

Welcome to the Pack

If University of Calgary undergraduate and graduate students are looking for a unique opportunity to collaborate with like-minded individuals and build a robust academic portfolio, they might want to consider joining the pack.

COLLEEN BIONDI



SINCE 2010, the Wolb-Pack—an interdisciplinary research team currently composed of undergraduate and graduate students from the faculties of medicine, science, arts and kinesiology—has been meeting once a week. They utilize their collaborative research model to discuss contemporary issues, plan and execute research projects, write papers and prepare podcasts for submission to a wide variety of peer reviewed journals and conferences.

With projects grounded in the framework of ableism and disability studies, the team’s academic work reflects the research and personal interests of the students, including topics such as bioethics, medical anthropology, models and determinants of health, climate change, sustainability, sports and therapeutic enhancement technologies such as social robots and brain-computer interfaces.

Gregor Wolbring, PhD, the group’s founder and a member of the university’s Institute for Public Health, says the pack gives students a place to belong, to learn about themselves and the opportunity to make a difference within the context of others.

“It is about building identity as a group,” says Wolbring.

When it comes to the research, the Wolb-Pack's emphasis is on maximizing resources. Students mentor one another, co-author documents and employ a variety of methodologies to aid in efficient and productive research. While Wolbring locates conferences and journals for the students, they do the heavy lifting. For instance, one student presented at 39 online conferences in 2012. Many of the peer reviewed academic papers are published open access and downloaded an average of 300 times.

This season, the students are also organizing the second annual INSPIRe (International Network of Student Perspectives in Research) conference and will be presenting at a symposium in the United Kingdom.

“Collaboration gets them further than competition,” he says. “And that’s about so much more than academics.”

Gregor Wolbring is an associate professor in the Department of Community Health Sciences and the Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies program.

Jesse Hendrikse, an adjunct professor in the Department of Community Health Sciences, is the first faculty supervisor to have joined the pack.

More about the group can be found at medicine.ucalgary.ca/crds.

