



### **Dr. Shauna Brail**

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and Senior Lecturer  
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### **Biography**

Shauna Brail ([shauna.brail@utoronto.ca](mailto:shauna.brail@utoronto.ca)) is the Director of the Urban Studies Experiential Learning Program and is a Senior Lecturer (effective July 1, 2010) in Urban Studies at the University of Toronto. She holds a BA in Urban Studies / Geography, an MA in Urban Planning and a PhD in Geography from the University of Toronto, University of British Columbia and University of Toronto respectively. Dr. Brail enjoyed a career in management consulting and as a senior policy advisor to the Ontario provincial government following the completion of her PhD, and prior to joining the University of Toronto. She is an associate member of the Graduate Faculty in the Department of Geography and Program in Planning, and is also affiliated with the [Martin Prosperity Institute](#) and the [Cities Centre](#). In addition, Dr. Brail is a member of the University of Toronto's Regent Park Steering Committee, and a member of the Regent Park Centre of Learning's Service Learning Subcommittee.

### **Teaching Philosophy**

"I believe an excellent teacher is one who provides students with a foundation of skills, resources, knowledge and confidence which they can apply to succeed in their current and future endeavors. As a teacher, my goals are: to impart knowledge and leading-edge ideas in a way that generates enthusiasm and interest; to encourage students to be active learners; and to create connections between the field of Urban Studies and the practice of Urban Studies.

I believe that students learn best in engaging, interactive environments. Whether the class is comprised of twenty or two hundred students, I always integrate interactive exercises into lectures and seminars - though the format of such engagement varies based on the size of the course, the content being discussed and my understanding of

the particular strengths of the class. In my teaching experience, I have found that students of all abilities benefit from active participation with their peers. By encouraging students to discuss multiple perspectives and viewpoints, all students are exposed to new ideas and to new ways of presenting ideas through interactive learning which in turn assists them in developing critical thinking and analytical skills.

I believe that creating strong connections between the field of Urban Studies and the practice of Urban Studies is critical to student success upon completion of undergraduate study. Our students are looking for opportunities to increase their post-graduate employability. By including outside the classroom learning opportunities that are strongly connected to classroom learning, students are able to learn about a problem or issue in-class (e.g.: poverty), experience that problem or issue first-hand (e.g.: work at a food bank), and then reflect on their role and society's role in helping to address the issue through research, course based assignments, discussion, additional volunteer work, etc. Supporting student learning through the development of connections between the field of Urban Studies and the practice of Urban Studies provides students with an understanding of their field of study and an opportunity to build upon their knowledge, interests and experiences.

By implementing the goals of my teaching philosophy, students are taught in an environment that promotes learning in combination with enthusiasm for the subject matter, they are encouraged to be active learners, and they are focused on developing connections between theory and practice through outside the classroom learning opportunities. A key outcome that I strive for as a result, is to help them develop confidence, knowledge and skills that can be transferred to future learning and other lifelong goals.”

In 2010-2011, Dr. Brail will be teaching the following courses - both of which have interactive components, outside the classroom learning opportunities and which focus on providing students with knowledge, confidence and an ability to critically assess and make sense of our urban world:

[INI 235Y: Introduction to Urban Studies](#)

[INI 437Y: Experiential Learning in Toronto and the GTA](#)

## **Research**

Dr. Brail's research interests lie broadly in the area of economic geography with a focus on the social, cultural and economic changes associated with shifting industrial strengths of cities and with a particular focus on the cultural / creative economy. Her secondary research interests are in the field of pedagogy as it relates to experiential and service learning at the university level.

Currently, she is involved in two research initiatives. The first is a cross-Canada study entitled “The Social Dynamics of Economic Performance: Innovation and Creativity in City-Regions.” Working together with Professor D. Leslie from UofT's Department of Geography, they are attempting to develop an understanding of how Toronto attracts and retains talented workers in both fashion design and visual arts.

A second study that Dr. Brail is engaged with relates to pedagogy and the integration of experiential learning and service learning with course curriculum. She is presently focused on a study looking at how undergraduate students demonstrate learning through journal assignments.

Previous research conducted by Dr. Brail includes: a study of the role of producer services in helping to transform inner city neighbourhoods in Vancouver; analysis on the emergence and evolution of new media as a 'new' industry and its implications on urban land use change; and a series of smaller studies looking at the role of e-commerce and the internet and their impact on Toronto's economic geography.

Dr. Brail has participated in the University of Toronto's work-study program for the past four years, and employs undergraduate students to assist in a variety of research and community-based projects.