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RANDFORCE PARTNERS IN MAJOR NSF GRANT BRINGING QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF ORAL HISTORY INTO ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING RESEARCH

The National Science Foundation has awarded a \$796,000 grant to an interdisciplinary team at University at Buffalo including The Randforce Associates, housed in the UB Technology Incubator. "Advancing Groundwater Restoration Through Qualitative Analysis" will use oral history to research and incorporate the experiences and insights of residents, scientists, engineers, and government and public health officials involved in groundwater remediation at Superfund sites. The grant's subtitle "What Practitioners and Stakeholders Care About and Why It Matters," signals the unique orientation beyond the technical, scientific, and environmental factors typical in NSF-funded studies.

The grant was awarded through the new *INSPIRE* program (Integrated NSF Support Promoting Interdisciplinary Research and Education) to a team led by Alan Rabideau, Principle Investigator and Professor of Environmental Engineering at the UB. He is joined by co-PIs Kenneth Shockley, a UB philosopher and ethicist, Erin Robinson, a Canisius College sociologist of environmental policy and community response, and Randforce Principal Michael Frisch, UB Professor / Senior Research Scholar.

"We will examine emerging concepts that focus on long-term management rather than expensive but ineffective cleanup technologies," says Rabideau. "Our approach will differ from purely technical assessments by integrating community engagement with science, engineering, ethics and policy."

The group will identify a wide breadth of stakeholders who will then be interviewed and recorded, both individually and in focus groups. Using indexing tools and techniques developed by Randforce for oral histories, the team will annotate and thematically cross-reference the recordings directly using qualitative analysis approaches used for audio/video content management, and customized for use in this multidisciplinary and scientific project. This is one of the few instances where a major oral history component serves as the central data source and core analytic methodology for NSF research.

The three-year project began in September 2013 and will support a number of masters and Ph.D. students at UB and Canisius. Doug Lambert, Randforce Director of Technology and a doctoral student working under Dr. Rabideau, says the grant is "an opportunity of a lifetime." "Interdisciplinary research is a great idea in principle, but you don't often see it happen effectively in practice," Lambert explains. "We're a diverse team, but we won't just combine our individual pieces at the end. We'll be in a room together, hammering it out, with oral history interview recording and content management as the central focus holding it all together. That's cool." The grant will run through 2016.

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