



SCS 1665-137 University Lecture Series (ULS)

Winter 2026

Date: January 23

Speaker: Mark Blevis, A Senior Executive at Commissionaires
Great Lakes

Title: Beyond Service: Integrating Veterans and Reservists for a
Competitive Workforce

Canada's veteran and reservist community represents a significant, often underutilized talent pool. They bring transferable skills—teamwork, leadership, adaptability, and operational excellence—that can strengthen any organization.

Mark will share firsthand insights from Commissionaires, Canada's largest employer of veterans, and demonstrate how this not-for-profit has thrived for a century in a competitive for-profit industry by leveraging military experience. You'll leave with practical strategies for integrating veterans and reservists into your workforce and cultivating a strong military-civilian culture.

Whether you're an HR professional, operations leader, or business executive, this session will help you build a more competitive organization while supporting those who have served.

Biography:

Mark Blevis is a senior executive at Commissionaires Great Lakes, where he leads key functions including finance, legal, IT, partnerships, marketing, governance, and facilities. His work builds on a rich background in security, public affairs, and digital communications.

Previously, Mark spent over a decade specializing in brand and reputation management, online advocacy, and litigation support. He was a frequent media analyst on digital influence in politics and public affairs, appearing on CTV, CBC, and in major publications. During this period, Mark conducted extensive Canadian-centric research on digital activism, online movements, and the impact of technology on public opinion.

He co-authored the Amazon bestselling book TOUCH: Five Factors to Growing and Leading a Human Organization, which explores how to bring humanity into tech-driven interactions.





His career has included unique experiences with Canada's military, including sailing aboard HMCS Calgary and participating in an Executrek program at CFB Petawawa. As one of Canada's first podcasters (2005), Mark became a community builder, conference organizer, and a voice on digital engagement.

Date: January 30

Speaker: Wendy Cecil, Chair, U of T's President's Circle; former Chair, U of T's Governing Council

Title: Serving with Purpose: Creating a Fulfilling Volunteer Life

Volunteering can be one of life's most rewarding experiences, but how do you ensure your time and talent make the greatest impact? Drawing on a lifetime of active and joyful service with diverse organizations, Wendy Cecil shares what makes the difference between truly fulfilling volunteer work and experiences that fall short.



In this session, you'll explore:

1. The vital role of Canada's volunteer sector and its impact on our economy and communities
2. The social value of volunteering and why it matters now more than ever
3. Practical strategies for choosing opportunities that align with your passions and purpose
4. How to avoid common pitfalls and create a volunteer life that brings balance, meaning, and joy.

Whether you're just starting your volunteer journey or looking to deepen your impact, this talk will help you approach volunteering thoughtfully and intentionally, so your time is well spent, and deeply satisfying.

Biography:

Dr. Wendy M. Cecil, CM, LL.D., HCapt(N) is a proud Victoria University alumna (Class of '71) and a lifelong champion of education and community. For over 40 years, she has volunteered with the University of Toronto, serving as Chair of Governing Council, Chancellor of Victoria University, and teaching *Corporate Ethics and Social Responsibility* to first-year students.

Her distinguished career began on Bay Street with the Toronto Stock Exchange and later as Vice President at Brookfield Asset Management. Wendy holds the Order of Canada (CM), an Honorary Doctor of Laws (LLD), and serves as an Honorary Captain in the Royal Canadian Navy.

Her passion for giving back started early—at age seven, she ran a lemonade stand to raise money for the *Star Fresh Air Fund*. Since then, she has supported organizations including St. Michael’s Hospital, the Royal Ontario Museum, Canadian Opera Company, Toronto Public Library, and Loran Scholarships.

A former ranked Canadian runner who completed 10 marathons, Wendy now hikes, swims, and walks—always staying active for her next volunteer adventure.

Date: February 6

Speaker: William H. Smalley, M.B.A., CSP, FBEI

Title: The Art of Influence: Turning Conflict into Opportunity

Conflict isn’t just inevitable; it’s a powerful catalyst for growth when managed effectively. This lecture will explore how persuasion and negotiation can transform challenging situations into opportunities for collaboration and innovation. Participants will gain practical insights into communication strategies that foster inclusive decision-making, strengthen leadership and relationships.



Biography:

William H. Smalley, MBA, CSP, FBEI is an international consultant, trainer, and keynote speaker with over 30 years experience in business strategy, marketing, and domestic and international business development. He is an active consultant and trainer in the private sector on Intelligent Selling™, negotiation, leadership, teambuilding, and presentation skills. He holds an EMBA from the Rotman School and is a Fellow of the Business Excellence Institute.

Date: February 13

Speaker: Steve Orsini, President and CEO, Council of Ontario Universities

Title: Ontario Universities: Partnering for Jobs and Growth

This presentation outlines how Ontario’s universities are partnering with the province to drive talent, innovation, and economic growth at a time of rising student demand and mounting financial pressures. It highlights universities’ contributions to key provincial priorities—from advanced manufacturing and clean energy to life sciences, critical minerals, and AI—while detailing the significant revenue declines stemming from funding and revenue constraints,



inflation, and reduced international enrolments. The presentation underscores growing domestic demand, the growing number of unfunded students, and the cuts universities have already made, and it sets out a funding plan to sustain student access, research, commercialization capacity, and Ontario's long-term competitiveness.

Biography:

Steve Orsini is President and CEO of the Council of Ontario Universities. Prior to this role, Steve held several leadership positions in the Ontario Public Service, including Secretary of the Cabinet, Deputy Minister of Finance and Secretary of the Treasury Board, and Deputy Minister of Revenue. Steve also held several leadership positions at the Ontario Hospital Association, including Vice-President of Policy and Public Affairs. Steve is a member of the [Fiscal Federalism Policy Network](#), a Board Member of the [Ontario Brain Institute](#) and [Canadian Ditchley Foundation](#), and a [Senior Fellow](#) at the C.D. Howe Institute.

Steve holds a Bachelor of Applied Arts in Urban and Regional Planning and a Master's in Environmental Studies.

Date: February 20

Speaker: Dr. Terri Hewitt, CEO, Surrey Place

Title: Neurodiversity, Disability and Equity: Building a System that Works for All

What does it mean to build a system that works for everyone? In this presentation, Dr. Terri Hewitt will discuss ideas of equity and inclusion through the lens of disability and neurodiversity, highlighting the often-invisible barriers in society that keep people with diverse needs out. She will explore what a system that works for neurodiverse communities can look like and how transformative change can benefit all of us. By putting theoretical principles into practice through co-design, representation, accessibility and accountability, we can create a world without limits.



Biography:

Terri Hewitt is a passionate advocate for neurodiverse communities and the CEO of Surrey Place. With more than 40 years as a registered psychologist specializing in developmental, clinical, and autism psychology, Terri has dedicated her career to helping individuals with developmental disabilities and

autism spectrum disorder live healthy, socially connected lives. Known for her ability to build innovative programs and forge strong partnerships, she has transformed service delivery to close critical gaps and create inclusive opportunities. Terri’s leadership reflects a deep commitment to empowering individuals and families, ensuring that every person has the chance to thrive

Date: February 27

Speaker: Joe Wong, Vice-President, International, and Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto

Title: Inclusive Development: Why It’s the Cornerstone of Democracy

What makes democracy truly thrive? Professor Joseph Wong argues it’s not just free elections; it’s inclusive development. Inclusive development means improving lives through education, healthcare, jobs, and opportunities—ensuring no one is left behind. In his acclaimed book *From Development to Democracy: The Transformations of Modern Asia* (with Dan Slater), Wong explores why inclusive development is the ultimate foundation for political stability.

Drawing on research in over 35 countries through the Reach Alliance, Wong brings this idea to life. His powerful stories and real-world examples reveal what it takes to “leave no one behind,” and why inclusive development is essential for strong, resilient democracies in Canada and around the world today.

Learn more about the [Reach Alliance](#).

Biography:

Joseph Wong is Vice President, International, and Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto. He previously served as the Ralph and Roz Halbert Professor of Innovation at the Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy and held the Canada Research Chair in Democratization, Health and Development.

His research focuses on comparative public policy and political economy, with work published in leading journals such as *The Lancet*, *Governance*, and *Comparative Political Studies*. He is the author of *From Development to Democracy: The Transformations of Modern Asia* (Princeton, 2022) and several other books on innovation, health, and development.



Professor Wong founded the Reach Alliance and has led initiatives on poverty, innovation, and global development. He previously directed the Asian Institute at the Munk School and received the Faculty's Outstanding Teaching Award in 2013.

Date: **March 6**

Speaker: **Jessica Mosher, President, Publisher and CEO,
University of Toronto Press and University of Toronto
Bookstore**

Title: **Publishing in the Age of AI**

This session offers an inside look at how artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping the world of publishing—from scholarly journals and textbooks to the books we browse in stores. It shows how AI is changing the way research is conducted, how authors create, and how students learn, while also prompting publishers to rethink licensing, workflows, and editorial practices. The talk explores how AI is streamlining distribution, improving metadata, and reshaping supply-chain decisions, all of which influence how readers discover new books and ideas. It also highlights the evolving role of bookstores as vibrant, community-driven spaces that stand out amid increasingly algorithmic recommendation systems. Taken together, these insights reveal the opportunities, tensions, and big decisions facing the publishing industry as AI becomes woven into every stage of the content journey.



Biography:

Jessica Mosher brings more than 25 years of leadership experience in publishing and educational technology to her role as President, Publisher, and Chief Executive Officer of University of Toronto Press (UTP), which she joined in November 2021. UTP is Canada's largest scholarly press, publishing hundreds of books, and journals across academic, trade, and higher education. Beyond publishing, UTP plays a pivotal role in the broader industry through UTP Distribution (UTPD), which fulfills orders for all English-language Canadian university presses and numerous U.S. and U.K. scholarly publishers, as well as a wide range of trade and educational partners. UTP also operates the University of Toronto Bookstores across three campuses, serving more than 100,000 students and 15,000 faculty members.



Date: March 13

Speaker: Charlie Keil, is Principal of Innis College and a Professor in the Cinema Studies Institute and the Department of History at the University of Toronto

Title: Has Streaming Killed the Movie Star? How Digital Platforms Changed Hollywood



Are movie stars still the kings and queens of Hollywood? Has streaming killed dulled their shine? In the golden age of the studio system, stars like Clark Gable and Bette Davis guaranteed box-office success, and studios built entire films around their power to pull in audiences. Even after the studio system collapsed, stars remained central to film marketing and persisted as cultural icons.

Today, things look very different. Franchises dominate, algorithms rule, and many wonder if the era of the movie star is over. This lecture briefly touches on the rise of film stardom from cinema's early decades to its glory days during the studio era. It then focuses on the decline of the movie star, exploring how streaming platforms like Netflix have reshaped the economics of fame. Join us to uncover what happened, and what this shift means for the future of film and celebrity culture.

Biography:

Charlie Keil is Principal of Innis College and a Professor in the Cinema Studies Institute and the Department of History at the University of Toronto. His research centers on early and silent American cinema, but he has also published on documentary, stardom, and film modernism. His most recent publication is *The Oxford Handbook of Silent Cinema* and his current projects include an exploration of the origins of Hollywood and an anthology devoted to the work of film scholar David Bordwell.

Professor Keil teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses in film history, analysis, and historiography. He is a recipient of multiple teaching awards, including the University of Toronto's President's Teaching Award and the Society for Cinema and Media Studies Distinguished Pedagogy Award.



Date: March 20

Speaker: Dr. Diana Durek

Title: **Wired to Lead: The Neuroscience of Exceptional Leadership**

In today's complex world, each of us is called upon to lead—at home, at work, and within our communities.

In this thought-provoking session, Diana will explore how neuroscience is transforming our understanding of leadership. She will share research on emotional intelligence, resilience, and human connection, and how these capacities shape decision making, fuel creativity, and strengthen our ability to lead through uncertainty.

Blending scientific insight with personal reflection, this talk offers a deeper understanding of what leadership truly requires—and practical guidance for cultivating these qualities within yourself and those around you. Whether you lead teams, projects, or community initiatives, this session will expand the way you think about leadership, influence, impact, and human potential.

Biography:

Diana is an expert in emotional intelligence and its impact on leadership effectiveness. She began her consulting career with MHS, a leading psychological assessment publisher. During her 11-year tenure, Diana specialized in building evidence-based models for predicting and improving individual and organizational performance for clients as diverse as Air Canada, American Express, and the U.S. Air Force.

Today, Diana's focus is on helping people and organizations change and grow. She also designs and delivers leadership and emotional intelligence courses for the University of Toronto, currently as a leadership instructor in the Temerty Faculty of Medicine. She has also taught in the School of Continuing Studies and the Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science.

Diana holds a Doctor of Education degree in Organizational Learning and Leadership from the University of Pennsylvania and a Master's degree in Organization Development and Change from Case Western Reserve University.





Date: March 27

Speaker: Dr. Rhonda McEwan, President and Vice-Chancellor, Victoria University in the University of Toronto

Title: Exploring Creativity and Technology: A Case for the Centre for Creativity

This talk presents the Centre for Creativity at Victoria University as a strategic response to a central challenge in contemporary higher education: while creativity is critical for addressing complex social, cultural, and technological issues, academic structures often limit interdisciplinary experimentation and creative risk-taking. Drawing on *Shared Spaces of Creation: Generative Artificial Intelligence’s Creative Agency and Affordances in the Artistic Process*, the presentation reframes creativity as a relational process that emerges through interactions among people, tools, technologies, and environments, rather than as an individual attribute.

The talk highlights how generative AI marks a shift in technology’s role in creative practice—from supporting physical execution to engaging directly in cognitive processes such as ideation and conceptualization. This shift underscores the need for institutional spaces that can support shared creative inquiry. The Centre for Creativity is introduced as such a space: a hub for interdisciplinary collaboration, mentorship, and experimentation that enables ideas to move into meaningful action.

Biography:

Dr. Rhonda N. McEwen is President and Vice-Chancellor of Victoria University in the University of Toronto, overseeing its academic and administrative operations. She became Victoria’s 14th president in July 2022. Previously, Dr. McEwen served as Vice-Principal, Academic and Dean at U of T Mississauga, where she led academic programs, planning, and policy. She also directed the Institute of Communication, Culture, Information & Technology, transforming it into a stand-alone unit and launching a professional certificate in digital media and technology.

Dr. McEwen holds an MBA in Information Technology (City University, London), an MSc in Telecommunications (University of Colorado), and a PhD in Information (University of Toronto). A former special advisor on Anti-Racism and Equity, Dr. McEwen’s research focuses on emerging technologies, including mobile communication, virtual reality, social networks, and human-robot interaction.

