In May 1964, a new interdisciplinary research centre was created at the University of Toronto. The Centre for Urban Studies, as it was then called, was established as part of the rapid growth of research activity and research funding typical of the 1960s. This was a period of transformation and expansion not only for the University of Toronto, but also for Canada’s cities.

The function of the Centre at that time was the same as it is today: to bring together University of Toronto faculty and graduate students interested in urban matters and to encourage and support urban research, with an emphasis on stimulating interdisciplinary research and providing support services to academic staff and students.

**Foundations**

The roots of the Centre go back to the early “brown bag” lunches of its founding members in the 1960s. In 1961, S.D. Clark (of Political Economy and, after 1962, Sociology), Oswald Hall (Sociology), Donald Kerr and Jacob Spelt (Geography), James Milner (Law), and Albert Rose (Social Work), began to meet every two or three months in one of the Political Economy seminar rooms at the McMaster building (now the Royal Conservatory) on Bloor Street to discuss their research interests, test their ideas, and read papers to each other.

Their concerns focused mainly in two areas: Metro Toronto and the urban-related activities of the federal and provincial governments. Professors Kerr and Spelt, for example, researched the internal structure of the city as well as its peripheral extensions. The development of expressways and the burgeoning suburban population were also a matter of interest. Others were concerned about environmental matters, such as water resources and other facilities for the fast-growing population of Metro Toronto. Albert Rose was mainly interested in the National Housing Act and its amendments that allowed the provinces greater freedom in building public housing. Donald Kerr became increasingly interested in the characteristics of metropolitan centres and their interrelationship with other urban centres.

By 1962, these scholars were convinced that it would be possible to create a research centre focused on urban affairs because of the obvious importance of urbanization to Canada, Ontario, and Metropolitan Toronto. They felt that such a centre would strengthen interdisciplinary research on problems of urban growth and development in the areas of geography, sociology, law, political science, town planning and social welfare. In a letter dated April 9, 1962, S.D. Clark urged Dean Bladen of the Faculty of Arts and Science to consider the establishment of a Centre of Urban Studies. He wrote:

“A Centre would offer much needed support to scholarly work...It would act to channel funds for the support of urban research and to stimulate work in this field. In view of the recent creation of the Canadian Council of Urban and Regional Research (CCURR), establishment of such a centre would be timely. A centre would enormously strengthen the hands of the University scholar engaged in urban research in seeking financial support from CCURR and other North American foundations....”

With the possible exception of Houston and Los Angeles, nowhere else on the North American continent has there occurred such phenomenal growth as in To-
ronto. The University has an exciting laboratory for urban research at its very doorstep. Indeed the University itself is part of this laboratory. No other place is more appropriate.

On May 1, 1962, faculty interested in the establishment of a Centre of Urban Studies met in the Faculty Lounge, Sidney Smith Hall, to discuss a plan of action. Professors Kerr, Spelt, Putnam, and Potvin from Geography, Dakin from Town and Regional Planning, Sawatsky from Business Administration, Milner from Law, Davis from Civil Engineering, Currie and Clark from Political Economy attended.

An informal managing committee of Professors Clark, Dakin, Kerr, and Milner, under the chairmanship of Milner, was asked to take further steps towards the establishment of a centre, and to organize an interfaculty seminar on urban problems for the academic term 1962-63. However, a year passed before the committee could arrange a meeting with the president to discuss the establishment of the centre. In the meantime, in the academic year 1962-63, the urban studies group (as members then called themselves) was active on campus. The committee succeeded in organizing the interfaculty seminar and the first meeting took place on November 15, in the Faculty Lounge of Sidney Smith Hall.

The theme chosen for the seminar was “The Forms of Government for Metropolitan Toronto.” The first paper was presented by Jacob Spelt on “The Origin and Structure of the Central Business District of Toronto.” Four further monthly sessions were held that year in which papers were read by a geographer, a sociologist and two visitors – a municipal consultant and a researcher from the Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board. Most participants focused on the suburbs and the central business district, but running throughout was the broad theme of the forms of local government suitable for a large and rapidly growing urban community.

The committee decided that seminars in the academic year 1963-64 would be less formal and would focus mainly on progress reports from academics who would attempt to say what they thought were the important ideas in their disciplines that had a bearing on the problems and relationships between urban and social planning.

The managing committee continued in its efforts to establish a formal centre of urban studies. In a letter to President Claude T. Bissell on November 7, 1963, the committee, which by then included Stefan Dupre of Political Science, requested an appointment to discuss the formation of the centre. A meeting was arranged on November 20, 1963, during which the committee was successful in pleading their case.

**Inauguration, May 1, 1964**

April 9th, 1964.

Dear Dean Bladen,

I write to urge that consideration be given to the establishment in the University of Toronto of a Centre of Urban Studies. Such a centre would provide a means of strengthening and furthering research work on problems of urban growth and development now going forward in geography, sociology, law, political science, town planning, social welfare and elsewhere. It would act to channel funds for the support of urban research and to stimulate work in this field.

Yours sincerely,

S. D. Clark
Professor of Sociology

The School of Graduate Studies established the Centre on May 1, 1964. The centre would be managed by an Executive Council of six faculty members, with a chairman appointed by the president. The president would also appoint a director who would be responsible for the day-to-day work of the centre. A Faculty Council and an Advisory Council made up of persons from outside the University who were concerned about the conduct and use of urban research would meet at least once a year and would be responsible for determining general policy and advising the Executive Council. The first members of the Executive Council were Meyer Brownstone (Political Economy), S.D. Clark (Sociology), John Dakin (Town and Regional Planning), D.P. Kerr (Geography), and Albert Rose (Social Work). J.B. Milner (Law) was
chairman.

The inaugural seminar of the newly formed Centre of Urban Studies was on the theme of urban renewal, and took place in the Senate Chamber in Simcoe Hall on October 29 and 30, 1964. The papers included a general appraisal of urban renewal programs, as well as analyses of the allocation of the costs of urban renewal among the three levels of government and private enterprise, the reaction of the private entrepreneur to public proposals for urban renewal, and human considerations in urban renewal. The proceedings were later published as a special issue of the University of Toronto Law Journal, and also sold by the Centre as its first publication.

During 1964, the Centre gave further thought to the details of its organization, and seminar sessions were held to discuss broad policies. Charles Tilly, of the Joint Centre for Urban Studies of the Massachusetts Institute for Technology and Harvard University, led the discussion at the first seminar, which dealt with the responsibilities and organization of an urban studies centre. Brian Berry from the University of Chicago was the second visitor, speaking on the role and activities of Chicago’s Centre of Urban Studies.

The Centre also initiated a number of research projects. The agenda of the Executive Council meeting on December 9, 1964 mentions four projects: the Timmins Project (Clark), the Georgian Bay Project (Milner), the Land Use Atlas (Kerr) and the CMHC-funded Alexandra Park Project (Rose). At the Executive Council meeting on March 3, 1965, several additional projects were discussed: the prospects for growth of urban places in non-metropolitan regions (Hodge), the perception of distance (Baker), the public reaction to current housing development (Rubin), the implications of the shift in taste in multiple dwelling housing, and the role of the plan in the planning process (Dakin and Milner). Clearly much needed to be done:

“It is apparent that research funds in substantial amounts will be required if the Centre’s ambitions are to be realized, and it is also apparent that more encouragement will have to be given to potential graduate students in urban studies if enough first class scholars are to be found to do the research. The experience of the Canadian Council on Urban and Regional Research has made it very clear that there is more work to be done than there are scholars to do it.”

Meanwhile, the Executive Council spent a great deal of time looking for a director, initially without much success. In early 1966, Stefan Dupre was finally convinced to become the “sacrificial lamb,” lest the University withdraw its approval of the centre for lack of a volunteer.

The Early Years

The Centre started as a one-person operation in the back room of a rented house in 1966 on Spadina Avenue (since torn down), immediately south of Hoskins Avenue. The director had a secretary, some initial funding, and little else. At that time the name of the Centre was enlarged to encompass “community studies” to reflect ongoing research on social and community issues which were not necessarily urban either in origin or expression.

The Executive Council and the director planned seminars, discussion groups, and visiting lecturers. Monthly luncheons featuring guest speakers were arranged to reach interested faculty on a regular basis. By 1969-70 the Centre maintained regular contact with
more than eighty faculty members and had among its resident researchers twenty professors.

In 1969, the Centre was able to appoint an associate director (Larry S. Bourne) to help with the increased administrative load. During this time the Centre moved to 150 St. George Street, acquiring eight offices in the process. By 1970, seven major research projects were under way, although not all of them were housed entirely on the new premises.

The Centre initiated a formal publications program in 1968 with a research paper series and a bibliographic series. Books resulting from CUCS research were also available at the Centre.

There was an unspoken agreement that the Centre would not formally engage in political lobbying, although many of its studies involved local government and the implications of legislation. Most individual members, however, were actively engaged in trying to influence changes in legislation and governmental structures. Some of the members had important positions on different governmental boards and thus were able to influence legislation passed by the federal and provincial governments and to pressure Ontario and Metropolitan Toronto to act on them. Thus, the Centre was acquiring, directly or indirectly, considerable influence in research and teaching, as well as political influence in urban development.

When Professor Dupre left the Centre in 1971, it had adequate funding, clear evidence of ongoing research activity and a visible and important presence in the University community. Under Richard Soberman (1971-72), who succeeded Dupre, and Larry Bourne (1972-84), the quality of the research that was being produced in the Centre was firmly established.

Changing Context: The Early 1970s

The first years of the 1970s were marked by a rapid turnover of leadership: Richard Soberman resigned after only a year as Director to head the Metropolitan Toronto Transportation Plan Review. Immediately after his own appointment, Larry Bourne left on an overdue year’s leave, and William Michelson had to hold the fort in his absence. Despite these upheavals, the early 1970s were critical in establishing directions in research and associated activities, as well as in institutional organization.

The Centre was developing at a time of increasing interest in urban affairs and considerable activity on the national, provincial, and local scenes. Nationally, the Hellyer Task Force on Housing and Urban Development issued its report in 1969 calling for a fresh approach to urban redevelopment and social housing. Locally, the fight over the redevelopment of Trefann Court spelled both the end of urban renewal as it had been known in Toronto and the entry of John Sewell and other urban reform activists onto the urban scene. Pressures for expressway development spawned the Stop Spadina movement. Toronto’s “Reform” Council was elected in 1972 with David Crombie as Mayor. The City’s new “downtown plan” focused intense debate on development issues and new urban forms.

While Toronto engaged in residential land banking and community organizing, the Ontario government initiated a regional planning process (called ‘Design for Development’), and Canada finally created an urban ministry in 1971: the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs 1971. Although the Ministry of State lasted only eight years, and municipal land banking and provincial enthusiasm for regional planning faded quickly, the Centre’s research agenda survived and prospered.

Research Directions in the 1970s

The early 1970s saw the development of several major research projects. The first, which provided an
important stimulus to the Centre’s research agenda, was an extensive exploration of alternative future trajectories of urban and economic development in Ontario and Quebec, funded primarily by Bell Canada. Most individual studies were completed in 1974.

In 1975 William Michelson finished a massive five-year study of the effects of housing type on the preferences and behaviour of households in the process of relocation. These years also saw the development of longer-term interdisciplinary projects. The first two were the Joint Program in Transportation (JPT) and the Urban Housing Markets Program, established in 1975.

The JPT linked faculty and students from engineering, economics, geography, planning, and law at York University and the University of Toronto. It received base funding from the federal government and benefited from substantial research and student support. The program made significant contributions to policy and still exists as a free-standing unit within the University of Toronto.

The Housing Markets program, in contrast, was initially funded internally (by the University’s Connaught Fund), but then survived on external funds for specific projects. The Child in the City Program (1976-83) was set up in response to the needs of the Hospital for Sick Children Foundation for research on the effects of social, neighbourhood and environmental change on the well-being of urban children. Directed by William Michelson, and then Howard Andrews, it was by far the largest and most ambitious program associated with the Centre and the first to combine faculty from the medical, health, and social science communities.

Because of the shortage of space at 150 St. George, the Child in the City program was first located at 158 St. George St., occupying almost as much space as the Centre did, with a much larger budget. It then moved to 455 Spadina, the Centre’s present home. In 1982, the Childcare Resource and Research Unit (CRRU) emerged from the innovative work of the Child in the City project. An important part of the Centre, CRRU continues to play a key role in childcare research and policy in Ontario and in Canada.

Another major emerging research focus was the analysis of community support systems and social networks. In early 1977, the new global secretariat of the International Network for Social Network Analysis (INSNA) was established in the Centre under the guidance of Barry Wellman. INSNA linked more than 300 social network analysts from all continents.

Proposals for other major initiatives (for instance, in urban politics and management, urban design, urban history, and ethnic studies and immigration) were less successful. None reached fruition as distinct programs of research. In some instances, there was no source of funding; in others, faculty interest or resources were thin; in still others, similar programs were eventually established but administered elsewhere (for example, the Ethnic and Pluralism Studies Collaborative Program). The Centre did, however, mount individual projects in several of these areas during the 1970s and 1980s.

**Organizational Philosophies**

The Centre has maintained a decentralized type of organizational structure. It has a small operating core funded by the University with various research initiatives supported primarily by external funding. Larry Bourne formalized this structure. The Centre acted as the hub of a wheel, providing an administrative home for a number of related interdisciplinary research programs. These functioned autonomously and, in the case of the JPT, could be spun off and run independently once they had built up a reputation and continuing support. Others, like the Child in the City, ended when the funding ran out. The Urban Housing Markets program was internalized and still continues without a distinctive administrative autonomy, reaching its zenith in the mid-1980s with the cross-Canada project assessing housing progress since 1945, directed by John Miron and funded by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

The programs were administered by coordinators or directors who were also cross-appointed as Associate Directors of the Centre (William Michelson, later Howard Andrews, for the Child in the City; Richard Sober-
man and Ron Rice for the JPT; Larry Bourne and John Hitchcock for Urban Housing Markets; Barry Wellman for INSNA).

This administrative model had a number of advantages: without having a large organization to support, the Centre nonetheless has the flexibility to accommodate large programs. It proved to be a cost-effective strategy. There were economies of scale in day-to-day operations. Program resources could be pooled and staff could be shared in difficult times. There was also a cross-fertilization of ideas and external contacts. Moreover, the university was saved the necessity of setting up new administrative units for each research initiative.

As part of this organizational philosophy, the Centre’s informal Advisory Group was formally reconstituted through the Graduate School in 1974-75 as the Executive Committee. This had ten members and met twice a year for nearly a decade, providing invaluable ideas and information on research initiatives, funding sources and operational priorities. At various times the membership included Meyer Brownstone (Political Economy), John Dakin, J.B. Cullingworth, John Hitchcock and Alan Waterhouse (Urban and Regional Planning), Albert Rose (Social Work), Ron Rice (Engineering), David Nowlan, John Bossons and Michael Denny (Economics), Lorna Marsden and Nancy Howell (Sociology), George Baird (Architecture), Stan Makuch (Law), Howard Andrews, Jim Simmons and Jacob Spelt (Geography).

The Centre ran on a small base budget, managing to operate under severe constraints that were compounded by further budget cuts in 1976-77. The annual contribution from the University of approximately $61,000 maintained a core administrative staff, a supply of paper, and very little else. Between 1978 and 1983, the Centre administered some 55 distinct research grants, which brought in more than $600,000, an average of about $150,000 a year (in addition to funding for major programs such as the Child in the City). Private funding of research tended to decline over the latter years, but was compensated for by increased grants from foundations, research councils, and government agencies. Accumulated overhead provided about the only available capacity to support new initiatives and to cover any shortfalls.

**Retrenchment: The Early 1980’s**

Ambitious plans for further expansion of the role and scope of the Centre were put on hold because of the budgetary climate of the University and the local and provincial governments. Some members of the Centre had envisioned a teaching program in Urban Studies. Others argued for the re-establishment of a student fellowship and grant program. Still others suggested a move toward more applied research and direct involvement in the community outside the University.

There was little agreement on the merits of introducing a teaching program as people feared that teaching needs might compete with research for scarce resources. As well, other divisions of the University claimed “urban” as their own instructional field. The community involvement link continued on an informal basis and as part of several research projects, but money for expansion was not forthcoming. Efforts in each of these directions continued to be severely hindered by the sharp downturn in funding and waning political interest in urban questions.

The federal Ministry of State for Urban Affairs was closed in 1979 and the only other major agency with an indirect urban mandate, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, retreated from funding large-scale external research projects. The chill was felt in other places too. The Bureau of Municipal Research in Toronto closed in 1982, and the Institute of Local Government at Queen’s University closed in 1983.

Nevertheless, despite frozen budgets and an often unfriendly external funding climate, the Centre contin-
Another international journal joined the Centre in 1984 when Women & Environments began its five-year sojourn under the guidance of Judith Kjellberg Bell. Inherited from York University and now owned by the non-profit WEED Foundation, Women & Environments brought to the Centre a focus on women’s perspectives on the built and natural environment.

The Centre’s small resource room was started in 1978 to organize the Centre’s ephemeral research material and policy documents, making these more widely available within the University and outside. The major focus was on housing, but its expanding holdings reflected the Centre’s changing research interests.

Despite the lack of a degree program in urban studies, the Centre placed considerable importance on supporting graduate student activities. Up to 40 students a year were employed as research assistants on major projects. At one point, as many as 10 graduate students were housed on the third floor at 150 St. George. Students were encouraged to publish their own research in the Centre’s series, and many did. The Centre also offered dissertation fellowships, small grants and assistantships. Approximately $125,000 was received from funding agencies and private corporations (such as Cadillac-Fairview) for graduate fellowships. These unfortunately stopped in the early 1980s and the number of research assistants in residence also dwindled as budgets and space tightened.

The Bourne years saw a large number of papers published, 191 by July 1984, as well as several books. The publication series became widely known internationally and often provided an outlet for the preliminary presentation of work published later elsewhere (about 40% of the research papers later appeared in refereed journals or edited collections).

At the time, there were few other formal mechanisms in Canada for distributing urban research findings. Indeed, there was relatively little urban research being carried out in the country. The Centre was a pioneer in this area, helping to create and integrate a community of interest among urban scholars within and outside the University. Its example was followed by the JPT and Child in the City, each of which started its own publication series during the 1970s.

The first Centre newsletter, initially intended for internal circulation, was published in fall 1972, discontinued after a few issues, and reactivated in 1978. During the 1980’s the newsletter had a considerable international following. The INSNA newsletter Connections was published three times a year through the Centre from 1976 until 1988 when, firmly established, it moved to the University of Florida.

The Centre hosted its first major international conference, on urban housing markets research and policy, in October 1977. This was also the first major conference to be held on housing in Canada since 1968, when the Canadian Welfare Council sponsored the First Canadian Housing Conference. The inception and success of both the
when housing as a research area received inadequate funding and few incentives from governments.

Another major conference, “The Metropolis,” held in November 1983, was jointly sponsored by the Department of Geography and the Centre in honour of the distinguished urban planner, teacher, activist and long-time Centre associate, Hans Blumenfeld. The conference themes reflected the issues that Blumenfeld, who was in his nineties at the time, had addressed most frequently in his long professional career: changes in planning strategies, transportation, housing and urban design, suburbanization and the protection of the environment.

**A Move, a Review and a New Director**

In 1982 the Centre moved once again, this time to permit consolidation of the economics department at 150 St. George. In the process it secured a third more space and a better view of life in the inner city. The move was to its present location at the top of the former ‘Tip Top Tailors’ building at 455 Spadina Avenue, into space partly vacated by the Akhenaten Temple project and partly still inhabited by the Child in the City project.

The offices were extensively redesigned and renovated. The original front doors of the old Victorian house at 150 St. George were retrieved and mounted in the fourth-floor hallway at 455 as a piece of the Centre’s and Toronto’s history.

Shortly after the move, the Centre underwent the School of Graduate Studies’ standard five-year review of its centres and institutes. Under the School’s revised rules, no director may serve more than two five-year terms. Larry Bourne’s tenure as the Centre’s longest-serving director had come to an end and a search was initiated for a successor to take office in 1984.

Review Committee members commended Bourne’s efforts in promoting research “particularly at a time when urban studies have not been a top research or policy priority,” and referred to the Centre as “a visible asset of which the University has reason to be proud,” and as “one of the premier research groups of its type in Canada” – fitting tributes to a distinguished tenure as Director.

The new Director appointed in July 1984, Meyer Brownstone, oversaw the next phase in the Centre’s evolution, a period in which many of the existing areas of research continued but with the addition of an emphasis on problems of urbanization in developing countries.