

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE
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Books Behind Bars

Prison libraries

No Comment

Trolling the web

Copycat

Pursuit of the real

*Plus:
In Conversation with
From Where I Sit
and much more!*



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*The Voice
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www.voicemagazine.org

500 Energy Square
10109 – 106 ST NW
Edmonton AB
T5J 3L7

800.788.9041 ext. 2905

Email
voice@voicemagazine.org

Publisher

AU Students' Union

Editor-In-Chief

Tamra Ross

Managing Editor

Christina M. Frey

Regular Contributors

Hazel Anaka
Katie D'Souza
S.D. Livingston
Wanda Waterman

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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

No Comment



Want some quick entertainment? Pull up any news story online and take a peek at the comments. The more controversial the story, the crazier the things that get posted. But it's not all harmless fun; hiding behind a veil of anonymity, posters can get rude, abrasive, and downright offensive and threatening quite quickly. Even good-news pieces aren't immune.

So is the solution to do what an increasing number of media sources are suggesting: remove the comments box entirely?

The information model has greatly changed since the early days of newspaper reporting. First, with higher levels of literacy and more widespread public access to news sources than ever before, the flow of information is no longer limited to the wealthy and educated few. The proliferation of a sense of leisure and the popularity of up-to-the-minute technology have only increased the opportunities to pursue information. That's a good thing.

But there's more. Because so much of our interaction has been globalized thanks to social media, we no longer gather at coffeehouses or in public squares to chat about the paper's big stories. Because so many of us retrieve our news online, it makes sense that we hash out our own thoughts, beliefs, and impressions using the same platform.

It's perhaps even necessary that we do so. After all, it's community engagement with media that keeps journalists accountable to the public and allows us to keep an active role in information gatekeeping. Comment boxes, in theory, keep that communication flowing.

But sometimes we get angry, we fight, and things get ugly. It's like a big, rowdy bar where anything goes; civil people can calmly discuss matters over a few beers, while at another table tempers get high and punches are thrown. A weird, turbulent, and ultimately unstable community, to be sure. But isn't that sense of community worth preserving anyways?

Not according to some.

How good exactly *is* that community? That's what media experts are starting to ask. This article suggests that the reality doesn't live up to the dream: "people who actually read comments are a small fraction of one percent of their entire readership," the author writes. As the article suggests, from a business perspective it's just not worth spending the money to maintain comment boards.

Another journalist claims that banning comments would "[stop] one in a hundred people [from] creating an aura of authentic grassroots reaction." Doesn't sound like too much of a problem, does it?

Yet in a real-life situation, what percentage of people will, as the article puts it, “[create] an aura of authentic grassroots reaction”? I’m guessing it might be similarly low.

So what’s the solution?

Requiring real names would lower, though probably not remove entirely, the incidence of hateful or threatening comments. It might cause more commenters to think before they hit “post.” And there are new developments that seem intriguing. Linking up news media consumption with social media—like the *Washington Post*’s Social Reader that’s connected to Facebook accounts—keeps would-be commenters accountable to their own social circle directly as well as to the world at large, yet still preserves that opportunity to engage writers and journalists.

This kind of self-censoring might not solve all the web’s social problems, but it’s a step in the right direction.

CHRONICLES OF CRUISCIN LAN

Wanda Waterman



IN CONVERSATION WITH . . .

Wanda Waterman



Lel Wa Ain, Part II

Recently, Nour Eldin Nageh Ali, composer and vocalist for the Lel Wa Ain band in Cairo, took the time to talk with Wanda Waterman about his personal musical development, the band, and the effect of the 2011 revolution on the Egyptian music industry. See the first part of this article [here](#).

Prior to the “Day of Rage,” Nour had fought long and hard to make a niche for himself in the commercial recording industry, composing songs for big music studios. But when one studio wouldn’t pay him for some of his material that they’d recorded, it left a bad taste in his mouth. He began moving in a new direction.

In the beginning it wasn’t easy to persuade good musicians to take a big risk and strike out on their own. “My start was actually in 2008,” remembers Nour. “I started my band with an *oud* player and drums. I tried to recruit other musicians, but everyone wanted a big record contract. I waited for

around three years to make the band I have now. Like the other independent bands, we had to build a base of supporters for our music.”

Nour’s disappointment with the commercial music world paved the way for his rapid acceptance of the kinds of new music business models that are now springing up all over the world. Just as in North American folk music circles we see ingenious ideas being implemented to replace the traditional recording contract, so also the Egyptian musical world is learning to find ways to support alternative music by means of audience support. This allows the proceeds of CD and ticket sales to remain largely within the pockets of the musicians themselves.

But in order to make this work, you need to have a fan base.

The 2011 political revolution in Egypt had significant cultural repercussions. There had long existed an underground music scene in Egypt, but its lack of widespread support kept it from thriving or having any marked influence on the culture at large.

“Music means to me eternal life, freedom, the extreme expression. I’ll die without music. Music kills the barriers and lifts the soul to a very, very high degree.”

Cairo musician Ousso

“I don’t think Egyptian music changed in response to the revolution,” Nour says, “but more ordinary people started listening to underground music.”

Lel Wa Ain, like other independent musicians and groups that had long accepted anonymity as their lot and who’d grown accustomed to struggle and poverty, now found themselves the happy recipients of media coverage and an upsurge of gig requests. A fan base grew quickly from among the native Egyptians and the foreigners who lived among them. But the infrastructure for the growth of this sector of the music industry was not there, and without it independent music remained clandestine.

Conventional models of music creation and promotion are designed to make more money for the upper turrets of the music industry than for musicians, supporting just enough superstars to make a music career seem so attractive to up-and-coming musicians and composers that they’re willing to give over too much money and control to the enterprise. But in Cairo, several independent entertainers decided to extend their maverick approach from making music to making a living.

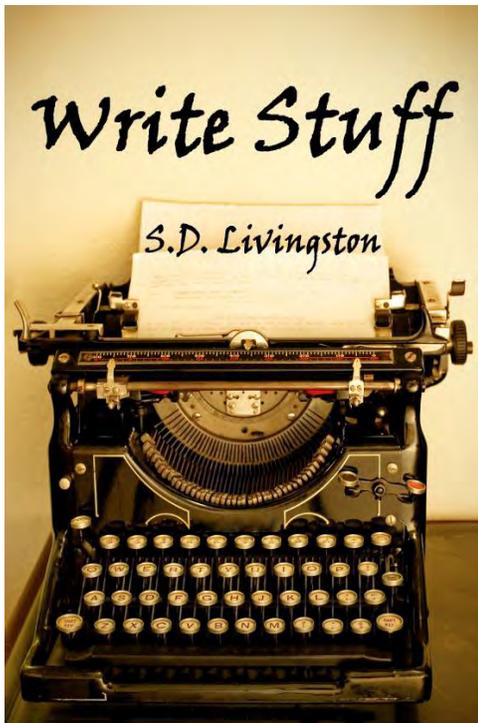
“There’s a great guitar player in Cairo now,” says Nour, “called Ousso. He has a diploma in guitar from America and he plays in Eftekasat, the most incredible jazz band in Cairo. Ousso had a unique idea that ended up being good for all of us. His idea was to have an underground concert. He came up with a really good business model to make this happen. It was called the S.O.S. Music Festival. Because of it, the underground bands in Cairo got more famous. The musician takes 50 per cent of the money.”

“When the revolution came it actually gave us more opportunities, even television exposure. It was an amazing experience for me, the first time I sang before millions of viewers—something I had only dreamed of.”



CONVOCATION 2012

The Voice Magazine would like to extend its congratulations to all 2012 graduates! What has your educational journey meant to you? What are your thoughts as you move on to the next phase of your life? Let us know, and you could be featured in our upcoming Convocation coverage!



Books Behind Bars

“Man’s mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions.” Those words come from Oliver Wendell Holmes, who retired from the Supreme Court of the United States at the age of 90. Not surprisingly, the inmates who form such a large part of that court system are often those who could most benefit from new ideas, ideas that can change lives for the better. So why is it still so difficult to supply them with the books that can offer them those ideas?

It’s not a huge leap to see the connection between education and crime. In a 2003 study, researchers from the University of Western Ontario and UCLA reported that “schooling significantly reduces the probability of incarceration.” They also found that differences “in educational attainment between black and white men” could explain a full 23 per cent of the gap in black/white male incarceration rates.

Not only is education a benefit to those who avoid jail and their victims, it holds financial benefits for society at large. Another study, reported in *The Vancouver Sun*, notes the impact that education has on property crimes in Canada, such as robbery, burglary, and fraud.

When prison sentences were increased by ten per cent, the property-crime rate dropped by five per cent. But those longer sentences cost taxpayers an extra \$20,000 to \$30,000 each year per inmate. If “comparable tax revenues” were instead used in programs that increase high school graduation rates, crime rates would drop by about nine per cent—nearly double the improvement.

So what, exactly, is the state of prison libraries today? Well, they’re hardly the stuff of a Dickensian debtors’ prison, yet there’s clearly a need for more of those life-changing books and their ideas.

In 2003, researchers conducted a thorough nationwide survey of Canadian prison libraries. The survey went out to prisons at all levels, from minimum to maximum security, and had a response rate of 73 per cent. The report makes interesting reading, and there are both positive and negative findings. However, as the authors write in their conclusion, this comment from one prison staff member sums up the feelings of many others: “There is no other environment where the need is greater and the commitment less.”

“[This] comment from one prison staff member sums up the feelings of many others: ‘There is no other environment where the need is greater and the commitment less.’”

And that need is tied firmly to those numbers on crime and education.

As the survey notes, “approximately 65 per cent of ‘new’ offenders test at a completion level lower than Grade 8 in mathematics and language skills and 82 per cent test lower than Grade 10.”

It might seem like a situation that's doomed to get worse, especially in the face of closures and cutbacks in many public library systems. But that's where Books to Prisoners comes in.

Books to Prisoners is actually an umbrella term for several programs that get reading material into inmates' hands. Wikipedia has a [list](#) of those programs across both Canada and the US, and the oldest of them is the Prison Book Program, started in Massachusetts in 1972.

Pam Boiros, a long-time volunteer with the program, recently [told](#) the *Boston Globe* that the books most requested by prisoners were a surprisingly basic item: dictionaries. She also shared a thank-you letter from an inmate whose cycle of depression, drugs, and prison had left him desperate enough to consider suicide—until he received a copy of *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

So the next time you're thinking about pruning those bookshelves, remember that list of book programs—and the minds that could be stretched by the ideas in the pages you may no longer need.

S.D. Livingston is the author of several books, including the new suspense novel Kings of Providence. Visit her [website](#) for information on her writing (and for more musings on the literary world!).

DID YOU KNOW?

Connexions



Whether you're in need of supplemental material for a course, want to hone your skills or brush up on the basics over the summer, or just have a keen interest in pursuing a subject a little further, be sure to check out the customizable learning modules at [Connexions](#).

Connexions, which describes itself as “the textbook equivalent of Wikipedia,” is really a lot more. The innovative resource is an open education “dynamic digital educational ecosystem” with two components: a huge content repository and a customizable content management system. The repository is made up of over 17,000 quality-controlled learning modules, short lessons that include multimedia as well as examples, problems, and text. Subject matter ranges from math to copyright law to disaster management to business and finance—and everything in between.

If you want to put together your own studies, you can use the content management software to copy modules and group them into a personal collection—which you can save and view online or download for working through at your leisure.

Overwhelmed? The repository also includes ready-made collections, which are sets of modules that have been grouped according to subject matter and specific level. There are over 1,000 collections currently available.

The resources at Connexions are freely available to all, and content can be accessed and downloaded via mobile devices as well as over the Internet.



Just Holding On

The big event I coordinate is over (except for the post-mortem analysis and final report). The bedding plants are potted and the beds are weeded (until the next big flush). The house was clean (until Grady showed up for the weekend). The new iMac sits invitingly on my desk (yet frustrates me at every turn).

Everything is in a state of flux. There isn't a single thing in the world that you can point to and say "Ah, yes, that's it; all done." Not farming or housework or childrearing. Not cooking or yard work or even learning.

Each day we fight the ravages of time and neglect. Moisturize your skin at 20, they say, or pay the price when you're 60 years old. Get that blood pressure under control now or plan on prolonged physiotherapy after the stroke. Use deadly force on that first dandelion, or learn to make wine. Keep moving or be felled by bad knees and stiff joints. Build a relationship with a little kid or lose the chance forever.

With the to-do list, it was the same deal. For a short time, I felt an eerie sense of calm. There were no immediate fires to extinguish, no problems waking me at three in the morning. This made me wonder just what I should be doing—because doing nothing is never an option for long.

It's as though a vacuum needed to be filled. Attend a meeting in the provincial riding and end up volunteering to work a golf tournament fundraiser. Score some Tonka construction toys, build a small sandbox, and invite a grandson to play. Try to learn Adobe's InDesign program and instantly find half a dozen print projects that need doing. *Gratis*, of course. Book an author talk for the public library. Agree to plan a first birthday party at a golf club. Volunteer to work satellite bingo (again) for the church. Throw in meetings with wedding couples, a BBQ, a bowling and pizza night, and before long the days and weeks begin to bulge with commitments.

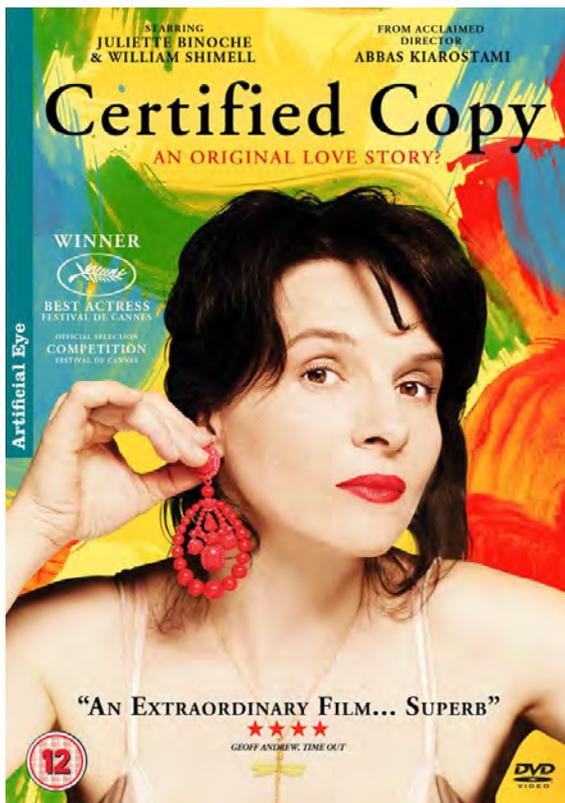
And that's not all. Today I plunked down \$40 for 15 millilitres of wrinkle cream; another must-do in the fight against time. But what about the bags? Concealer only masks the dark circles. There's a chilled eye mask taking up space in the fridge. God help me, I've even started using a bronzing self-tanner. I plan my outfits and wear more colour. I keep the grey at bay with regular salon appointments and streaks to fool the eye. Giving up is not an option.

Sometimes it seems as though we're locked in a battle with time. Whether the threat is horticultural, medical, emotional, aesthetic, or an overstuffed calendar, it's a fight to hold on, from where I sit.

Hazel Anaka's first novel is *Lucky Dog*. Visit her [website](#) for more information or follow her on Twitter @anakawrites.

THE MINDFUL BARD

Wanda Waterman



Books, Music, and Film to Wake Up Your Muse and Help You Change the World

Film: *Certified Copy* (IFC Films 2010)

Writer/Director: Abbas Kiarostami

Cast: Juliette Binoche, William Shimell, Jean-Claude Carrière, Agathe Natanson, Gianna Giachetti, Adrian Moore

“Answer the question. Is she or isn’t she?”

What?

A phony.

I don’t know. I don’t think so.

You don’t, huh? Well, you’re wrong. She is. But on the other hand, you’re right, because she’s a real phony.”

Breakfast at Tiffany’s

Fake It ‘Til You Make It to the Real

When the man goes outside the café to talk on his cellphone, the middle-aged Tuscan waitress remarks to his female companion that he seems to be a good husband. Taken aback—she’s only just met the man yesterday and isn’t romantically involved with him—the woman decides to play along and pretend that she really has been married to this man for years and that they have a host of typical marital problems. For one thing, she really wants to hear what this wise soul has to say on the subject of marriage and happiness. But at the back of her mind, she also has a singular mission.

When the man returns, she tells him they’ve been mistaken for a married couple. He quite naturally falls in with the simulation, and for the rest of the day they continue to speak and act as though they’re married. They even develop a history and a dispute unique to their relationship, a conflict that nearly every couple forms early on in the relationship and repeats *ad nauseum*, never seeming to get it resolved. In their case the argument revolves around his coldness and her emotional demands.

Both of them bring so much personal baggage to the game that it quickly becomes clear this isn’t just lighthearted play-acting; the facts of their existence compel them toward the staging of this tragedy whose goal, for both of them, is the discovery of something transcendent. A haunted quest for the real has thrown them together for better or worse.

When you were a teenager, did you ever consider yourself a seeker or defender of truth, denying yourself many of the sweet comforts of illusion in your single-minded quest for meaning? Despite the warning underlying *The Matrix*, our illusions can grant certain emotional and physical benefits that are quite real.

It's similar with copies; knowing that an object isn't an original doesn't necessarily detract from the pleasure of viewing the object or from the object's benefits to a culture.

This is where James and his companion disagree. Her happiness is contingent on things conforming to an ideal reality while he asks, *What is real?* James sees a replica as a kind of portal, a thing that points and beckons us back toward the original. He shows that a careful study of copies leads us to the realization that every object around us is somehow a copy of another object, and that we're living in a giant network of echoes and shadows. A forged *Mona Lisa* is a copy of the original *Mona Lisa*, which is a copy of La Gioconda, which is a DNA replica of a composite of La Gioconda's ancestors.

James has written a book about the importance of copies in the world of art. His companion has discovered this book and bought six copies to give to friends, even though she claims to disagree with its premise (an antiques dealer and art connoisseur, she feels a distinction should be made between the value of a copy and an original). Her obsession with James and his ideas—she attends his lecture, insists that he sign the books she's bought, and invites him to meet her—are based not so much on physical attraction as on a sense of personal urgency she dare not disobey.

The true marital status of these two virtual strangers remains unspoken. The woman doesn't even appear to have a name—she never gives it, and James never addresses her directly. In this way she appears to act as a symbol for that nameless thing that illuminates our surroundings and gives them their significance.

The two are so hungry to find the authentic that they're compelled to conduct an existential experiment in which they take up arms against all that might distract from the most precious thing that they seek. Among these distractions are the petty frustrations and duties of life, but right up there with these is the kind of conditional happiness that's dependent on the satisfaction of lofty ideals.

Distraction from the deepest goods creates bitterness and resentment in romantic relationships. If we can learn to accept our partners as they are, only abandoning them when they become willfully destructive to us, we have an opportunity to achieve that level of mindfulness necessary for profound and lasting joy.

By the end of the film both have expressed not only their personal thoughts and feelings but also the collective universal crisis that is relationship; they end up speaking for the human race. Through a series of tests and recriminations these two eventually discover the thing shining brightest in their hearts, the thing, in Sappho's words, that is "more gold than gold." As in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, they reach a mythical level where they become the gods they've supplanted.

In a square they encounter another art-loving couple. The man takes James aside and tells him that all his wife needs is for him to place his hand on her shoulder. James thanks the man, but declines to follow the advice. Later, though, he changes his mind and places his hand on his "wife's" shoulder. She melts, becoming almost diaphanous with joy. Like the velveteen rabbit, she has become real.

"The authentic is whatever is illuminated by proximity to the beloved; it's what comes alive under the touch of that loving hand. The closer the copy is to the original, the more it is authentic in itself."

What is authentic? The authentic is whatever is illuminated by proximity to the beloved; it's what comes alive under the touch of that loving hand. The closer the copy is to the original, the more it is authentic in itself.

Certified Copy fulfills eight of the Mindful Bard's criteria for films well worth seeing: 1) it is authentic, original, and delightful; 2) it poses and admirably responds to questions that have a direct bearing on my view of existence; 3) it stimulates my mind; 4) it provides respite from a sick and cruel world, a respite enabling me to renew myself for a return to mindful artistic endeavour; 5) it is about attainment of the true self; 6) it inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation; 7) it makes me want to be a better artist; and 8) it makes me appreciate that life is a complex and rare phenomenon, making living a unique opportunity.

Wanda also penned the poems for the artist book *They Tell My Tale to Children Now to Help Them to be Good*, a collection of meditations on fairy tales, illustrated by artist Susan Malmstrom.

CLICK OF THE WRIST

Get a Job

So you've graduated—congratulations!—and now comes the fun part. Well, maybe not so much fun. In today's economy, getting a job or applying for a promotion is a full-time job in itself, and certainly a frustrating and stressful one. Check out these links for inspiration and helpful tips.

Social Media

Social Media is the big bad wolf of job seeking—or is it? Not according to this *Harvard Business Review* article, which discusses how to make social media work for you. Used properly, these resources can help you make contacts, spread your portfolio, and land interviews and, eventually, jobs.

Creativity Pays Off

Don't be too original, job applicants are warned; most would-be employers frown upon resumes that seem gimmicky or just too clever. And yet these job applicants took the risk, and their creativity and knowledge of the employer resulted in a hiring. Click through for some inspiration!

Back to Basics

All the creativity in the world won't get you very far, though, if you approach the job market without a plan. The *Huffington Post* gives some solid advice for organizing your job hunt.



INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: Nightmare

For the millions of children afraid of the dark, nighttime and sleep can be a painful ritual. For the millions of adults who suffer from insomnia, nighttime and sleep can be a painful ritual. Coincidence? Maybe not, according to Canadian researchers.

As the CBC [reports](#), researchers at the Sleep and Depression Laboratory at Ryerson University in Toronto say that “fear of the dark may be behind the sleepless nights that some insomniacs experience.”

Dr. Colleen Carney, who headed the study, frequently sees insomniac patients in her lab. She noticed that many of them “sleep with a light on or with a TV or computer on in the bedroom . . . and . . . [talk] about the dark in phobic terms.” After performing objective tests, Carney realized that the light may not be causing the insomnia, but it might be indicative of the cause instead. According to the study’s results, “around half of the poor sleepers” in the trial were afraid of the dark.

“[Basically] it means . . . they are already going to be coming in with tension,” Carney told reporters.

These findings could mean that insomnia might be eased by cognitive behavioural therapy and other treatments that can assist with “[phobias] like fear of the dark.”

Around the World: Electrifying

Electrical grids. Complex reactions. Conductive minerals. Sound like a chemistry lab? Maybe—but if you thought it belonged to a complex life form like human beings, you’d be wrong.

As *National Geographic’s* Daily News site [reports](#), new research has found that the not-so-simple bacteria “can use minerals in soil as electrical grids, which helps the microbes generate chemicals they need to survive.”

It is widely known that “different species of microorganisms can work together by trading electrons” in order to better digest food sources—much like what happens in the human body. However, scientists previously believed that this could only occur if the bacteria were touching each other or using transfer molecules for a piggyback effect.

The researchers at the Toyko University of Pharmacy and Life Sciences now suggest that “microbes can use conductive minerals as ‘wires’ for boosting their electrical transfers.”

Their findings may be a boon to alternative energy sources like “microbial fuel cells, which use microorganisms to generate electricity from chemical sludge.”

AUSU UPDATE



AU Students urge candidates to improve university funding

AU students are concerned about the financial health of Athabasca University and the effect of recent news stories on the reputation of the AUSU membership.

A recent CBC report notes that in recent years the university has made a series of reserve draws to cover budget shortfalls, draining the once \$30-million reserve fund.

Tuition and fees at AU, meanwhile, continue to increase despite the concerns of AUSU that education is becoming increasingly unaffordable in Alberta.

“I’m very concerned about AU’s financial situation,” says AUSU President Bethany Tynes. “AU is increasing student fees, observing hiring freezes, denying sabbaticals, delaying projects, and downsizing their offices due to a lack of available funds. We don’t want to see the quality of our education diminish.”

“At the same time,” Tynes continues, “I am confused by AU Board Chair Barry Walker’s comment to the CBC that AU is ‘in a very sound financial position,’ as the concerns we’ve noted do not support the notion that we’re financially sound.”

Chronic underfunding of public post-secondary education is a factor in AU’s financial stress. AU students have lobbied Alberta in recent years to address the shortfall; our members call on the candidates in Alberta’s provincial election to make post-secondary funding a priority in their platforms and to ensure that all Alberta universities are funded equally and sufficiently. Public post-secondary institutions need a reliable, predictable funding model that provides sufficient base operating funds to support a world-class education.

Athabasca University Students' Union is the largest students' union in Alberta, representing nearly 40,000 undergraduates annually.

Media Contact:

Tamra Ross, Executive Director, AUSU

1-800-788-9041 extension 2905

executivedirector@ausu.org

This column is provided by AUSU to facilitate communication with its members. The Voice does not write or edit this section; all content has been exclusively and directly provided by AUSU, and any questions or comments about the material should be directed to ausu@ausu.org.

CLASSIFIEDS

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

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500 Energy Square - 10109 – 106 St NW - Edmonton AB - T5J 3L7
- Ph: 800.788.9041 ext. 2905 - Fax: 780.497.7003 attn: Voice Editor

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Editor-In-Chief Tamra Ross
Managing Editor Christina M. Frey

Regular Columnists Hazel Anaka, Katie D'Souza, S.D. Livingston, Wanda Waterman

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