

THE

VOICE

MAGAZINE

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Shatter the Quiet

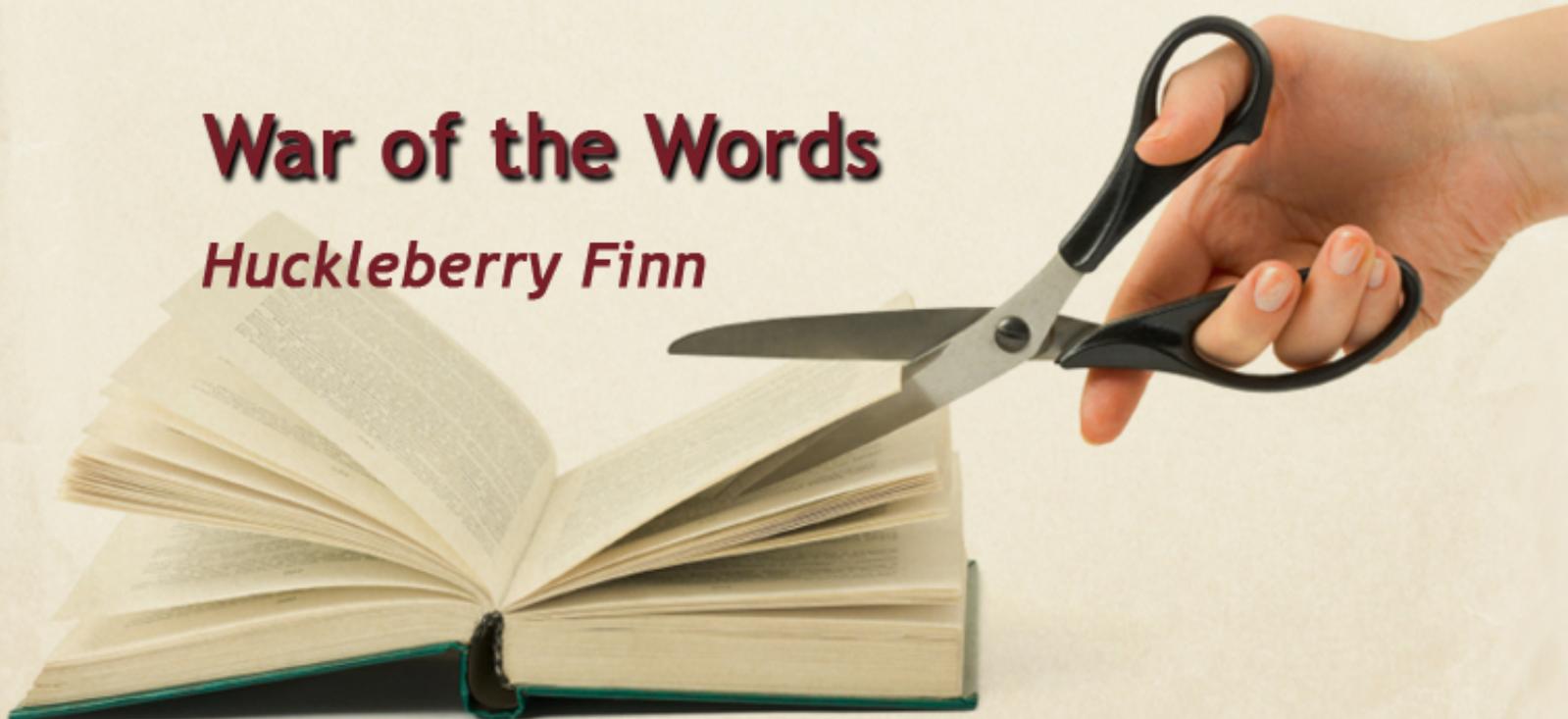
Night in Tunisia

Don't Look Ahead

The un-resolution

War of the Words

Huckleberry Finn



Plus: Gregor's Bed, Cruiscin Lan, and much more . . .

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We love to hear from you! Send your questions and comments to voice@voicemagazine.org, and please indicate if we may publish your letter.



EDITORIAL

Christina M. Frey

**Don't Look Up**

So, have you broken them yet?

I'm not talking about the ugly vases gifted to you by your easily-offended mother-in-law, but points to you if you managed to pull it off (talk about a great start to the year!).

I'm talking about the much-hyped, much-desired, and frequently much-maligned New Year's resolutions.

Equal parts serious, self-building material and the consistent butt of comedians' banter, New Year's resolutions have made their place in pop culture and in the human psyche. But lately they've been getting a new twist appropriate to our been-there-done-that world.

The trend: to break out of the rut. Forget losing weight—how about learning to scuba dive? And forcing yourself to organize your life minute-by-minute is old news. This year, more and more people are attempting year-long projects to do something innovative, imaginative, or just plain cool, every day of the year.

It's been showing up in blogs, photostreams, magazines, movies (*Julie & Julia*, anyone?), and books. I'm currently reading about Australian film critic Michael Adams' entertaining (and mind-boggling) day-by-day search for the "worst movie ever made." And last month, I laughed through A.J. Jacobs' memories of his quest to read straight through all the volumes of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

It makes me want to break out of the bonds of my annual, but boring, "Be-more-organized-and-keep-the-house-cleaner-and-stop-fighting-with-my-kid" set of resolutions. How exciting would my life be if I were to latch on to some cool idea and create an innovative year-long focus?

And then it hit me. Much of the excitement of these projects isn't the project itself, or even, to some extent, the lessons learned along the way. It was the interactions among A.J. Jacobs' family members that made his quest memorable. It was the integration of Julie's own life with her cooking quest that made the film *Julie & Julia* a story.

Because the ordinary *is* exciting, interesting, intriguing. Ironically, it's those big projects of ours that often get in the way.

Goals are good. Whether it's finishing a degree (or that dreaded course assignment), earning that promotion, or developing that relationship, goals give us something to strive toward. We can look ahead, staying motivated, on track, and focused.

But often, and particularly at the beginning of the year, we get so bogged down in the enormity of our vision for success that we fail to enjoy the life that unfolds along the way to that destination.

If life's a journey—the great road trip—and those goals are stops along the way, then by ignoring the scenery in our desperate attempts to reach the next stop, we're missing out on a lot of living.

Even the most seemingly boring surroundings can be woven into the most fascinating stories. The everyday has a charm that we often ignore in our valiant efforts to look ahead.

So where do we want to be next January, when we'll be looking back on 2011 and preparing to embrace 2012? Let's hope that we'll be able to look back and say we granted ourselves the opportunity to savour the unique, crazy, boring, exhilarating, joyful, and pain-filled moments that made up 2011. Let's be able to say that 2011 was a success not because of what we did, but because of how we did it.

After all, it's joy along the journey, not the destination itself, that makes any road trip worthwhile.



DID YOU KNOW?



Field Study Opportunity

Interested in ethno-cultural studies or biodiversity? Appreciate humanitarian efforts? Enjoy travelling? How about experiencing all three—and earning university credit?

This May, AU students have the opportunity to participate in a “unique field study opportunity” in Borneo. In addition to receiving field lectures, students will either “participate in an ethno-ecological study with the Wehea Dayak” people while helping with “community development projects,” or “join a scientific team conducting the first comprehensive biodiversity study of the Wehea Forest.”

Participants can earn up to eight university credits for the field study.

The trip, which is sponsored by Ethical Expeditions, will cost US \$5,500, which includes “university credit, all meals, accommodation, internal travel and educational materials.” Airfare to Balikpapan, Indonesian Borneo, is the student's responsibility, as are other travel-related expenses.

Applicants should be “passionate about preserving biological and cultural diversity” and be “interested in the complex issues facing the island of Borneo.” There is space for up to 12 students to join the study.

For more information, contact AU anthropology tutor [Janelle Baker](#) or visit the Ethical Expeditions [website](#).



Night in Tunisia: The Inevitable Eruption of a Long-standing Unrest, Part I

“Some friends had invited me to a small party at their house. My host told me a story that his gardener had told him a few days ago. I asked to speak to the gardener, who explained that he was from a village in the Northwest of Tunisia. It had snowed there; the people needed aid from the government and the authorities had promised to provide the aid. On the day that the aid was provided, the TV was there to record and preserve this historic moment. But according to my witness, people were just handed some old wool blankets and some food, and as soon as the TV journalists left, the authorities took the items back.

I can't say if this is typical, but it is not the first

time that I have heard stories like this.”

Leena Ben Mhenni, [blogger](#) and assistant professor of linguistics at the University of Tunis, in an interview with Wanda Waterman St. Louis

Sidi Bouzid is an enchanting coastal village on the shores of the Bay of Tunis. Like many villages in northwestern Tunisia (unlike the more affluent towns of the northeast), the village is plagued by poverty due to high unemployment and a scarcity of resources.

The cluster of blue and white-painted houses is dominated by the magnificent home of Sakhr El Materi, the son-in-law of Tunisia's president, Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali. The mansion, as well as the lifestyle of its inhabitants, has drawn the ire of many Tunisians for its conspicuous opulence in a country where basic needs are often unmet and youth unemployment is around 30 per cent.

It was in this village that in early December 2010, an unemployed 20-something university graduate named Mohamed Bouazizi was eking out a meagre living with a fruit and vegetable stand. The police, alleging that the stand was illegal, confiscated the produce (by some reports not once but three times). Being his family's sole means of support yet unable to find work, the young man was overwhelmed with discouragement. He finally attempted suicide by dousing himself with gasoline and setting himself alight outside the police station, later dying from his burns.

News of the self-immolation and its motive spread quickly. Bouazizi became a martyr, his act the catalyst for a series of protests from various sectors of the population, including students, trade unionists, and lawyers, beginning on December 17. Something in the tragic desperation of Bouazizi's plight had resonated with ordinary people and their advocates, symbolizing their own hopelessness, pent-up rage, and longing to be heard and taken seriously.

By January 3, the day when school students would return from their holidays, a national strike had been launched. More than eight Tunisian government websites had been sabotaged by hackers as an expression of solidarity with the protesters.

Claiming responsibility for the cyber attack is the international group Anonymous, which metes out punitive hacking measures against businesses and regimes seen to be antagonistic to WikiLeaks. Anonymous has made a special point of denouncing the Ben Ali administration's silencing of free speech on the Internet.

By January 10, 20 protesters had allegedly died in violent confrontations at the hands of the police, and many police had been injured.

Tunisia is a country long seen as one of the more stable in the region; it has among the highest literacy rates in the Arab world and an excellent record of women's rights, and is relatively affluent. But the country does not allow human rights groups to enter and monitor its activities, and has in the last decade imprisoned more journalists than any other Arab country. A current media blackout prevents journalists from interviewing Tunisians in many areas.

In an effort to help maintain stability, the United States continues to offer the country its financial and military support, and the EU is negotiating "advanced partner status" for Tunisia.

(This three-part series will be continued next week.)



NOTICE: AUSU GENERAL MEETING

AUSU will hold its annual general meeting on Wednesday, February 2, 2011, at 2:30 pm MST (4:30 pm EST). The meeting will be held via teleconference; all currently active students may attend. Students living outside Canada may also dial in to the teleconference, but please inform AUSU in advance if you'll be calling from an international location. For further information or to reserve a line, please contact AUSU at ausu@ausu.org.

Green Light

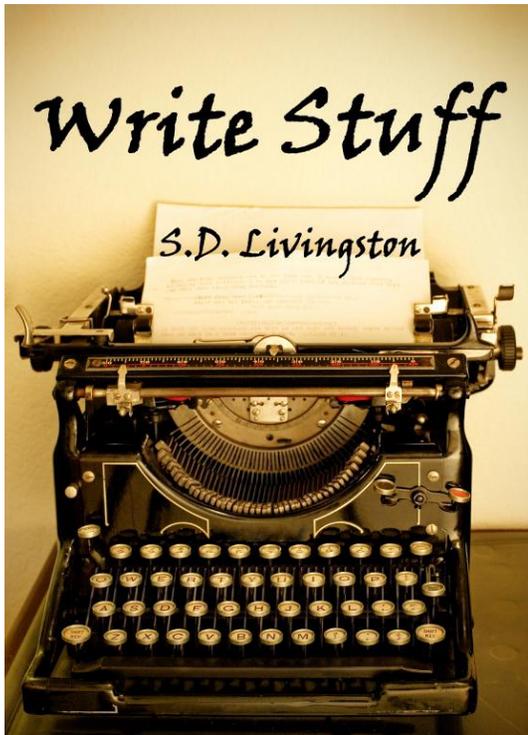
News, Tips, and Tricks for a Healthy Planet



Biodiesels—alternative fuels made from plant-based sources like soybeans—have yet to really take off in popularity or use. Part of the difficulty is that, despite conflicting studies, they're believed to contaminate regular diesel fuels, and thus can't share containers or pipelines with petroleum-based fuels.

Enter a newcomer in the alternative fuel field: renewable diesels. The fuel is made from refined animal fat, lard, and tallow—all by-products of the meat processing world (in fact, the technology is being in part pioneered by meat giant Tyson Foods). Renewable diesels don't give off benzene, which is thought to be carcinogenic, and they also generate far lower levels of other chemical emissions.

Best of all, because of the way renewable diesels are refined, they can be mixed with traditional petroleum-based diesels. To learn more and discover the challenges facing this fuel source, read the *National Geographic Daily News* site's [commentary](#).



Whitewash

It's no surprise that the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum contains offensive literary material. On their [website](#), along with the propaganda posters, there are even anti-Semitic schoolbooks and colouring books. These words, preserved in their original form, serve as unflinching reminders of the past, and to sanitize them for modern sensibilities would diminish that impact. Sadly, a US publisher plans to do just that for another dark chapter in history, by removing the racist language in *Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

In February, NewSouth Books in Alabama will publish a combined volume of those Mark Twain novels, only with a revisionist twist. The word "nigger" will be replaced by "slave," while "Injun" will become "Indian."

The logic, according to Twain scholar Alan Gribben, is that modern readers may be so sensitive about the use of the "N-word" that they avoid the books altogether. Some students may

not get the chance to read the original versions even if they want to: Twain's classics are among the most challenged books ever. As Gribben writes in the introduction to the new edition, "even at the level of college and graduate school, students are capable of resenting textual encounters with this racial appellative."

And that's exactly the point, the crucial reason why the racist language should be left intact. Because it *should* offend us. Students should resent it. To dull its sting means that we risk forgetting its danger.

That's not to say that literature needs to shock in order to convey a powerful message. In John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, the most hurtful thing George calls Lennie is "crazy." And Charles Dickens often unleashed his sharp social criticism through humour.

Nor does it mean that every piece of literature that offends current attitudes is a rebuke against past norms. It's impossible (and risky) to presume authors' motives, especially if they lived in a time vastly different from our own. When Othello strikes Desdemona and later kills her, or Iago murders his own wife, was Shakespeare pointing out the evils of domestic violence? Not likely, but we'll never know for sure. Yet we don't delete those scenes or change the language. We study them, perform them, and compare them to our own society and language.

So it should be with Twain's words, offensive as we find them today. He lived at a time when slavery and emancipation were violently divisive issues, and he started writing *Huckleberry Finn* in 1876, just 11 years after the Civil War ended and the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution freed all remaining slaves in the US.



Twain's lone voice does not define those times, any more than the writings of Frederick Douglass or Harriet Beecher Stowe do. Any more than the author of an anti-Semitic colouring book speaks for the totality of Nazi-era Germany. But to erase their words is to erase some part of their experience; to deny a part of history as it actually happened to or influenced them. Just as those same events affected millions of others whose voices will never be heard.

And that's far more offensive than the uncensored words of Tom and Huck could ever be.

CLICK OF THE WRIST: A Year-long Adventure

Classic New Year's resolutions are so 2010. Consider making 2011 a year to remember by reaching out to the unusual or the fantastic for ideas. A popular trend is to set out to do a particular thing every day—or week—for a year, and write about it. Here are a few adventures to get you started.

All Dressed Up

Nothing to wear today? No problem for this fashionista. Sick of the wastefulness of the constant buy-and-buy-more clothes shopping mentality, the New Yorker came up with her unique Uniform Project: she wore the same LBD for 365 days straight, accessorized with donated items. At the same time, she raised over \$100,000 for underprivileged schoolchildren in India. The video montage of her outfit choices is simply inspirational (stills of the outfits can be found on her [blog](#)).

Just Lunch

It's lunchtime at the school cafeteria—what's on the menu? Hopefully not the “typical” fare discovered by one school employee, who just wrapped up her mission to eat school lunches each school day of the year. This article/interview from TODAYshow.com is accompanied by several stomach-turning photos and a link to her blog, where her thoughts on eating and stories of her fellow (younger) cafeteria comrades are sure to satisfy.

Toy Story

Cue the scrolling words. It's a time of unrest in the galaxy, and Stormtroopers are meeting the real world—with sometimes disastrous results. This man's photo project of capturing his action figures in a series of bizarre backgrounds and story poses makes an intriguing and entertaining viewing. You can see the whole collection on his Flickr site.

Dinner and a Movie

Moviegoers may already be aware that Julie, heroine of the 2009 film *Julie & Julia*, spends a year cooking her way through Julia Childs' *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. Inspired by the film—or in mockery of it, I'm not quite sure which—one blogger has taken on the unimaginable project of watching the film every day for a year. His commentary is as hilariously absurd as his quest.





Intriguing New Trends in Music

Doctor Sparkles: *Scary Country* (Independent 2010).

The Beast of the New World Order

*“If you were the ruler of everyone,
At least from a fool’s point of view,
Given your gravities and your depravities,
What would you measure up to?”*

Doctor Sparkles, “If You Were the Ruler of Everyone”

On a first listen to the beginning of this album, you immediately think, *Egad, this is so cabaret!* and then you remember: Doctor Sparkles IS cabaret.

Thus this CD recalls the best (and the worst) of all the musical cabaret you’ve ever heard, from radio and movie archives to the very smuggest political party gatherings.

Except you won’t find Doctor Sparkles in either. He does stay true to the genre (ingeniously, painfully), including self-conscious and contrived lyrics, a pompous tone, potty humor, and incorrect verbiage.

But is this a satire of the genre? Western musical genres have become so ridiculous lately that I confess I’ve often mistaken serious work for over-the-top lampoon. I don’t think it matters here, because Doctor Sparkles never takes himself seriously.

In his words, “To the extent that I am centred and present to the God-in-my-innermost-being, I am by definition ‘light-hearted’ and haven’t the slightest use for gravity. In fact, I consider seriousness a form of suffering in that its subject eclipses the Love residing in the heart, and if Love could be described as my religion, then being serious about anything amounts to worshipping a false idol.”

His choice of cabaret as the soapbox for his rucksack full of subversive ideals and arch observations is a sign that, yes, we are living in a culture in flux, a culture in decline, a culture ripe for overturning.

Doctor Sparkles, a.k.a. Kevin Patrick Baiko, came to my attention a couple of years back when I heard a track called “Sail Away,” a droll yet poignant castigation of mindless living. In our 2008 [interview](#), he recounted that he’d grown up in a house where a big band had kept up regular rehearsals and where his mother taught banjo and voice.



Here, once again, the music is lovely, of course—and the recording quality is superb, the arrangements are delightful, and Sparkles’ voice is as smooth and rich as cream cheese. His masterful ukulele playing is adapted to multiple styles and shines in them all.

Yes, this is cabaret, and as such it incorporates (absorbs?) many other genres, offering an interesting cross-section of American folk music. High points include “Playing Music to the End of Time,” a cheery zydeco number; “Military Town Blues,” a burnin’ hippie blues anthem; “Without Freedom,” a Ventures-like rockabilly soundtrack; and “Something Pretty,” a mockery of consumerist culture.

Doctor Sparkles is that annoying little brother who tries so hard to get everyone’s attention with his overly dramatic play-acting that it can take a while to realize that he really does have something to say that’s worth hearing. After all, it’s always the youngest child (or the youngest at heart) who knows what’s really going on.

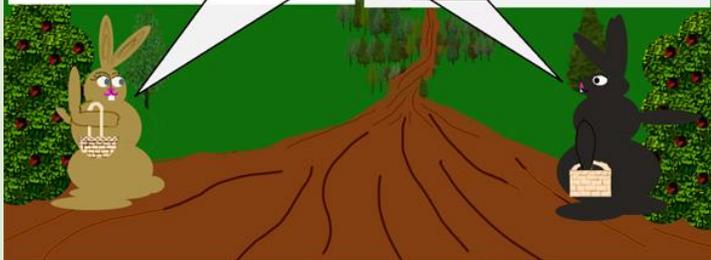
CHRONICLES OF CRUISCIN LAN

Wanda Waterman St. Louis

Neighbours been tellin' Bud McCullough he gut no bizness bringin' in no Ay-rab mare fer breedin'.

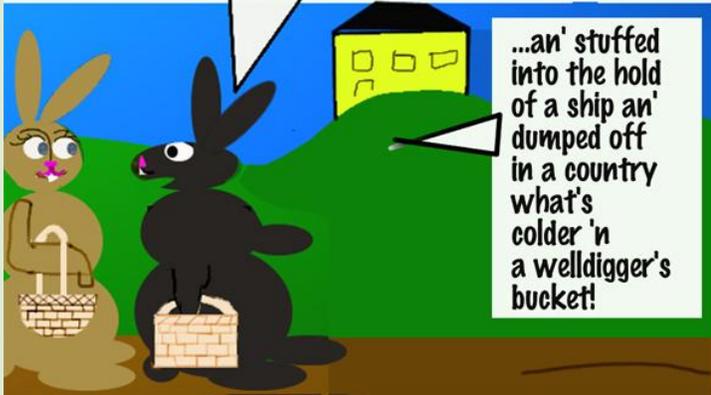
Just met that mare the other day. She's right nice.

They say he oughta be goin' local an' usin' them there Newfoundland ponies.



It ain't like she ASKED to be hauled off from 'er home turf...

...an' stuffed into the hold of a ship an' dumped off in a country what's colder 'n a welldigger's bucket!



An' how would YOU know?!

Oh. Yeah. Right.



INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: Surfin' Canada

How much time do you spend online? More than your friends? More than your neighbours? Don't be afraid to admit it; high Internet use has become part of the Canadian identity.

As *The Globe and Mail* [reports](#), no-one “spends more time online than Canadians,” including our neighbours to the south.

The numbers, collected from various sources (including Statistics Canada and the CRTC), show that on average, Canadians “spent 42 hours a month surfing” the Internet last year. Americans? Just 30 hours a month. And Canadians spend “up to 50 per cent more time online” than people in the UK or Australia.

In fact, Canadians “also dominate use of certain sites . . . rank[ing] first for frequency of use in online banking, Wikipedia and YouTube.”

Researchers are puzzled over the large gaps, pointing to causes as diverse as isolated geographic conditions, lower personal expenditure on entertainment (in particular as compared to Americans), and high levels of “digital literacy.”

But maybe it comes down to something much simpler: long, cold winters. As Sidney Eve Matrix, a communications professor at Queen's University, told reporters, “Maybe we stay inside and get bored. I know I'd rather sit around and connect with my friends on Facebook than drive in extreme weather [to see them.]”

Around the World: A Time to Cry

Dealing with a bully or attacker? Fending off unwanted advances? Don't listen to Fergie—big girls (and boys) *do* cry, and what's often frowned on as childish and “weak” might actually be nature's way of protecting us from aggression, whether sexual or otherwise.

As the *National Geographic's* Daily News Site [reports](#), new neurobiological research has discovered that when women cry, men's sex drive drops. The double-blind study showed lower levels of sexual arousal as well as “less activity in parts of the brain linked to sexual excitement.”

But study author Noam Sobel, a neurobiologist at Israel's Weizmann Institute of Science, believes that the study's results have a broader application than just to the field of human sexuality. For example, “the men's lack of sex drive [could be] just a side effect of the drop in testosterone”—which would also cause lower levels of aggression.

In the natural world, “the ability to control aggression in another animal can have major value,” particularly against a dominating species or predator. In fact, Sobel believes that the effects of human tears are connected to dominance rather than gender and sexuality: “less dominant people may be sending aggression-reducing messages to stronger individuals via their tears.”

He hopes to reproduce the study using male tears to compare the results.

AUSU UPDATE



Convocation 2010

AUSU wishes to congratulate this year's graduates, whether attending Convocation in person or by distance. We wish you the best of luck in your future pursuits. You are an inspiration to all AU students!

AUSU Executive Election

AUSU has recently held its internal election for the Executive. We wish to congratulate Barbara Rielly (President), Bethany Tynes (Vice President External and Student Affairs) and Sarah Kertcher (Vice President Finance and Administration) on their election and thank those that ran for their willingness to serve.

Internal elections are being held to determine committee membership and we expect that all will be in place shortly. Our new Council is taking its bearings and has already begun to set the direction for this term.

Student Issues

AUSU recently completed a compilation of reported student issues covering a two year period; all issues were recorded in such a way as to ensure that student information remains protected and private. This effort confirmed what we long suspected; that tutor problems were the single biggest issue faced by our students (56 of 120 complaints).

Outdated course materials and errors in texts continue to be reported as well as were exam issues, slowness of the transfer process, and the scantiness of information in School of Business FAQs. Over that two year period there was a decrease in the number of complaints about student financing, exam request problems, difficulty registering in more than six courses, and materials shortages for courses. Kudos to AU for improving in those areas. Now if we could only get the Tutors' Union to the table . . .

New 2010 AUSU Handbook/Planners – Arrived!

Finally! People have already started receiving the new planners in the mail, and we're currently shipping them out as fast as the orders come in. Full of useful information about AUSU, writing styles, course grading, great finds online for your studies that you may not have known about, as well as having places to write down your phone numbers, keep track of your assignments, and, oh yeah, a year's worth of calendar to plan out your schedule too. We'll give one free to each AUSU member just for the asking.

Remember, though, we only print a limited number of these each year, so when they're gone, they're gone.

Let 'em Know who Represents for You!

AUSU logo mugs, hoodies, USB keys, and much more are all available for sale from our office. Also, used locks can be purchased at half price! Check out our merchandise catalog on our front page. You should

check out our hoodies in particular—made in Canada and 100% bamboo, we're offering them for just barely over our cost, and they're both durable and comfortable.

And if you have new little ones in your family, or know somebody who does, check out our baby onesies. Made by American Apparel, these onesies are high quality and let folks know your kids are growing up to great things as a "Future Graduate of Athabasca U"

AUSU Scheduling Meeting with Tutors' Union – Not really an Update

Some things resist change. We're still waiting for a response from the Tutor's Union as to when we might be able to meet with them to discuss ways that AUSU and the Tutor's Union can work together to ensure that students are getting the contact they need. Unfortunately, they haven't yet replied, so we're stepping up our campaign to get in touch with them. If you want to help, the next time you're talking to your tutor, ask them if they know when the Tutor's Union will meet with AUSU so that the groups can work together on common issues.

Our statistics we've been collecting from the forums and your calls show that issues with tutors - specifically the amount of time taken for marking assignments and exams are your number one concern. Help us help you.

SmartDraw Program Renewal

Some of you who took advantage of our program to provide SmartDraw software to members have been getting notifications that your software license will soon be expiring. Fortunately, AUSU will be continuing this program, so if you haven't already, go to the AUSU home page to download the newest version.

SmartDraw allows you to create a wide range of graphics for your assignments and submit them electronically in a Word file. You can also place your graphics in Excel or PowerPoint files, or export them as TIF, GIF, or JPEG files to make a web graphic or even a logo. Just a few of the graphics you can make include Venn diagrams, genetics charts, graphs, organizational and flow charts, and Gantt charts.

For any course that requires charts that cannot be easily created in Word or Excel, this should be a real time saver and make it easier to submit all portions of an assignment by email.

Remember, though, that you should always check with your tutor to find out if there is a specific format he or she prefers. Your tutor does not have to have SmartDraw to view these graphics, however. Installations under this program are good for one year. The package includes both the Standard and Health Care editions of SmartDraw.

AUSU
Representing AU
Undergrads

Student Gear

2009 merchandise

The catalog features six items of merchandise:

- AUSU calendar
- Voice water bottle
- Colorful balloons
- Red hoodie
- AUSU logo graphic
- Purple t-shirt with "Future Graduate of Athabasca U" text

Clothing
Technology
Fun Items
Home Decor

Fostering the Student Community
AUSU and Voice gear is intended to support your studies and help you feel like part of the AU student community. Suggestions for new items are welcome. Contact our office with any questions.

CLASSIFIEDS

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

THE VOICE

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