 pm

Grace H. Fan, assistant professor of strategy and entrepreneurship with UBC Okanagan's Faculty of Management, has received \$73,800 in funding over two years from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council to support research on the discourse on water in BC.

"B.C. is going to have a new water act – the Sustainable Water Act, which is replacing the more than 100-year-old water act, and it is going to have a significant impact on the way water is managed throughout B.C.," said Fan, who uses organization theory to explain entrepreneurship and water sustainability.

Organizational theory is the study of organizations and their interrelationship with the environment in which they operate.

"My research will focus on the process of how the BC Sustainable Water Act has been developed – who was consulted, how they were involved, the transparency of those consultations, and what, if any, influence or impact those dialogues have in forming policy for the Sustainable Water Act."

Fan and her co-investigator, Dev Jennings from the University of Alberta, are interested in the process of how the policy is developed, and will also examine how the policy is received by the community and stakeholders, and what further negotiations take place. They will also look at how the Sustainable Water Act will be implemented at the ground level.

It is anticipated the Sustainable Water Act will be announced and reviewed in spring 2015.

"It will be the first time B.C. is going to have legislation on ground water, which is a significant change," said Fan. "Also, for the first time, they have included wording about First Nations, which is another important issue.

"We assume there will be lots of negotiation resulting from these two specific issues. We're interested in figuring out the legal framework in which this all takes place. What groups will be included and invited to participate in this? How will they contribute? How transparent will the negotiations be?"

Fan said her research could be used by policy-makers, communities, and stakeholders to better understand their roles and possible alternatives in the consultation and negotiation process, potentially leading to smoother implementation of policy and better collaboration from stakeholders.

Fan's past research, funded by the UBC Okanagan Provost's research office, has examined policy development and stakeholder collaboration at its best.

She has applied organizational theory to study the collaborative model created and maintained by the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) and Okanagan Water Stewardship Council, who have successfully brought together diverse stakeholders throughout the Okanagan to address water sustainability issues in the Valley.

“The collaborative model is very fascinating,” said Fan. “What the OBWB and stewardship council have achieved by working together is often considered a leading example of water management in Canada, and the whole of North America.”