



## News Release

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# Pearson Alumnus Named One of Time's Top 100 Influential People of 2021

A former student of Victoria's Pearson College UWC who is now a respected climate scientist and researcher was recently named one of [Time's Top 100 Most Influential People of 2021](#).

Together with fellow climate scientist Friederike Otto, [Geert Jan van Oldenborgh](#) was cited by renowned environmentalist Bill McKibben who wrote, "Thanks to Otto and van Oldenborgh and their colleagues at the [World Weather Attribution Project](#), we can now speak much more confidently: this summer, for instance, when a massive heat wave shattered records across the Pacific Northwest, their team quickly issued a deep statistical analysis that concluded the soaring heat was 'virtually impossible without human-caused climate change.'"

Speaking from Gouda in his native Netherlands, van Oldenborgh, who graduated from Pearson in 1980, said that his work and the project, "would have been much less successful without my Pearson College education!"

"This is a tremendous recognition for Geert and truly reflective of where we as a college have been and will continue to be as we educate and engage young people from around the world on the many positive ways they can influence and take action on climate justice," said College President Craig Davis.

"The record-breaking heat and drought on Vancouver Island and throughout British Columbia this year is another climate 'canary in the coal mine' that suggests Geert and his colleagues are spot on in their analyses."

In an earlier interview, van Oldenborgh described how his Pearson education and social experience helped shape his career and lifelong passion for climate science.

"I arrived as a typical nerdy student: excellent at academics but not all that good in social interactions! On campus I learned communication skills with people from different cultures and communication styles, which served me well in working in the international teams that are the rule in climate science projects. The Pearson experience made me much more aware of the wide world outside Europe and North America. In our work we try to address weather and climate extremes in all parts of the world so that we can answer the most relevant questions.

“A good example is the 2013 [IPCC \(Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change -- the UN body for assessing the science related to climate change\) AR6 report](#) in which I was honoured to serve as Lead Author for Chapter 11 and the Atlas. These projects always have a tension between having to get a big job done before a strict deadline and trying to make sure that everyone on the team gets the opportunity to contribute.

“The other lesson learned was that of an inequality of access to resources in the world. This was one of the reasons for building the [Climate Explorer website](#), to make sure that good scientists with mediocre internet access and computing facilities could still do good research.”

Inspired by alumni like Geert and energized by current students, Pearson College UWC -- founded in 1974 as Canada’s only United World College with a mission of teaching peace and sustainability to students from across Canada and around the world -- is currently developing a ground-breaking pre-university [Climate Action Leadership \(CAL\) Diploma program](#) within the globally-recognized International Baccalaureate (IB).

“The CAL Diploma will empower our diverse cohort of students at a pivotal moment in their lives to find their place, power and purpose in the ecology of climate solutions,” said Davis.

“With a curriculum informed by the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) together with a high understanding of global intersectional movements for change and solidarity, we believe it is imperative to equip our students with agency through a solutions-focused learning experience, that balances the ‘whys’ of what is happening with the ‘now what’ of action and impact, from community organizing to entrepreneurship, from scientific research to innovation, policy-making and advocacy, among others.

“Individuals like Geert and others from Pearson and schools around the world really pioneered the path of climate science and climate justice. We hope the development of our Climate Action Leadership Diploma program spurs many other committed young people to take up this mantle.”

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***We are privileged to learn, work, and live on the traditional territory of the Sc’ianew (Beecher Bay) First Nation. [Pearson College UWC](#) was founded as Lester B. Pearson United World College (UWC) of the Pacific in 1974 as unique pre-university school. Up to 200 students from across Canada and around the world chosen based on their promise, potential and demonstrated commitment to actively engage in creating a better world. Students are from up to 160 countries worldwide.***

**Contact:** Brian Geary | Nikola Menda  
Pearson College UWC Communications  
[bgeary@pearsoncollege.ca](mailto:bgeary@pearsoncollege.ca) | [nmende@pearsoncollege.ca](mailto:nmende@pearsoncollege.ca)