



PROFESSORS

The Robarts Centre as incubator

BY CHRISTINA HOICKA

Dr. Christina E. Hoicka is an associate professor in the Department of Geography and Department of Civil Engineering at the University of Victoria. She holds the Canada Research Chair in Urban Planning for Climate Change. With degrees in engineering, environmental studies, and geography, Dr. Hoicka combines these perspectives into both teaching and research. Current areas of focus are to combine the fields of energy geography and sustainability transitions in order to investigate the actions of communities and the demand side (households, firms, organizations) in mitigating climate change.

I joined the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies in 2016 as a senior faculty associate and member of the Executive Committee. The support I received at Robarts as a scholar of energy transitions and justice helped me to establish a research program critical to Canada and move into a Canada Research Chair leadership research position.

The Institute of Research and Innovation in Sustainability (IRIS) was closed in 2014, leaving a large gap in support and convening for sustainability scholars at York University. At the suggestion of Professor Dawn Bazely, I reached out to Robarts and was offered an office, research support, and space to meet with my research team of graduate students and post-doctoral researchers. At the time, Robarts Centre was under the leadership of Dr. Gabrielle Slowey. Dr. Slowey, Laura Taman, and the Executive Committee warmly welcomed me, my ideas, and my team. One of the Centre's most innovative activities was funding research clusters. A research cluster received research support and a budget of \$1,500 per year. Robarts created an ecosystem of critical engagement of issues, including ecology and Black scholars.

Robarts provided me with a protected niche environment to transition my studies toward justice-oriented aspects of the energy transition. Robarts gave space to my style of supervision: working collaboratively as a team and creating a safe container for feedback. In this space, Faculty of Environmental Studies students pursued research into justice aspects of the diffusion of low-carbon energy innovations, Indigenous community participation in renewable energy transitions, and the inclusion of historically marginalized communities in foundation funding for low-carbon energy transitions.

When I began to talk about the lack of gender diversity in energy research, Robarts and Dr. Slowey encouraged me to organize with other women and non-binary scholars as a research cluster. We started the Women and Inclusivity in Sustainable Energy Research (WISER) network. With support and funds, we were able to organize media training, research panels, a Google listserv for members, and an outward-facing website. This global network would never have taken off without the support of Dr. Slowey, Laura Taman, and the Robarts Centre Executive Committee.

My research program took off, and in 2021 I was awarded a national research chair at the University of Victoria. I am now funded to contribute to research into justice in energy transitions. Though I live across the country on Vancouver Island, I send a holiday card each year to Robarts Centre with fond memories. ■