

## **MIRANDA MONOSKY**

### **Starkey-Robinson Award for Graduate Research on Canada**



Miranda Monosky completed her Master of Arts thesis in Geography at Memorial University in December 2020. Her research, focused on the policy and practices surrounding mine closure planning in Northern Canada, was the product of her unique collaboration with an industry—university—community committee engaged in participatory mine closure planning in Nunavik, Northern Quebec. The resulting thesis and publications, not only contribute important insights into this neglected field of industry and environmental governance, but also model new forms and modalities of collaborative research practices in Northern Canada. In this way, the significance of her research transcends both the subject matter and regional focus of the work, and the many results flowing from this project represent a remarkable achievement for a student at the master’s level.

Miranda’s thesis, “Social and Community Engaged Mine Closure: An Exploration of Mine Closure Governance and Industry Practices in Northern Canada,” tackled perhaps the most neglected aspect of mining industry regulation around the world: planning for post-mining social and economic transitions. International scholarship has highlighted the need for a global examination of legislation and policy mechanisms for “embedding social considerations into the closure process and curbing divestment strategies to avoid closure costs” (Bainton & Holcombe, 2018: 473). This is also the case in Canada, where mine closure policy and practice tends to remain focused on technical environmental aspects of mine closure and remediation, to the virtual exclusion of the social and economic impacts of mining transitions. Closure regulations and industry practices also provide limited opportunities for community input and engagement in closure planning. These policy and practice gaps present significant risks for Northern and Indigenous communities whose territories are affected by mining operations and which will be directly affected by their social, economic, and environmental legacies post-closure.

To investigate these challenges, Miranda joined me (as her supervisor) as part of a collaborative research project, funded through the NSERC Towards Environmentally Responsible Resource Extraction Network (TERRE-NET). Our work entailed collaboration with Raglan Mine Closure Plan Subcommittee, a group comprised of representatives from the Glencore Raglan Mine, Inuit community members from Salluit and Kangiqsujuaq, Nunavik, Makivik Corporation (a regional Inuit governance organization), and university experts. This working group aims to integrate Inuit knowledge and community engagement into closure planning for the Raglan Mine, which has operated in the territory since 1996, but is not slated to closure until 2041.

Miranda’s research was guided by the priorities and needs of this unique collaboration. Through meetings and discussions, Miranda co-developed her research questions and approaches with the subcommittee. Based on this responsive approach to project development, Miranda’s research focused not on the Inuit communities themselves—which expressed concerns about “research fatigue”—but rather on the wider structures and practices of mine closure planning and governance. The goal was to provide an analysis of current closure planning practices across Northern Canada, and a detailed examination of the regional and provincial governance of mine

closure in Nunavik, in order to better inform the Raglan subcommittee's own collaborative planning efforts. As part of her research and engagement activities, Miranda also provided ongoing support to the subcommittee (attending meetings, note-taking, communications, document reviews, etc.), activities partly supported by a MITACS Accelerate internship.

This “study up” approach yielded richly detailed and important results, based on Miranda's careful research design and critical analysis. Miranda's 200-page thesis explored issues associated with social and community-engaged mine closure through two principle foci: the collection and analytical review of mine closure plans from 10 active mining operations across Northern Canada; and a policy analysis of mine closure in Nunavik, Quebec, informed by semi-structured interviews with regional and provincial government officials. Two examiners accepted the thesis with only minor modifications, ranking it as “excellent” and “very significant.” The external examiner from University of Alberta praised it as “an excellent piece of work which will no doubt make an important impact on discussions on mine reclamation in the north.” (See extended abstract below for more details of the thesis findings.)

Impressively, Miranda successfully translated these results into peer-reviewed, published contributions to national and international scholarship on mining (see full citations below). Her first publication, in the *Journal of Environmental Management* (Monosky & Keeling 2021), reported on her closure plan analysis. The second, published in *Northern Review* (Monosky & Keeling 2021), provided an in-depth review of Nunavik and Quebec's approach to mine closure governance. (Although I am co-author, Miranda took the lead role in research design, data analysis, and drafting the papers). Also during her program, Miranda contributed to a forthcoming peer-reviewed book chapter (Dance et al. 2022) as well as a SSHRC Knowledge Synthesis report (Beckett et al. 2020). She presented her findings in numerous scholarly and public venues, including at annual TERRE-NET meetings, the ArcticNet annual conference, the Nunavik Mining Symposium, and an interdisciplinary Mining and the Environment conference, where she won an award for best presentation. This is a remarkable set of contributions for a master's student in the social sciences.

Just as importantly, Miranda fulfilled her obligations to her community collaborators, presenting her research to the Raglan mine closure subcommittee and supplying a report and lay summary for regional and community-level decision-makers. She also continued to support the work of the subcommittee through the end of her program and beyond. This commitment to publically engaged and responsive research is a hallmark of Miranda's research. In the context of contemporary debates around resource extraction, community sustainability, and the rights of Indigenous peoples, Miranda's contributions both to the understanding of mine closure and mine site transitions, as well as to new models and modes of collaborative, participatory research, mark its double significance to the geography of Canada.