

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

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comments to voice@ausu.org,
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publish your letter.

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There Ought To Be a Law

Besides death and taxes, there are a couple of other constants in the universe: Everybody loves a good puzzle, and most of us like to see the good guy win. These two simple facts (as well as the quality of the production) are what's behind the solid success of the television program *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*.

About to enter its eighth season and still going strong, the original *CSI* has generated two spin-offs (*CSI: Miami* and *CSI: New York*) and a raft of computer games. It's make-believe crimes solved by make-believe people; television studios have been doing it since *Perry Mason*, *The Mod Squad*, and the like. All well and good.

But it's also spawned a disturbing new show being aired by Spike TV, one that pushes the bounds of the reality TV fad way too far.

It's one thing to curl up on the couch and try to solve a fictitious crime before the Hollywood *CSI* characters do. It's quite another to watch the victims of real, violent crimes turned into fodder for a glorified game show. And that's exactly what happens on Spike TV's *Murder*.

The intro for the first episode says it all: "This show contains explicit and gruesome crime scene photos and re-creations . . . The heinous crimes you are about to see are real."

As two teams of wannabe forensic investigators are shown arriving at the original crime scene (all the cases used in the show have been solved), the 911 call is played. The contestants smile for the camera and introduce themselves. In the background, a terrified teenage girl on the actual 911 tape has run to her neighbours' house, incoherent as she sobs that her parents have just been shot.

The only word to describe it is horrific. To realize that this family's pain, the brutal crime that invaded their home and stole their lives, has been reduced to nothing more than entertainment deserves no other word than that.

There have been other reality-based crime shows. *America's Most Wanted* was one of the first. Although it started out with good intentions (to identify and help locate wanted criminals), it opened the door to programs like *Cops*—a chase-and-arrest-fest with no redeeming qualities.

As the *Murder* contestants look for clues and analyze blood spatter, competing with another team to solve the crime, it becomes increasingly obvious that there is no point to this show but voyeurism. Crime-scene photos are trotted out, the home that the crime took place in is visited, and the very real pain of these families is relived. It's the next level in extreme viewing.

It reminds me of the final days before the fall of the Roman Empire: for a while in those bread-and-circus days, the thrill of watching a character die a fake death in a play was enough. But as the Empire reeled, the crowds clamoured to take things further, and the actors on stage were actually killed.

Perhaps the most disturbing thing is that the concept was estimated to be popular enough to garner an audience (I'm not even sure I want to know who gave this debacle a thumbs-up in the test audiences). It's cheap sensationalism at the expense of grieving families, friends, and quite frankly, good taste. There ought to be a law.

AU Profiles:

Randall Sawka

by Christina M. Frey



In this week's profile, we meet Athabasca University graduate Randall Sawka, a freelance writer who has just published a thriller novel. He chats about the self-publishing business, how Athabasca University has helped him fulfill his dream of becoming a writer, and just what to do about writer's block.

Randall and his wife Nancy live in Victoria, British Columbia; their grown daughter, Michelle, attends the University of British Columbia. In 2005, Randall graduated from Athabasca University with a major in English. This achievement paved the way for a career in freelance writing, beginning with the publication of his first novel this summer.

As a teenager Randall had considered becoming a journalist. However, aside from writing for his high-school newspaper, he never pursued it until decades later, after he had been working in sales for years.

"I was tired of business courses and wanted to get away from sales," Randall says. Since his long-held dream had been to write fiction, his wife encouraged him to begin studying English. However, he wasn't enthusiastic about taking classes with students his daughter's age. Athabasca University offered a good solution with distance education. "My daughter was happy," Randall jokes.

Athabasca's flexibility was also appealing, as it allowed the Sawkas to continue travelling frequently. In fact, at one point, Randall was able to combine the two, obtaining special permission from the university to study Spanish in Madrid for a month.

At Athabasca, Randall focused on obtaining the knowledge and skills he would need as a freelance writer. Course-wise, he concentrated on English literature in addition to taking writing classes. "I wanted to rebuild my foundation," he says, so studying the classics fit well into that plan.

Randall recently published his first novel, *Rough Business*. He describes it as "a fast-paced police thriller" that starts out set in Edmonton but soon involves a "chase around the world." Interestingly, the writing process was closely tied to his timeline as an AU student. Randall didn't want to start writing the novel until after he had graduated, but he kept his brain active as he worked through his courses. When he started his first writing class almost five years ago, he began collecting the ideas which would one day become the novel. He'd write ideas on scraps of paper around the house or on napkins in a café and collect these ideas in a jar. It paid off; all that prep work allowed him to write the first draft of *Rough Business* in just one month, writing for about five hours each day.

What about distractions and writer's block? To keep focused, Randall employs the same technique he used while completing assignments for his courses: he writes on beaches and in coffee shops, "away from distractions and refrigerators." He also keeps several projects going concurrently in case of burnout.

As for writer's block, Randall doesn't begin a writing project cold. "Keep writing the little ideas down," he advises. "In a year or two, you may have a book." For Randall, a general idea of the story is the most important; he writes straight from start to finish, with the little details resolving themselves along the way. "I've learned that the ending is usually straightforward . . . the good guy wins!" he laughs.

Breaking into the self-publishing world wasn't easy, but Randall claims that it's not as bad as some might think. Realizing that major publishers and agents only want writers with experience is the first big step. "One must sweep that away and learn the basics," says Randall. Then "you just dive in and learn to market yourself and your book." For Randall, this meant calling and visiting various bookstores across Canada and pitching the book. You need to have the "nerve to ask for the sale," he says.

**"I'm living my
dream . . . and
having a
blast."**

Marketing can be a challenge, however. Randall estimates that he spends four hours marketing for every hour he spends writing. While his sales background has definitely helped in the marketing and business end of writing, he believes that persistence, politeness, a lot of hope, and a very thick skin are crucial as well. Writers may be stereotyped as quiet and retiring, but Randall notes that it is "vital to be in front of the public"—whether on the radio or in bookstores, or even on television for more established writers. During a book signing, it's important to be proactive and engage people, rather than just "sitting behind a desk quietly."

To current AU students looking to further their own goals, Randall has some good advice. "You are already doing the important thing—you are in post-secondary school," he says. Doing what you love is also vital; "it makes getting out of bed every day easier."

Support is also important. "I had great encouragement from profs and tutors," Randall says. "They told me I had the ability to tell a story." That gave him the confidence to start and keep going. His wife's support was also crucial during both studying and writing.

At this point, *Rough Business* is carried by more than 40 bookstores across Canada, with more expected soon. Randall anticipates that if he sells three to five thousand books, he may be able to catch the attention of a major publisher for future works. He's also been approached to do a lecture cruise on the basics of self-publishing. Randall has written another novel, which is still in manuscript form, and has several other writing projects in various stages of development. "In short," he says, "I'm living my dream . . . and having a blast."

For more information on Randall Sawka and *Rough Business*, check out his website at www.randallsawka.com

If you would like to be profiled in a future issue of the Voice, please contact the Editor at voice@ausu.org

POETIC LICENCE

Tight-Laced

My corset is made of air,
stronger than steel or bone
and self-laced to shape me like a tube.

What better way to purge this
hourglass?

You know,
Ms. Granger holds the record,
tight-laced to fifteen now and counting,
but I have no use for her corsetiere.

To be the hand within the glove
must have some appeal.

Immobilized,
would Warhol craft
a stylized portrait to commemorate
the corset joining him in death?

To protect, support, heal:
this at least has merit.

Invisible and resilient,
my corset does not hold me in or back,
but rejects compression into
this shape you have defined for me.

Jennifer McNeil

Elevator

Why should we not go down?

This is exorcism in an elevator,
your face a blur,
a hint of auburn locks, a crooked smile.

No good, no good, no good,
for anyone or anything.

One press and slam, a transformation.
Speeding upwards now,
your hands around my throat
passed every floor.

There are no destinations here,
no scheduled stops.
The walls have folded out and over,
the Big Bang in reverse:

I am the unmaker, the undoer.

You glimpse the edge,
concrete and steel, and then beyond.

It is all the chance I need,
and one thrust is enough to topple
what you were and are,
and never will become.

Jennifer McNeil

The Chronicles of Cruiscin Lan

by
Wanda
Waterman
St. Louis

Baloney Festival Cookbook, Royal Canadian Legion
Branch #59 Ladies Auxiliary

**Stuffed Baloney
Bowls**
Bake baloney
slices on a cookie
sheet in a warm
oven until they
curl up to form
bowls. Fill bowls
with Kraft Dinner.
Garnish with
crushed potato
chips and serve
with a grin!



Baloney Festival
Cookbook Highlights

Chronicles of
CRUISCIN LAN



The family will be so pleased with dinner!



Baspanner
Hollow out a baloney
log. Stuff with
mashed spam.
Insert wieners into
centre. Bake in
medium hot oven
until golden brown.
Slice up and serve
with fries, gravy,
and White Shark.



Brad's coming over! What
can we snack on that won't give
me G.A.S?!!!

Baloney Chip & Dip
Slice baloney very
thin and cut into
bite-size pieces.
Bake in a warm
oven on a cookie
sheet until they
dry out and curl up.
Cool in a bucket.
Mash up raw
baloney meat with
a cup of sour cream
and have yourself
a dippety-do-daw day!



Here's a summertime picnic favourite!



Baloney Boats
Slice a baloney
log in half the
long way. Hollow
out the centres
of each half. Pile
high with Connors
kippers and
crushed crackers.
Watch the kids
come a'runnin'!



Lord's Prayer Redux

Our Mother, who art in Haida Gwaii and Venice and Montreal, who art walking alone on a midnight coastline, who art in Stonehenge and that greasy-spoon breakfast spot on Commercial Drive

Hallowed be thy name, and hallowed be the hip upon which thou swingest thy babbling infant, and the beautiful creases around thine eyes, and thy golden tooth that flasheth in the morning sun

Thy will be done, thy laundry be done, thy Chinese takeout be done and eaten with thy brown-eyed lover in the backseat of thy Toyota Corolla

In earth as it is in Heaven and in Hell (which is to say, all-of-apiece)

Give us this day our daily bread, our Darjeeling and falafels, our cheap red wine, our honky-tonk and crème brûlée, our golden trumpets and honey-coloured skin, our licorice sticks and marching bands, our Friday night

black-and-white horror flicks, our jukeboxes and Japanese gardens dripping with rain, our cotton underthings drying on the line, our sleeping-late teasing, our smoked meat on rye, our campfire stories, our bedroom curtains blowing dancing in a ghostly breeze blowing off the lake

And forgive us our greed and our lies, our pyramid marketing systems and seven-step programs, our tawdry self-interest and reality television, our creepy misogyny, our SUVs, our torture chambers and police states, our megaton atomic warheads

As we forgive Stockwell Day and those who broadcast Nickelback on public airwaves (but not really)

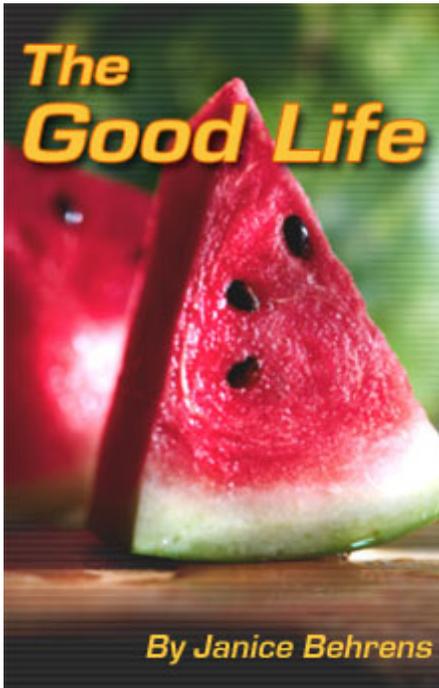
And lead us not into buying "Artist-styled Lofts" on the third floor of gated communities, or designer clothing from the Punk department of Old Navy, exchanging cheap gossip, voting Conservative, answering our cellphones at theatres and funerals, saying "Get a job," confusing luck with honour, or turning away, turning away, turning away

But deliver us from delusions of every kind

For thine is the cherry-red lips and the silver-strapped sandals, the fury of the tempest, the pull of the moon, the labyrinth of the womb, the ancient memories of feathers and teeth, the river in a season of flood, the salty-sweet skin, the intuition and the rounded belly, the fingers that pluck the cosmic harp, the hands that change the Eternal Diaper, the taste of blood, the laughter floating up from wrought-iron balconies, the lamb curry with sweet potatoes simmering on the stove, the bare feet dangling, the secret smile, the well-earned wrinkles

The Power, and the Joy, and the Glory,

For ever and ever. *Amen.*



The Value of Adversity

Like everyone else, I enjoy days that roll along smoothly. I get out of bed on time, and the weather is pleasant. The newspaper arrives neatly folded on my doorstep. I do not burn the toast. Traffic is smooth, making for an easy commute. I arrive at the office perfectly on time, and my daily schedule clicks along like Swiss clockwork. We all—perhaps far too occasionally—have days like that. It seems that everyone, from the gods on down, are easy to get along with, and everything falls in place.

The only downside to that delightful sort of day is that I have never really learned a darn thing about myself or about life during those times. Sure, on those perfect days I have avoided unpleasant emotions and states of mind, such as anger, confusion, frustration, and sadness. On the other hand, I have not been forced to grow. My mettle has not been tested, and I have not had the transformative experience of having to overcome adversity and rise to the challenge, be it minor or dire.

Despite what the books might tell me, everything I needed to learn in life was learned during those times when I was heartbroken, defeated, wracked with grief, or mired in feelings that I was sure I would never be able to rise above. I have learned far more from rash decisions, fears, anxieties, and personal failures than from any self-help book, corporate training seminar, or university course. If I have any wisdom or worth as a human being today, it is because I have fallen flat on my face time and again, and learned the valuable lesson of how to laugh at myself.

If we are truthful with ourselves, we will realize that it is not comfort and harmony that allow us to reach our potential as human beings. We do not transcend our limitations when everything goes our way. The times that we grow and develop are the times when everything seems to be falling down around our heads. If our first love walks out of our life in the middle of a bleak February rainstorm, or we are fired from a job that we really needed, it seems as though nothing will ever again be right. It is only days, weeks, or years later that we begin to have an inkling of the deep, rich layers those minor or not-so-minor catastrophes have added to our beings.

Books, Music, and Film to Wake Up Your Muse and Help You Change the World**The Handsome Family - *Last Days of Wonder***

Release date: May 29, 2006

Label: Carrot Top Records, Chicago, IL

(Recorded in the Sparks's home studio in Albuquerque, New Mexico)

The first time I saw Brett and Rennie Sparks was in *Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus*. Rennie is strumming an autoharp and Brett is skritchng a washboard. They are standing on the front porch of a weathered shack and the shack is floating in a lake whose waters appear to be level with the porch. Two monitors face them and electrical cords snake around their feet. If the water were to lap a little too hard it would finish them

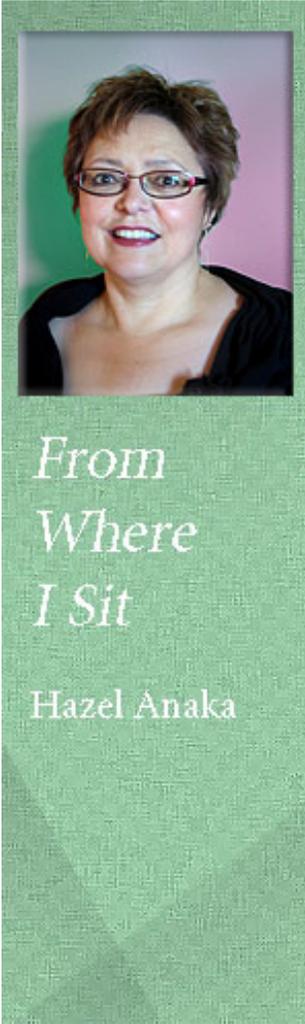
both off in an apt burst of white light.

By the time this movie was released, The Handsome Family had already put out several recordings that won ecstatic reviews and cultivated a small following. In the same year they sang "Famous Blue Raincoat" in *I'm Your Man*, the film tribute to Leonard Cohen. Cohen's influence shines from Rennie's lyrics. Nothing is stolen from Cohen (well, the line "my lady of the golf course" in "Flapping Your Broken Wings" may be a nod to "Suzanne"), but I'm guessing Cohen songs are among the influences which gave them that creative go-ahead which truly original artists pass on like a fertile seed in the depths of their own creations; seed that, if we're good, we too can pass on; seed that says, *Do what's in your head right now you fool and stop trying to be like your idols.*

I've heard couples like this in Appalachian camp meetings; the woman strumming an autoharp while singing a bold harmony to her husband's heartfelt nasal hymnifying. These lyrics are not quite what you'd hear in a church in the wildwood, yet they suit the music like butter on grits. It takes genius and imagination to take simple traditional forms and use them as vehicles for this kind of intellectual exploration.

You sense that behind these songs is a trauma so huge that all the little things have ceased to matter and all the great forgotten things are once again peeping at us from behind the mountains. Northrop Frye wrote that when you get deep enough into irony you see glimpses of ancient gods and goddesses and the beginnings of things. The Handsome Family's world is thick with primitive deity: Nikola Tesla as the embodiment of the marginalized beauty of the solitary mad genius; death as a hovering companion; the mad as prophets and apostles; and the presence of the one you love throbbing in all things, even dirty needles and abandoned cars. The sound is new while being at the same time a gesture back to a time of leafy groves and addled huntsmen, to that American twilight time between the chivalry of medieval England and the primeval terrors of an alien continent.

The creation of new modes of realism often begins with a Faulknerian weirdness that steps outside the expected. For those who wear reality like chains, this weirdness is liberating, and liberation is one condition of the creative act. Those who like their world structured and bland will no doubt feel disturbed by the Sparks's surreal view of life. As a friend once remarked of Jane Siberry, after you listen to that music it takes a while before you feel normal again. I think that's the point. The dissonant chord screeches toward resolution, the rain clears, and this too shall pass. Meanwhile, you are in this beautiful space. Revel in it.



New Car Smell

In the past few days I've entered into uncharted territory. Normally I would've had Roy at my side driving the process. Because of time constraints, it was more out of necessity than desire that I began researching a new vehicle purchase on my own.

I started with talking to our son Greg, who's a shrewd researcher. Knowing my needs and desires, he suggested some models to start with. He recommended a couple of websites (caranddriver.com and motortrend.com) that offer impartial comparisons of like vehicles. He offered us the use of a service he's subscribed to that reveals true dealer costs and lists dealerships that are likely to deal.

I started checking out newspaper ads and specialty publications like *Truck Trader*. I stopped glazing over when car commercials came on. I surfed manufacturers' websites. I read stories about cross-border vehicle purchases. I even left HGTV long enough to discover a television show called *New Drivers' Seat* and its accompanying web site.

I reread the chapter on auto loans in George Boelcke's book *It's Your Money*. George spent years as the finance guy at a dealership and knows the attendant pitfalls and myths. He urges buyers to be smart and know the bottom line, the actual dollars and cents expended over the long haul. I've asked preliminary questions at my credit union. I'm thinking about how much moola I could get my hands on for a down payment.

I really didn't know what to expect when it was time to start doing some test driving. Would I be treated as a second-class citizen because I'm missing a Y chromosome? Would I be talked down to or dismissed? At the two dealerships I visited—one urban, one rural; one very young salesman, one not—I was treated well. Maybe everyone has clued in to the fact women drive most sales of most products. Amen.

While nothing even close to a deal has been struck, I'm leaning toward the Honda CR-V EX in Tango Red Pearl. The test drive down the Yellowhead was fun, easy, natural. I liked the fact it's bigger than a car but smaller and more manoeuvrable than our truck. I could cram a chair or other prize acquisition from a flea market into the cargo area. I could rip down the road with the sunroof open. We don't need to worry about car seats or hockey bags anymore, so the size seems right for this stage of our lives. Honda's standard safety features give peace of mind. The website alg.com shows it holds its resale value far longer than domestic models.

Maybe the nicest surprise is the straightforwardness of the pricing. Back in the day, it was a farcical process of "make me an offer and I'll take it to my manager," and so the dance began.

I don't know when this deal may be done but I'm glad I've done the legwork. We're not rushing the process. We want to do it right. If we buy new, it will be my first new vehicle ever. There's nothing quite like that new car smell, from where I sit.

AUSU THIS MONTH



Coalition for Student Loan Fairness

AUSU is currently investigating the Coalition for Student Loan Fairness (CSLF) to determine if participation with this group would be advantageous to our members. The group, a grassroots movement of student loan borrowers from across Canada, supports fairness in the loans repayment process.

The CSLF notes that Canadian students are charged a rate of 2.5 to 4.5% above prime for loan repayment, resulting in interest charges that can amount to as much as 33% of the loan principal over the lifetime of the loan. Borrowers who utilize interest relief during low-income periods may pay considerably more. Given that student loans are offered as a public service and incentive to learning, the high profitability of these loans is of concern to AUSU.

CSLF also notes that students over the age of 30 are not included in government surveys of student loan experiences. This is of particular concern to AUSU as the majority of our membership is 30 years of age or older and we know from our experiences with our members that the current loans program does not adequately serve these members, nor does it serve members who wish to work to support themselves while studying part-time.

CSLF also asks that the government provide an Ombuds office to handle student loan complaints—a change that would help address many of the problems we hear about regarding lost forms, incorrect instructions, and confusing requirements. Additionally, CSLF supports providing for consolidation of multiple student loans into a single loan with a single payment, a change that many students have asked for.

Members are encouraged to check out the CSLF website at <http://www.studentloanfairness.ca/index.php>

AUSU Frappr—Show Us Where You Are

On June 20 AUSU launched a Frappr member map on the front page of AUSU.org. Just three days later, nearly 140 members have added their dot to our map, and a "picture" of the dispersion of our website visitors is taking shape. We're thrilled to see so many of you leaving your little mark on our site, and we love all the great pictures and shoutouts people have uploaded. Members who have left anonymous pins are encouraged to add their name (or alias, if you are shy) so we know you are all different people! If you haven't added your mark, drop by www.ausu.org—and don't forget to read the posting information if you are new to Frappr.

One thing I've noticed about carrying a camera is that it gives you—truly—a third eye. You cannot help but see, see more, look more closely, and find subjects in things you might otherwise pass by. This week, then, are a couple of collections of photographically related links.

People - A selection of sites of photographers and photographic collectives, whose subject matter ranges from the surreal to the simplistic, from the portrait to the peculiar. Some content may not be suitable for everyone. Please surf with caution.

Canada Photo Series - <http://www.canadaphotoseries.com/>

Alec Soth - <http://www.alecsoth.com/>

Michael Wolf - <http://www.photomichaelwolf.com/intro/index.html>

No Barriers Photography - <http://www.nobarriersphotography.com/>

Luke Stephenson - <http://www.lukestephenson.com/>

Things - What to do with the photographs after you've taken them? Why not consider some of the options below.

Camera Toss (The Blog) - <http://cameratoss.blogspot.com/>

If you toss it away, you never know what it might come back with.

Photo.net - <http://photo.net/>

Don't keep those snaps to yourself; share them with the world!

Digital Image Cafe - <http://www.digitalimagecafe.com/>

Camera reviews, artistic chat, forums, contests, and more, all combine in this one-stop photographers' shop.

Digital Camera Reviews and News - <http://www.dpreview.com/>

Want a little more info on a camera, its capabilities, or something else relating to the digital photographic arts? This is one place to start searching for your answers.

PDN Online - <http://www.pdnonline.com/pdn/index.jsp>

"Award-winning monthly magazine for the professional photographer, has been covering the professional photographic industry for over two decades. Every month, PDN delivers unbiased news and analysis, interviews, and portfolios of the latest photographic work." (PDN Online)

MOO - <http://www.moo.com/>

Make your own business cards, photo cards, or mini cards, from your own photographs or choose from a pool provided on the site. This site integrates with Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>), LiveJournal (<http://www.livejournal.com>), Vox (<http://www.vox.com>), Second Life (<http://www.secondlife.com>), and many more.

EDUCATION NEWS

Athabasca University to offer first DE Doctoral program

ATHABASCA (The Insider) - Athabasca University has received approval from the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology to offer its first doctoral program, a Doctor of Education (EdD) in distance education. The program, the first of its kind in North America, will admit its first students in August 2008.



Marguerite Koole of the Centre for Distance Education is busy keeping track of inquiries about the new EdD program.

"Athabasca University has established itself as a world leader in providing high-quality distance education, and it is fitting that AU's first doctorate reflects our area of expertise," Athabasca University president Dr. Frits Pannekoek said. "We are very excited about this new development for our university as it paves the way for other doctorates the university is proposing."

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"This program will enable students and faculty to form an online research community studying all aspects of learning at a distance," Dr. Pannekoek said. "The research is useful in many contexts as more and more aspects of online education are adopted by universities and by businesses for professional development."

The new doctoral program will admit students annually, beginning with 12 for the inaugural year. Online applications will be accepted by the Centre for Distance Education this fall, and admission decisions will be made by February 15, 2008. Interest in the program is high. To date, the Centre for Distance Education has received more than 300 inquiries from students across Canada as well as from the United States, New Zealand, Germany, Mauritius, Namibia and Uganda.

Prior to approval from the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, the new EdD program underwent a rigorous review by the Campus Alberta Quality Council, which considers the readiness of institutions to deliver and sustain high quality degree programs. To meet this goal, all degree programs recommended by the council must offer an education of sufficient breadth and rigour to meet national and international program standards at recognized post-secondary institutions.

classifieds

Classifieds are free for AU students! Contact voice@ausu.org for more information.

THE VOICE

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