Companies often claim that being environmentally responsible comes at too steep a cost. Not so, says Western’s Tima Bansal, who argues that corporate competitiveness is often consistent with environmental and social responsibility.

Bansal, Shrumiak Professor in International Business at the Richard Ivey School of Business, will use her research to show Canadian companies how they can integrate the three pillars of sustainable development—economic, environmental and social accountability—to rise to the forefront of competitive leadership. “There’s a perception that there’s a trade-off between environmental and social responsibility,” she says. “But there’s an overlap where they’re consistent, and particularly so in the long haul.”

Many of Bansal’s previous research projects have clearly illustrated these concepts. In her study of the adoption of voluntary international management system standard, ISO 14001, she showed that voluntary standards provide firms with the flexibility to successfully integrate environmental programs while still benefiting on the bottom line. For example, it is estimated that ISO 14001 certification will cost up to $50,000 per facility for a small company and $100,000 for large companies. Despite the short-term expense, corporations are likely to accrue considerable benefits over time through improved environmental management, including lower operating costs, improved reputation, fewer fines and penalties and improved stockholder relations. Ultimately, such responsibility should lead to sustainable development.

Implications for government policy are important: progressive, voluntary programs are a significant instrument for corporate change. “Voluntary initiatives are more effective in terms of competitiveness than regulations,” says Bansal. “But you need regulations to set the floor.” With traditional, mandatory government-imposed regulations, companies tend to float in-and-out of compliance as they try to meet only minimum levels of acceptance.

Environmentally-responsible firms benefit from being perceived as legitimate by the public, which is commensurate with less financial risk. Bansal has shown that firms with higher environmental legitimacy have less unsystematic market risk, making it easier for them to secure capital by increasing their stock’s desirability. Furthermore, disclosing environmental impacts sensitizes the public, which further motivates legitimate firms to reduce the footprints they leave on the environment.

Interestingly, Bansal’s work has shown that a company’s unsystematic market risk also decreases if they market that they are being environmental conscious when they are in fact, not. Ironically though, firms with strong reputations suffer from increased risk when they tout their ‘greening’ practices. “If you’re good, then it’s just better to keep quiet,” she says.

In conducting her research, Bansal has found the relationships she forms with corporations to be interactive and collaborative. “Some companies resist,” she says, “but fewer than you’d think because firms want to be socially and environmentally responsible, but do not know how to do so efficiently.” Many have, in fact, come to her to develop programs and research.

Bansal hopes tools and definitions resulting from her research will lead to a better understanding of the tension and overlap that exists between environmental and economic concerns, which are important, but understudied. “The social-environmental issue is a cool issue to study because it is where society and business meet,” she says.

_Growing Green_
Municipal governance is an emerging field of study in the social sciences and gaining prominence with a new research project led by Robert Young. A Political Science professor and Canada Research Chair in Multilevel Governance, Young is leading a five-year exploration of policy-making at the municipal level.

Funded by a $2.5 million grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), “Multilevel Governance and Public Policy in Canadian Municipalities” is the largest study ever undertaken in the social sciences. It is a collective effort involving 36 researchers at 26 Canadian universities and others from the United States, Belgium, South Africa and Germany.

The project’s expansive scope will cover six key policy areas (emergency planning, federal property, immigrant settlement, municipal image building infrastructure and urban Aboriginal policy) in more than 100 cities and small municipalities across Canada. About 120 case studies will be developed, from which conclusions can be drawn and generalizations made.

“Our team wants to see what kinds of policies are in place and explain each of them as a function of the set of municipal–federal–provincial negotiations that took place, as well as the social forces — that is, intergovernmental and voluntary organizations — who either participated in the policy-making process or not,” says Young.

“Ultimately we want to see which factors produce the best policies and if each policy is as good as it could be.”

Young and his team also hope to answer two of the perennial questions relating to municipal governance: does public participation make for better policy, and does business dominate municipal decision-making? There is a lot of debate about each of these questions.

“Most of the evidence to date is from small studies that look at maybe three policy areas within one municipality,” says Young. “It’s hard to tell then if what is learned about industrial policy in Chicago is applicable to immigrant policy in New Orleans. With our research, for example, we’ll be able to say public participation produces better policies in cities of ‘x’ size when dealing with ‘y’ type policies.” This research should provide municipalities with information to improve policy-making processes.

The team’s Canadian investigators are divided into 11 groups. One is studying the federal government’s role in the municipal policy-making process; each of the other 10 is examining how public policy gets made at the municipal level in each province. Municipal functions and powers vary a lot between provinces, making comparison of the development of local policies across jurisdictions an important component of the study.

International researchers are looking at the structure of inter-governmental relations in nine other countries to identify successful models of partnership and cooperation.

Young hopes to better understand alternatives and trends. “There seems to be a trend for cities and municipalities to be taking more resources and doing more functions,” he says. “This trend is a very, very hot topic in Canada right now with the Prime Minister’s new deal for cities.”

“Playing” with History

“The computer is the symbol of the 20th century,” says Stéphane Lévesque. “The problem is how we use computers for education — the social sciences, and particularly history, are falling behind.”

It is ineffective to simply provide history students with obscure chronological information about people and events, says Lévesque, a professor in Western’s Faculty of Education. Instead, he has developed a novel software used to help teach concepts for better understanding the past. The Virtual Historian will help students think critically about history and develop their own understanding of broader historical themes.

“Teaching kids a great story about the past is no longer sufficient,” he says. “They need different tools to successfully face 21st century challenges.”

Established methods of teaching and learning are being challenged by the acceleration of history, and by how mass media has increased its accessibility. “We need to get students to use history in a different way,” Lévesque says. “In chemistry, you don’t just read about it in a book — you ‘play the game’.”

This is where the Virtual Historian fits in. The Web-based program will be interactive and will allow students to develop techniques for learning history by having them track down clues, make decisions and develop their own interpretations of historical events — much like a detective caper. “We learn far better and more successfully if we ‘play the game’ instead of being told about the game,” says Lévesque.

Primary and secondary sources — including recently declassified documents — within the Virtual Historian provide first-hand accounts of history and provide clues as students attempt to ‘solve the case’. Archival film footage and artifacts presented in three-dimensions further bring the stories to life. Digitization has played a tremendous role in increasing accessibility to such historical documents as newspapers, letters, images and artifacts. “Historical literacy is still important,” says Lévesque, “but you need to understand how to play with it.”

The first case developed for the Virtual Historian delves into the October Crisis of 1970 and poses such questions as: “Was Prime Minister Trudeau justified to invoke the War Measures Act?” Students will work through a series of online scaffolding questions and study the relevance of various sources to develop their own sense of the event before preparing a final essay.

Lévesque will develop similar pivotal cases in Canadian history and some that are more region-specific. “There has been a consistent master-narrative in the U.S. but not so much here,” he says. “How is it that we teach Canadian history in Québec, B.C. and Ontario, and they don’t match up?”

All cases will be developed to accommodate each province’s Ministry guidelines for evaluation and curriculum, and will also be provided in both English and French. Lévesque is hoping the symbol of the 20th century will help us learn about the past, while also carrying us forward into the future: “Kids don’t connect if they don’t know where you’re coming from,” he says. “Historians don’t always make the past relevant, and for legitimate reasons. As educators, however, we need to make it useful, pertinent and relevant for today and tomorrow.”

www.uwo.ca/research
How is it that a Canadian professor of French has amassed one of the world’s largest collections of Holocaust testimonial?

Western Alain Goldschläger came to realize the value of survivors’ testimonies during his involvement with the second prosecution of notorious Holocaust denier, Ernst Zundel, in 1988. Upon examining the bibliographies of Holocaust-related texts, he noticed they all referenced the same books. “I realized very fast that nobody researched or systematically collected the memoirs,” he says.

Western Psychology professor Peter Hoaken, who will use PDAs to explore ties between alcohol and a variety of health-related behaviors, including aggression and unsafe sex.

His focus is the extent to which alcohol interferes with cognitive function and the role this plays in leading us to engage in inappropriate or maladaptive behaviors. Information he collects will be used to develop a model for identifying traits for impulsiveness and hostility and, longer-term, to educate and provide opportunities for early intervention for at-risk individuals. Half of both perpetrators and victims of violent crime are under the influence of alcohol. By identifying traits that predispose us to violence, Hoaken hopes his study will help implement education programs and reduce both direct and indirect impacts on our health care system. “There are all sorts of health-related behaviors that are tangentially related to alcohol,” he says. “If we map those characteristics back onto younger kids, hopefully we can initiate some earlier intervention.”

Study participants will be asked a series of questions through a PDA to assess behavior, mood and cognitive abilities — whether they have consumed alcohol or not. “The innovative aspect is to get results from people in their natural environments,” he says of the process, coined “experience sampling.” Real-time responses will help eliminate biases associated with traditional methods and, because of the dis-inhibiting nature of alcohol, hopefully result in more truthful replies. “The question is not ‘does alcohol directly cause inappropriate, maladaptive behavior, because it doesn’t,’” says Hoaken. “What we’re trying to work out is with whom it causes these sorts of inappropriate behaviors.” While most individuals do not engage in violent acts when they drink, many may react differently in a group setting, depending on their cognitive abilities. Hoaken’s research has shown that executive cognitive functions (ECF) — a series of cognitive abilities used together toward goal-directed behavior — may in fact mediate the relationship between alcohol and aggression. People with low ECF scores tend to demonstrate increased impulsive behavior and a higher likelihood of committing violent acts when cognitive functions are impaired, particularly in a group environment. In contrast, those with strong cognitive functionality are very unlikely to become aggressive when provoked, even when acutely intoxicated.

Studies will target specific populations prone to higher base rates of alcohol consumption, binge drinking and injury, including parolees, undergraduate students and individuals with specific psychiatric conditions. Funded by the Canada Foundation for Innovation and the Alcohol Beverage Medical Research Foundation, data collected from Hoaken’s novel study will also provide colleagues with insight into other behavioral issues unrelated to alcohol. “Technology is going to allow us to pursue questions that were previously inaccessible,” says Hoaken. “There are all sorts of potential applications; hopefully there will be some innovative approaches to answer important societal questions.”

Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) have already infiltrated boardrooms, classrooms and commuter buses. Now, they are also helping university researchers study why we are the way we are.

“Technology is going to allow social sciences researchers to do amazing things in the coming years,” says Western Psychology professor Peter Hoaken, who will use PDAs to explore ties between alcohol and a variety of health-related behaviors, including aggression and unsafe sex.

His focus is the extent to which alcohol interferes with cognitive function and the role this plays in leading us to engage in inappropriate or maladaptive behaviors. Information he collects will be used to develop a model for identifying traits for impulsiveness and hostility and, longer-term, to educate and provide opportunities for early intervention for at-risk individuals. Half of both perpetrators and victims of violent crime are under the influence of alcohol. By identifying traits that predispose us to violence, Hoaken hopes his study will help implement education programs and reduce both direct and indirect impacts on our health care system. “There are all sorts of health-related behaviors that are tangentially related to alcohol,” he says. “If we map those characteristics back onto younger kids, hopefully we can initiate some earlier intervention.”

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An era’s mood, culture, values and politics are often captured by the flourish of a paint brush or a sculptor’s chisel.

From art, you can learn a great deal about how people lived, says Madeline Lennon, Art History professor at Western. She is researching the collecting of Renaissance art in the 19th century by analyzing nearly three decades of correspondence between Sir Austen Henry Layard and Giovanni Morelli. These letters provide insight into Italian society at the time and discuss the preservation, conservation, dispersion and collecting of art.

Layard, from Britain, was one of the 19th century’s leading archaeologists and is best known for his discoveries at the ruins of Nineveh, now part of Mosul in modern Iraq. He met Giovanni Morelli—who made significant contributions to the analysis and protection of art—during the 1860s when both were searching for sales of Italian art collections.

Their correspondence between 1863-1891, much of which dealt directly with the importance of art, helps paint a picture of what society was like at the time and “rounds out understanding of the culture,” says Lennon. What is important, she says, is that “you see art in its context and its social setting.” The letters delve into politics, people, uprisings in Spain, and how to conserve, analyze and appreciate art.

Lennon is fascinated by both the human pattern and the parallels that exist between politics, history and society at the time—and how they recur throughout history. “It’s a discussion of the social setting of the day, of the politics of Europe,” she says. “They are discussions about art that fit into much larger social constructs.”

Art collectors are interesting in their own right, Lennon says, because of the passionate way in which they read and learn everything they can about the works they amass, attempt to meet the artists and try to determine why they are so drawn to particular pieces. “They are average people,” she says, but “the art speaks to them about something and enriches their lives.”

Lennon proposes that two-thirds of us are inherently collectors of some sort, but that art engages the collector in a different way. “There is an aesthetic element,” she says, “but it is so much more than a pretty picture.” Moral, political and religious meanings add a new dimension, turning art into more than just objects of beauty.

Western’s Department of Visual Arts has developed a course—which Lennon has taught—that provides students with a hands-on approach to researching art history. As part of the class, they meet and engage collectors while selecting pieces of art to curate an exhibition at Museum London. This unique opportunity provides students with a chance to learn in the field and experience collectors’ energy, excitement and knowledge while curating successful shows. What better way to do research?

Contemporary art is now capturing our history in the making—and, in the process, attracting a new generation of collectors as fresh and vibrant as the colours in the art itself.