

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE
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Meeting the Minds

Dr. Maiga Chang, Part I

The End

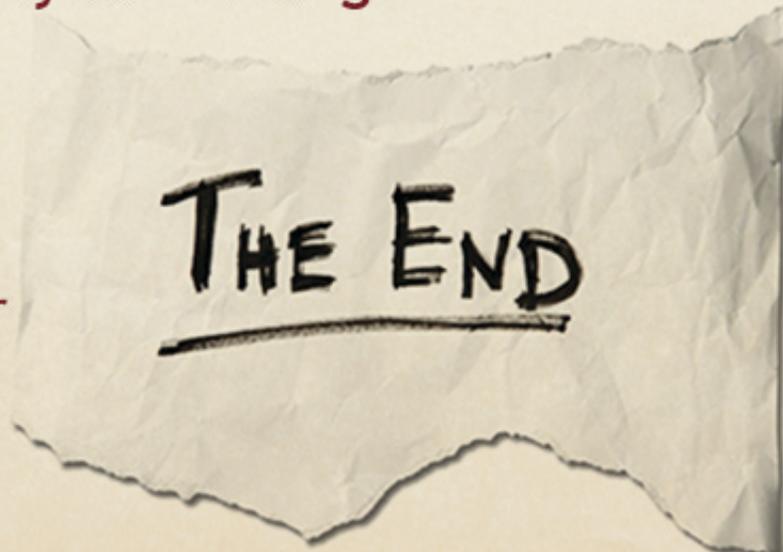
The Final Submit

What Do We Stand For?

Another Look at the Bylaw Change

Plus:

*We're All in this Together
Letters and more Letters
and much more!*



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Dear Editor;

As a full-time student in an multidisciplinary program I was a little disappointed at the admonishing tone from Colleen Doucette's letter to the editor. How could you (Colleen) be surprised at the low turn out when the average student balances work, family, volunteering, and school-life and a meeting gets scheduled for supper time. The letter felt like one big ol', and very unnecessary, guilt trip.

You asked why aren't students more engaged with AU? From what I understand, this meeting was about the Humanities & Social Science faculty, one faculty, which is likely about a quarter of AU's student body (probably more considering the Social Science side is pretty big). This is a student body that isn't roaming a university hallway, sitting in classrooms and being bombarded in the cafeteria by the university's radio station. We are working people, we chose AU for the difference it could make to those of us not able to attend traditional secondary school.

You found it "terribly disappointing"? I'm sorry you feel that way, but you may not know that most of AU students won't care, or even know, if you're disappointed. Lets be honest, a huge number of students don't read the Voice (sorry Karl), don't join in any Facebook groups, nor do they even know what the Landing is (crickets chirping there). They don't look at the website except to do school, and they don't follow AU on twitter. You are not reaching people to participate in the information session because people are not going to be engaged like a traditional university, and the powers-that-be wanting this type of input must start to realize that. If AU, or you, or counsel, or the Voice want input from your student body, quit trying to get it through traditional means, or they way its always been done. I've been a student since 2004 and this university, and AUSU council are still trying to get people to phone in. It's almost as bad as asking people to fax information in.

My suggestion when something like this comes up, or is known to be pending is to get email involved sending out information, and even a poll/input session through some internet-based means. Then gather the input and assign an AUSU

counsellor to attend as our rep. If 90% of us don't answer? Don't fret, you've rep'd the 10%. I guarantee that if another information session is set up, for this faculty or another, there will be the same amount of interest if the mode of input is the same. This suggestion isn't a fail-safe method either, as the student body is still a busy group, with more on their minds than the inner, political workings of the university.

Take care, keep rep'ing.

Jody W.

(Ed. It may not be a huge number, but I like to think it's the best of them.)

Hi Karl,

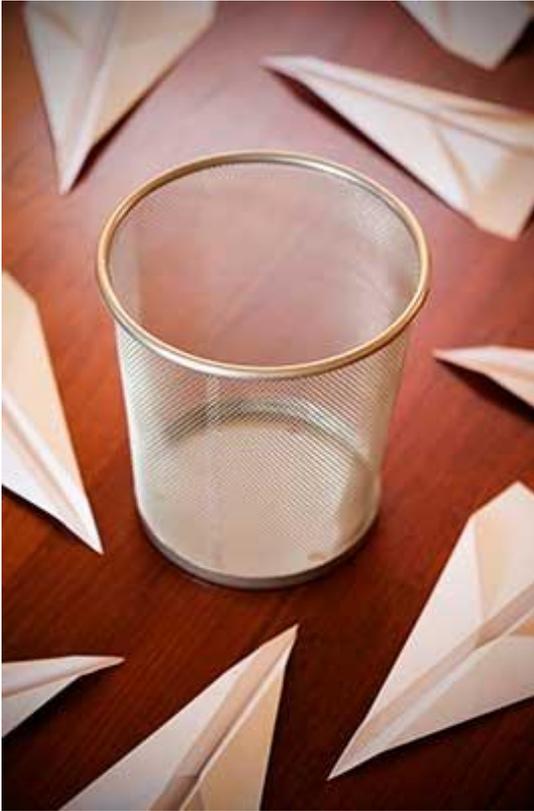
Just read your editorial, Hidden Crimes, from the March 25th issue. I don't think you can compare someone in an abusive relationship to this case. These people were just dating and I don't believe they had any commitment to each other, such as kids, long term relationship etc, which would cause them to what to stay with him.

Often people who are in abusive relationships have had a long span where there was no abuse and they are hoping things will return to that again. In this case, Jian is just that type of guy and these women were attracted to him in spite of it. If the women had chosen not to see him again, then I would agree that he should be held accountable, but I think by them seeing him, they were saying it was ok.

Barb G.

(Ed. I don't think the shock of the experience, the natural disbelief, should be discounted.)

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**Karl Low****What do we Stand For?**

Last week we had an [article](#) from Barb Lehtiniemi about some of the dangers that come from changing the bylaws, as well as a letter from Colleen Doucette, the outgoing VP External about student engagement, and that got me thinking. We also received a response to Colleen's letter from another student, where she argues that AU is a very different school and so hoping for a large student engagement, especially for a synchronous, telephone meeting, simply isn't very likely.

Then yesterday, AUSU held its annual AGM. Barely. Even though there are nine current council members, and an additional five new councillors-elect, it was still touch and go to meet the ten-person quorum that an AGM requires, as one of the current Council was unable to attend, and only two of the five new Councillors-elect bothered to show up. (Kudos to both Julian Teterenko and Scott Jacobsen for their diligence.)

All of this got me thinking, and my thoughts are that the changes to the bylaws that AUSU is undertaking right now are extremely dangerous. Our membership engagement is extremely low at the best of times. Of the required two consultations AUSU holds for bylaw changes, they cancelled the first one because nobody had

indicated they would be attending, and Barb L. was the only student to attend the second one. You can read her article to see how that went.

The issue of student engagement is vital. As Jody W. points out in her letter this week, we're not students who roam hallways, have common classrooms, or even generally access the various group forums that are available. AUSU shut down their own forum for lack of use, apparently. But why should students bother to get engaged if they know that their voices can simply be ignored. And that is exactly what this change to the bylaws allows.

So if a student union decided to do something corrupt, how would we know? And even if we did know, what could we do about it? This is not a traditional university, so many of the normal modes of protest that students have against university administration or student government don't exist. We can't rationally organize a sit-in to disrupt their work, we can't hold a visible protest that might attract media or government attention, there is virtually no way that we could stop a rogue Council, and that's assuming we even knew that it had gone rogue. The Voice is not fully independent, as the events of last year clearly showed, and should I get to be too much of a thorn in the side of a corrupt council, it would be quite easy for them to simply get rid of me, and hence The Voice, especially if these proposed changes to the bylaws go through. To be clear, I'm not suggesting that this student Council is or even would consider such a thing, or that the new council being sworn in will either. But what about the one after them? Or the one after that?

AUSU is arguing that they're forced to do this by the PSLA, but let's consider what would happen if AUSU did not comply. Would the government step in and require they change the bylaws to eliminate the ability of students to govern themselves? According to the backgrounder AUSU submitted today for The Voice, no. They say that

the Learning Ministry has "advised AUSU that the Ministry cannot provide legal interpretation of the PSLA", and that AUSU should simply consult legal advice. And why would the government step in? What government in their right mind would risk the kind of publicity that would come from attempting to do anything to a student union that wanted to give its members more control over the organization?

So if the government isn't going to do anything about this, and they've said as much, does AUSU Council need to be in such a hurry to kowtow to the government to take control of the organization away from students?

After all, aren't student unions generally the place where bad laws are first put to the test and change sought? When students protested in Quebec in 2012 with pots and pans, those protests weren't in accordance with the law, but the students' unions felt that what was involved was important enough that that didn't matter. The government went so far as to pass an additional law specifically banning the protests around the universities, but that did not stop the protests, either.

And you know what? Eventually the students won. Tuition was frozen, the law banning protests around the universities was repealed. Would the same results have been had if the current Council of AUSU had been leading the group? Once the government said, "This is against the law," would this Council have had the courage to press forward anyway, to win? Considering that the current government hasn't even said the bylaws are in violation, yet AUSU is rushing to change them, I think not.

What makes this stranger is that this would be a perfect issue for AUSU to take up with the government, especially an NDP government with a Wildrose opposition, and organize some form of campaign to allow students more power to represent themselves. The opposition would support the idea based on their libertarian principles and that it gives them a new stick to hit the NDP government with, and the NDP government can quickly turn this into a win by amending the PSLA to allow students to set the bylaws of their own organizations at a properly convened general meeting – thus catering to their generally student-friendly populist base.

Plus, this would then allow AUSU to declare a win for students over government. And what student council wouldn't want to have that feather in its cap?

So rather than simply accepting that the PSLA requires power to be taken from the students, I'm urging all Council members to vote against this proposed bylaw change on April 14th. Let the current bylaws—bylaws that serve to encourage student engagement, that better acknowledge the unique nature of AUSU, that better address the additional risks that AUSU faces due to how our students are dispersed and decentralized—let those bylaws stand unchanged, and instead put your energies toward challenging the Alberta government on this issue, for a principle that won't just benefit AUSU, but will benefit students across the province.

That's my take on it, anyway.

As for the rest of the issue? It's a pretty good one. We talk with Dr. Maiga Chang from the School of Information and Computing Sciences, have a closer look at Comp 266, and Barb L. has found an interesting tool to help you judge if a course might be right for you, because, hey, we're all in this together, right? Plus, of course, some news, some reviews, and a bit of advice for how to get through your studies on your own two feet.

Enjoy the read!



MEETING THE MINDS

INTERVIEWS with AU's EDUCATORS



Dr. Maiga Chang is an associate professor in AU's School of Information and Computing Sciences and is the New Initiative Chair on executive board of the IEEE Technical Committee of Learning Technology. He recently took some time to be interviewed for The Voice Magazine, and this is the first of that three-part interview.

Your research interests lie in "mobile learning and ubiquitous learning, museum e-learning, game-based learning, educational robots, learning behaviour analysis, data mining, intelligent agent technology, computational intelligence in e-learning, and mobile healthcare" (Athabasca University, 2016). What seems like the source of these research interests for you?

Basically, I will say that this is a dream. I had a dream that I can create a world, a virtual world, which we live inside. In this world, we can do everything we want, and we can learn everything by interacting with people in the environment. Even though we don't know if the people we interact with are a real person or a person controlled by computers. In order to do that, first of all, you need to create an of environment – virtual, augmented reality, and game world – that people can live inside, access resources and

interact with people via their computers, mobile devices, and helmets like Google Goggles, Microsoft Hololens, and Oculus Rift.

Most important is the computer controlled people that we are going to interact with in the virtual world. Computers need to know what we need. They need to know what our skill-set is. In that case, they can give us appropriate quests or activities so we can do something not too easy and not too difficult, but that we can manage it. Then, they can do more. So, basically, you can see these kinds of intelligent agents/computer players, or virtual characters need to know you. They need to have a kind of data mining engine or data analytic mechanism behind the scenes to find your preference, needs, and learning style, and then when they talk to you, and they interact with you, they need to use natural language. They need to speak to you. They also need understand when you are talking. That is part of natural language processing research taking place. Of course, artificial intelligence is very important.

All of my research topics. They all do some efforts and they contribute to my dream of creating a virtual world in which everybody can learn anything they want based on their learning preference, their experience, and what they have done already.

How will digital technology, electronic media, and artificial intelligence shift the landscape around education, and its subsequent impact on individual students and instructors?

I will first say what the traditional learning or the classroom learning looks like. Basically, the teacher is needed to prepare a kind of lecture and a lot of materials for teaching. Then, when they go to the classroom, they see a lot of students – 40 or even hundreds in a university level class. They use the same thing to teach all 100 different students with the same technique, with the same content, with the same test. Under such circumstance, some of their students may not understand what they're taught, some of their students may not like this kind of teaching way. That is where with the digital technology, or what you said—with "electronic media" and "artificial intelligence" can contribute.

In that case, we can provide teachers something like with "Okay, now you prepare your materials that look like this, and, according to our learning analytics result or data mining result, we can tell you that your teaching materials and methods are very good for 65% of your students. But there are another 35% of students that they need something more fancy. Probably, you should be looking for another YouTube video for specific content, and then your teaching materials will be more suitable for them." But, as I say, we can only cover a portion of the people. At least, when we have these kinds of technologies, we can digitalize our materials; we can have multimedia; and we can have interactive activities for students to get their hands dirty. Electronic media, for example, some students, for instance, don't like reading. They like watching video. So, these kinds of things, when put together, can make students learn better or more efficiently. That, I think, could help teachers.

Of course, I need to emphasize that I never consider to use technology enhanced research results to replace teachers because I think teachers are very important, which is why I think your question is very good because we are trying to help teachers and make them teach more efficiently. I mean, the lectures, more suitable, or better for the students.

You are the Associate Professor in the School of Computing Information and Systems at AU. What are the tasks and responsibilities involved in this station?

Basically, every professor in university or in any university in the world is probably having the same responsibilities. They are teaching, doing research, and also having some kinds of services. So, basically, teaching is easy to understand. You need to prepare and revise your courses, design and open new courses. When you teach students, you need to answer student questions and mark assignments. Of course, it is a little bit different in Athabasca University than in other universities because in AU, at least in the School of Computing and Information Systems. We professors have two different roles.

The first role is you can be a tutor for students in a course, which is coordinated by your colleague. For example, I was a tutor for COMP-308, in that course, I am a tutor. I need to interact with students. I will respond their questions, and when they submit their assignment I will mark it. However, whenever they have their final exam, I do not mark that. The final exam is marked by the course coordinator, which is my colleague – another professor. I am the course creator in some other courses. If the tutors have a question, such as, "How should I mark this assignment or how should I respond this question?" I will make sure all students have consistent responses and marking schemes from their tutors. Also, if some students they say, "Oh, your course has a problem. I cannot access a specific webpage" or "I cannot see this reading material," then they may ask their tutors for help and tutors will reflect that to me so I can fix the issues.

Doing research, for example, we will propose and apply for government and industry funding. We will also supervise our graduate students doing their research like essay, project, or thesis research. Of course, publishing and writing papers are also our job for doing research. The service could help university. For example, like me, try to help university design University Certificate in Game Development and Programming and the Bachelor of Science with a Minor in Game Development. That means when you enrol as a program student in a Bachelor of Science, then you can choose to take another minor in game development. Also, if you want to switch to a job in game industry, you may want to work on the university certificate in game development and programming so you can provide the potential employers a proof of what you are capable of.

So, that's what I helped schools to do, and also we needed to participate in some committees to help the school to make a decision. For example, in a task, I was in a committee for seeking and discussing what kind of information technology we need to use. We need to decide which web-based conference applications we want to use. That's something that we need to do for our university.

Could there be some applications there for some artificial intelligence algorithm that understands at least rudimentary grammar and natural language to some degree, or academic language, to make recommendations to students?

That's good! That's one of my research directions. First of all, we develop a system called Automarking. Automarking is actually online now and provides web service for anybody. So if you want to mark your students' short answers of open-ended questions, then you can provide Automarking the correct answer you've thought of and also what your students write, and then we can mark it for you. Of course, you can consider to override the marks by yourself. So, that's the first thing we have done.

Right now, we are trying to do two things. We want to mark an essay. When we mark an essay, which means there are more sentences and some of these sentences will be associated with others that have been written at very beginning. And that will be very difficult for computer to understand and mark but that is what we want to do.

The researchers a long time ago, about 1960s, they believe that some kind of structures can make computers they learn from sentences and answer questions according to their own knowledge structure. In that case, when the computer read more documents and information, the structure can become more complete and solid. So, when you say IBM Watson, when it assesses something, it will try to access the knowledge processed, learned and stored to get some responses. And so yes! It is doable.

Compared to traditional universities, students in AU are active, because most of them have their own goal. They know what they want.

One relevant research direction that I am doing is trying to mark students' writing skill. Which means not how correct your answer is, but how you write words and tell the story. For examples, you use a lot of wrong words, or you have a lot of typos, or you use inappropriate verbs, and you don't write things in a sequence or something like that. We want to mark students' writing skills before marking the correctness and coverage that their answers are, but this research hasn't been done yet.

What are the joys of teaching at AU for you?

I would say most students are really active. I mean compared to students in the traditional university. I taught in traditional university since 1998. Since 2007, I've worked for AU. Compared to traditional universities, students in AU are active because most of them have their own goal. They know what they want. They know, "Okay, I want to take this course because this course can help me." It's not like most traditional university students, who are forced to take courses to graduate. AU students are active. They are mature.

So, basically, because they have a goal to pursue. So, sometimes it is good to see when you ask students to do a little more they will say, "Yes." Because they know if they do this, they can get more benefit. It makes sense. You can make them know why you are asking this; what kind of benefits they will have. And I think that is a good thing of teaching at AU regarding the student body.

References

Athabasca University. (2016). Maiga Chang.
Retrieved from <http://maiga.athabascau.ca/>.

A native British Columbian, Scott Douglas Jacobsen is an AU undergrad and AUSU Councillor-elect. He researches and runs In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal, and In-Sight Publishing.

We're All in This Together

Barbara Lehtiniemi



It's lonely being an AU student. Sitting here in my campus of one, I sometimes feel like the only student walking this path. Occasionally my campus expands to include a tutor or two, and a handful of virtual students on social media. Phone or in-person conversations with students are rare—and treasured.

But I'm not alone on this journey. I'm in the Bachelor of General Studies program, which makes me one of 359 students (2013-2014 AU fiscal year) working toward the same degree. If all of us BGS students got together for one class, we'd need a lecture hall to hold us all.

According to data available on AU's [Student Consumer Info](#) webpage, there were more than 8000 students in AU undergraduate programs during the 2013-2014 fiscal year. Over 3000 of these students were in Humanities and Social Science programs, along with 2300 in Business programs, 1400 in Nursing programs, and 600 in Science programs. And that's not counting the 3500 or so students in graduate programs. You can see the full breakdown by program in the [Total Enrolment by Program](#) document.

So, we may feel alone, but we're not alone. Breaking enrolment down course by course, you might discover you have more classmates than you realized. A look at the [Course Completion Rates](#) reveals how many students attempted most courses during the year. (Currently, data is posted for the 2012-2013 fiscal year, but you can access data for the 2014-2015 fiscal year [here](#).)

So if you took ENGL 255 *Introductory Composition* recently, you're among the over 1300 students who attempt it each year. Similarly, MATH 215 *Introduction to Statistics* draws over 1000 students each year, and ADMN 233 *Writing in Organizations* isn't far behind.

The Course Completion Rates data reveal more than just how many students attempted AU courses. For any individual study course drawing more than 100 students per year (excluding students who withdraw within 30 days and those who submitted no assignments,) the data shows the percentage of students who passed or failed, as well as the percentage of those who withdrew after 30 days or let their contract expire without completing the course.

If you're a student, course completion data could form part of the selection criteria you use, for example, to decide between two courses of interest, or to decide when to take a course. The data might also prompt you to take a closer look at courses you hadn't considered, like PHIL 333 [Business Ethics](#), with a 94.9% completion rate, or BIOL 310 [Biology of Human Sexuality](#) with an over 95% completion rate.

In a 2011 [news article](#), AU reported that their students' average course completion rate of 85% was consistent with rates at other institutions. Individual course completion rates at AU vary from 44% to 100%, and knowing

these can assist you in managing your course load. While the figures don't tell the whole story—students can withdraw from a course for reasons unrelated to course content, for example—following the data from year to year may provide clues to the level of challenge a course presents.

Every course is a challenge in its own way, and each course you enrol in is an important step in your AU journey. The more information you have to help you select your courses, the better your decisions will be.

As an AU student, you may occasionally feel lonely, but you are never alone. No matter which program or courses you are enrolled in, others are there too. If you have ever failed a course, run out of contract time, or withdrawn, you aren't alone in that either. Your challenges mirror another student's challenges; your successes mirror another's success. We are all in this together.

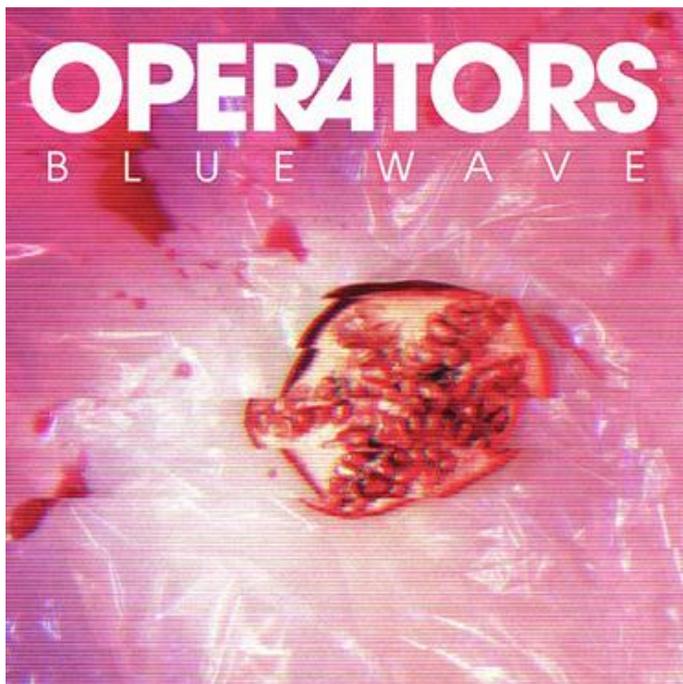
Barbara Lehtiniemi is a writer, photographer, and AU student. She lives on a windswept rural road in Eastern Ontario



Music Review

Operators

Samantha Stevens



Band: Operators

Album: *Blue Wave*

Often electronic music tends to drone on and on and listeners can go through an entire album with little interest or effort on their part. But *Blue Wave* is not that kind of electronic music. The tracks on *Blue Wave* are full of such intense energy that you'll be drawn to the music and the contagious effervescence will take hold of the very fibres of your being.

Formed in 2013, Operators is composed of Canadian musicians Dan Boeckner, Devojka, and Sam Brown. *Blue Wave* is the band's debut album and was released April 1st. Considered analog post-punk, fans of David Bowie will really enjoy the tracks because of their unusual sound and attractive beats. Interestingly, "much of *Blue Wave* was recorded in a middle of nowhere 1850s-

vintage barn in southern Ontario" (<http://music.cbc.ca/#!/artists/Operators>).

The album opens with "Rome." The track features an intense, dominant beat combined with dark vocals. The song feels like a foreboding, perhaps because of the jarring beat, and the lyrics are somewhat neurotic and melancholy. However, a brief reprieve from the bleakness comes with the chorus where the drumming beat eases off. It is also at that point that you'll realize how much the beat has wormed its way into your head and how you'll now feel slightly empty without it.

"Control" is a bit lighter and the dance-infused electronic intro will have you moving along to the beat. The feature that I love most about this song is the occasional saxophone-like effect that breaks up the monotony that sometimes occurs in electronic music.

"Cold Light" is softer than the previous two tracks, but it still features that amazingly infectious rhythm. It is by this point that you realize that the musicians brilliantly arranged the songs to flow seamlessly into one another. This song also features beautiful backup vocals that enhance the allure and add to the earthier feel of the music.

The intro to "Mission Creep" is a touch jarring; I didn't really enjoy this track. I couldn't find the harmony in this song, and at times the music sounded like various electronic effects smashed together to create noise. However, I can't help but feel that the musical chaos to enhance the theme of the song may have been Operators' aim.

"Blue Wave" brings listeners back into an ordered world with an electronic dance track that sounds like it is from the 70s or 80s. The nostalgic feel of this song not only makes it fun, but I found it oddly relaxing.

The last track that I will mention is "Nobody". It also happens to be my favourite song on this album. It has a psychedelic feel to it, but there are also modern alternative rock influences in this song. The rhythm has less of a dance feel to it, but I still found that the beat made me want to move along with it. The guitar is also more dominant in this song, with an amazing solo part way through the track. There is also a harmony between the music and the singing that strikes me as being strangely beautiful.

All in all, I really enjoyed Operators debut album *Blue Wave*. The tracks are a perfect fit for any activity where you may need a bit of energy, and I can easily picture myself listening to this album while studying.

Samantha Stevens is an aspiring writer who loves combining her love for literature with photography, painting, music, and all creative pursuits.

Student Sizzle AU's Hot Social Media Topics

Following what's hot around AU's social media sites.

AthaU Facebook Group

Cassandra reports that, after completing her final exam for MKTG 406, she was informed she'd been given the wrong exam. Stephanie seeks info on how to reference a course study guide in an essay. Sean wants to know if the AUSU Forums are gone. Other posts include AU's *Open Magazine*, obsessive screen refreshes, mid-course tutor changes, and courses COMP 210, HRMT 301, and PHIL 335.

Twitter

@AthabascaU tweets: "New to #onlinelearning? Study Tips for a new #AthaU student:

<http://goo.gl/Demg13>."

@AthabascaUSU (AUSU) tweets: "AUSU May Award and Bursary Applications are now Online. APPLY NOW! Deadline is May 1, 2016. <http://bit.ly/1GIWJhi>."

Youtube

Eleven-minute webinar on "How to Write a Killer Scholarship Essay in 8 Steps" posted by International Student Loan.





Marie Well

Course Exam

AU courses, up close

Comp 266 – Introduction to Web Programming

Dr. Dron, course designer of COMP 266, Introduction to Web Programming, provides a look at what makes his course unique from so many others at AU.

What makes the course particularly interesting to you as the creator, the designer, or the instructor?

The challenge of building social pedagogies into a fairly dry, skill-based subject and, above all, into a self-paced course. The fact that students working independently could not reliably be expected to collaborate meant that I had to find ways to support cooperative working, where people working independently could both help and learn from others. Also, programming is a very practical skill that is not unlike music, but it tends to be taught as though it were a science, with formulae and methods to learn and, only once learned, to be applied. I inverted this by focusing on the problems to be solved, so students have to learn the mechanical parts in order to solve those problems. The course is staged so they get to play the 'easy pieces' first.

When was this course created? When was the last update of the course? Of the learning materials?

The course as it now stands (version 3) was first released around 2012, I think. It completely replaced an older textbook-based version: everything in it was new apart from the title and learning outcomes. From a process perspective it has not been formally updated since then, apart from very minor tweaks and fixes to broken URLs, but that is because it is designed to evolve continuously, which means it should last for many years to come. Informally, the last update from me was a couple of days ago, but the course is designed so that student work becomes part of the fabric of it so it never stops changing. The last student update was a couple of hours ago.

What was the process for getting the course made?

All major course revisions are first discussed in our school meetings, during which the author presents the plan to colleagues and adapts according to feedback. After this I wrote the bulk of it directly using Moodle and the Landing (our social learning commons). At that point the design iterated in dialogue with one of our best learning designers, who suggested changes such as the self-test quizzes and a couple of other tweaks. After I had finished with it an editor did the final tweaks to layout and wording, and put it online. Since then, apart from minor wording fixes, the Moodle content has remained largely static. The Landing group where most of the work happens and where it continues to evolve is my own responsibility.

If it's an e-text course, have you heard of any issues with the e-text that students might want to be prepared for?

The course has a very open approach to learning resources, offering choices of online resources from which to learn, varying from online books and courses to web pages and problem-solving forums. It has no required textbook. It provides an ever-changing set of links to a lot of different sites, to which others are constantly added both by me and by students. It's not always easy for students to cope with that. It can become a bit overwhelming for students as there are so many choices and, of course, resources come and go quite frequently on the Web, so it can be hard to find things, and to work out which are reliable and useful. This is quite

intentional. It is meant to mirror the authentic process that professional programmers use when learning, so it is one of the skills that students need to learn. We do help as much as we can with it, both in recommending resources and through offering feedback, but it is ultimately down to the students to pick (and discover) resources that suit their needs best.

About how many students take this course, on average?

At any one time there tend to be around 60-80 students enrolled.

What kind of learning style is it? For instance, is it very open ended or does it give fairly detailed instructions?

It's a scaffolded problem-based approach based on a single project (a website) that evolves iteratively throughout the course. The course provides a staged set of activities going from basic design and site building through to complex programming and from there on to technically simpler but more sophisticated and powerful uses of technologies to enhance the site. There is a very strong emphasis on reflection throughout: students don't just learn, but learn *how* to learn. The content and methods of learning are extremely flexible, and different for every student. There are no graded assignments – students get feedback from tutors and other students, but only to help them with the process and to help them do better. There's just a single graded portfolio at the end through which students present evidence of achieving the learning outcomes, which can come from any work on the course, not just the web sites they produce. Reflective learning diaries are a crucial component of that, but students can also, optionally, include things like help given to others and engagement in discussions to give evidence of meeting the learning outcomes. It's very social for those that want it, but those that don't want to engage with others are not forced to do so. The emphasis throughout is on giving students as much control as possible over almost every aspect of the content and process. It's not just about giving lots of choices: it's about supporting and empowering students to be able to make *wise* choices.

If this course isn't a requirement of their program, why should students take it as an elective?

It's a great course for those that want to dip into programming but do not relish the rigid, formal and, for some, dull process of learning step by step. It's for those that want to actively produce something and learn to think like an information systems professional, engaging in a very practical way with the ideas, skills and processes involved in being a programmer. It can provide a useful foundation for the more theoretical and 'hard' programming courses that we also offer.

What part or concept in the course have you seen students have the most trouble with?

Programming. Always programming. The course tries to introduce that gently but, eventually, students have to grapple with the nature of the beast, which is not so much complicated as annoying. It is really easy to spend days on a problem that results from a single error in code, which is frustrating even to professional programmers. Like any skill, programming demands a lot of practice which, for some, that is at odds with expectations. Students sometimes expect to be told what to do and thereby somehow magically learn it – textbooks often deliberately give that impression - but, in programming, that simply doesn't work. You have to do it, do it again, and keep doing it, in lots of different ways, until you become proficient. Also, most students have difficulties at the start because the process is very different from what most are used to, but they normally figure it out in the end. The way the course evolves means that help with the process is improving all the time and it is less of a problem than it was at the start. Some have problems deciding *what* to do: because it is so open-ended and because some have come from a background of schooling that tells them what to do, being given full creative rein over what they do can be a bit intimidating. One of the roles of tutors on the course is to help them get over that hurdle.

What's a good way for students to deal with the more troublesome parts?

Share the problems! That's how the course works. Either in their own blogs or through discussions on the Landing, students are strongly encouraged to seek help and to offer advice to others. One of the reasons we use the Landing is that students who are nervous about doing that (we don't normally like to reveal our ignorance) can choose who gets to see such cries for help – just the tutor, the other students, everyone on the Landing, or even the whole world. The more they share, the more likely it is that they will get a timely response, but it is their choice.

Are the assignments fairly similar in the amount of work required, or are some of them much larger? (and, if so, which ones.)

There are no assignments as such, but the seven staged units are very variable in size. The biggest by far is the central programming unit, which is expected to take about a quarter of the whole time on the course. We provide estimates of the time each unit will take but they are only very approximate averages, and there is no such thing as an average student!

Is there a part of the course they've heard students really enjoy? What is it?

I've heard expressions of joy – aha! moments – pretty much the whole way through. What's nice about it is that, at every stage and many points along the way, students create a very tangible and visible artifact that, by the nature of the course design, almost always meets a goal or need that interests them.

If there's exams, what are they like? Is it a couple of essays? Short answer questions? Multiple choice?

We have no exams – they make no sense in most contexts and especially not in this course, which already has copious mechanisms to assure identity and prevent cheating. Any or all the work on the course can contribute to the assessment – it is largely up to students to choose what they present as evidence in their portfolios. And assembling the portfolio is itself an important learning activity that helps consolidate learning: unlike those courses with exams and summative assessments, there's no activity on this course that does not contribute to learning, apart from figuring out how to use the two sites it runs upon.

If it's not a new course, has it been running a while? Is there some part of it you think might need to be looked at in the next update?

A few. I need to make the process clearer and to build in a means to ensure that students get feedback on *all* their work. Right now, there are some stop points where this happens and students *can* seek feedback for any unit, but not all take advantage of that, so it is a bit haphazard. I think it would also be worthwhile to provide a little more scaffolding for dependent learners that are lost and don't know which way to go - the freedom the course offers can be overwhelming for some. Also, although the course is designed to be very future-proof for at least a decade, changes in technologies used in industry are beginning to be great enough to make it worthwhile slightly shifting the balance of the course to make greater use of emerging frameworks that did not exist when the course began. Such things are very much allowed for in the existing course design but it would make sense to make it more explicit.

Or what would you change to make the course even better if you could?

The need to shift between Moodle and the Landing is annoying, especially as they use very different patterns and paradigms. This can be confusing. I'd like to shift the whole thing across to the Landing, but Moodle remains very useful for managing the formal assessments and as a fixed repository of course content, though useless for providing the control that the pedagogies of the course demands, so we are stuck with both for now.

In your opinion, do you think this course is a harder one or an easier one than the average at AU?

Very variable. Some take to it like a duck to water, others find it confusing and hard. One thing is fairly certain though – most students tend to put in many more hours than they would for most courses, because they get personal value from it. The open-endedness of it, and the fact that they are almost all doing something that has personal meaning to them, means that they tend to spend much longer than necessary in perfecting their work. They tend to be highly motivated to achieve a lot, and it shows in the results. The quality of work on the course tends to be very high.

What kind of personality type or talent is required to succeed at this course?

The course works best for people that like to be in control of their own work, that enjoy challenges and problem solving, and that are not uncomfortable sharing with others. It tends to be *much* less effective for those that just want to be told what to do and to get on with it in private. This is a very active course that demands a lot of creative thinking and engagement. Of course, these are characteristics of good programmers, so it is quite authentic!

Does this course qualify for any certificates or diplomas?

It can be part of the BSc Computing program and computer games certificates.



Canadian Education News

Scott Jacobsen



Canadian Education cheap compared to the United States

The Globe and Mail suggests that some students from the United States (US) might take their studies to Canada because of lower costs. With the Canadian dollar down, the US dollar is functionally up. This means comparable education is less money. Some students are wising up to that situation.

For instance, the Sauder Business School at the University of British Columbia is a 16-month MBA and has a "\$45,656 (Canadian) price tag for Canadian students and \$65,998 for U.S. and international students, which converts to about

\$49,700 (U.S.)." That translates into a cheaper education for US students.

Repeat that calculation across Canada based on the Canadian-to-US dollar exchange rate, the savings in educational expenses are significant, are being noticed, and are being utilized by US students.

It's the end—of the search for Ryerson University's New President

Ryerson University has a new President and vice-chancellor according to *The Globe and Mail*. The search for a new president for the university took 18 months, and has concluded with the appointment of Dr. Mohamed Lachemi. Dr. Lachemi said, "It's a very special feeling...I know the community and place very well." He has served in the capacity as interim president for four months and will hold the official appointment for five years.

He replaces Sheldon Levy who "left to pursue ambitions as deputy minister at Ontario's Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities." Lachemi assumed the position on April 4.

Canadian Education Fair in Chandigarh, India

The Canadian Education Fair in Chandigarh had "45 Canadian colleges and universities" that "took part in the 'Study in Canada Mega Education Fair' organised by Charms Education and Immigration Services" with about 450 students in attendance.

The international coordinator, Anna Simonyan, from Assiniboine Community College, Manitoba, said, "Manitoba ... Canada offers attractive facilities to international students. Health cards are given to students, a rebate of 60 per cent is given on tuition fees, which is already very affordable, and the province has a unique nominee programme that makes getting PR easier."



Study Tips from a Semi-Anonymous Friend

Banana? The Limited Flavours of Theory

There is nothing more that The Study Dude wants for you than to introduce a new theory like AU's Dr. George Siemens did. Don't hesitate: add to the thimble of qualitative theories.

Well, in these articles, as The Study Dude, I'll try to give you the study tips you need to help make your learning easier. I'll also give you straight and honest opinions and personal anecdotes—even the embarrassing ones that you wouldn't ever dare read about from any other study tip guru.

This week's Study Dude lists some theories that apply to quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods strategies.

John W. Creswell, author of *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, highlights key theoretical views.

Quantitative Theory

Taking a quantitative course is good. Taking a quantitative course from an outside faculty is not so good.

When I was in the communications faculty, I opted to take a sociology course in multiple linear regression: a quantitative course. Most of the sociology students had solid backgrounds in statistical methods, but a number of students, including myself, who came in from outside faculties, had little to no background. Now, I did a lot right in the course, especially in the math components, but I kept getting docked marks for leaving off the words "with such-and-such variable(s) held constant." This repeated error knocked my grade down by about two letter grades. The sociology students all seemed to include the magic words; all of us external people failed to do so.

By the last few classes, the only student remaining from outside faculties was me. Everyone else withdrew. This class served as a key reason why I didn't get the grade to enter the PhD program. No-one told me I needed a 3.8 GPA or better to get into the PhD program. If I had known this, I may have withdrawn, too.

As a matter of fact, no-one told me that students need about a 3.60 or better, depending on the year, to get into the master's program. Did you know that?

Almost as bad, when my supervisor found out I enrolled in a quantitative course, she was angered. Quantitative methods were shunned in my faculty. But, years later, I got a job offer to work for a market research company. So, the sociology course in multiple linear regression, combined with my numerical background, paid off.

In spite of all this, in that multiple linear regression course we didn't tackle quantitative *theories*—just statistical analysis. But, Creswell comes to the rescue by shedding light on the theories that quantitative research designs use.

- Quantitative research uses variables. Variables are measurable or observable things.
- Variables also go by the name "constructs."
- Variables that you measure can be things like demographics such as annual income or self-reported attitudes such as how likely one is to vote.
- Independent variables cause, influence, or predict an outcome. For instance, rain (an independent variable) influences photosynthesis.
- Dependent variables represent the actual outcome.
- Other variables such as mediating variables and moderating variables can also appear in research. Mediating variables are sandwiched between the independent and dependent variables. Moderating variables multiply two variables together to see what kind of an influence the two together have.
- Control variables and confounding variables also exist. What are they? Not quite sure.
- When doing a quantitative study, discuss how your chosen theory might predict or explain an outcome.
- The theory should capture the direction and magnitude of the variable's influence on one another. For instance, with increased spirituality comes increased resilience for individuals experiencing the loss of a loved one. A theory would explain or predict why this relationship happens.
- Express your theory as a bunch of if/then statements, or as a bunch of hypotheses, or as a visual representation. As an example, for a bunch of hypothesis, you can say things like, "The higher x, the higher y. The higher x, the higher z. The higher y, the higher z." If/then statements are similar, but seem to add a bit of explanation. As for the visual representations, these contain diagrams with your independent variables all on one side pointing with arrows to your dependent variables. The intervening variables go in between.
- If your topic is about a single person, then look to psychology literature for a theory. If your topic is about groups of people or an organization, then look to sociological literature.
- Try to find one theory that fits your study. Remember that theories are expressed in general terms, so you might luck out and find something which your specific variables might fit into. For instance, a theory that generally says rewards lead to greater motivation could fit nicely with your work if you are studying how a possibility of tenure (the reward) can lead to increased publication (the increased motivation).

Qualitative Theory

The qualitative theories all seem to cover the same theme: marginalization and oppression. When I went into grad studies, I felt that the choice of qualitative theories could be reduced to under ten key ones, and they all contained the same theme. But, I didn't want to condemn the powers-that-be for my marginalized status. Instead, I wanted to find a happy medium—yes, a happy one—of cooperation and compromise. When my supervisor heard my preference for a theory that didn't exist, she was angered, and we soon parted ways.

Yes, I believe the university has gone to the extreme left, influencing political ideology and silencing critics. We now attack people in power without acknowledging a lot of the good they do like create jobs, goods, and services. As a marginalized person, I wanted to acknowledge that good and find compromise. That's not a lot to ask of a university, is it?

Qualitative theories all seemed very similar, representing marginalized people. But, what happens when the powerful people—the so-called oppressors— become the marginalized? I wonder if these methods will represent them then. The enemy turned victim turned enemy turned victim, academic research gets the bipolar stamp, in my mind.

However, hope prevails: some qualitative theory, for instance, allows you to build theory from scratch. Yes, the Study Dude has high hopes for you. Build your own theory if you've got the time and money.

Creswell outlines the theories for qualitative research:

- Qualitative theory boils down to three types: (1) themes-based theories, (2) theoretical lenses, and (3) theory built from scratch.
- First, as for themes based theories, ethnographic research employs themes such as "social control, language, stability and change, or social organization" (p. 61). Themes are like hypotheses that you can fit your research into. Themes-based theories serve like placeholders for your ideas.
- Second, as for theoretical lenses, such a lens would include perspectives like feminism, racialized discourses, critical theory, queer theory, and disability inquiry.
- Third, as for theory built from scratch, the constructing of a theory becomes the final destination of your research. You can discover themes in your research (for example, from interviews of subjects) and then produce a model and a theory from your themes.
- There are at least three ways to build theory from scratch: (1) through grounded theory (where your theory emerges from interviews from your participants, for example), (2) through naturalistic generalizations (where your theory takes in your own personal experiences), and (3) through pattern theory (where metaphors and analogies serve as the foundation).
- You can skip the theory altogether if you want. Phenomenology studies often skip theory altogether. In these studies, the researcher discovers the nature of an experience from the view of the research subjects.

Mixed Methods Theories

Mixed method strategies can involve theories with themes of marginalization, too. Alternatively, a mixed method strategy can use theories that people have built from scratch: a grounded theory, for example. Also, in a mixed method strategy, you can even leave out the theory altogether.

I wonder, what theories have others built that ultimately faced rejection from journals. Oftentimes, a theory can be ridiculed and shunned—slid under the rug—until fifty or so years later when it's revived.

For instance, the researcher who discovered that doctors washing their hands prevented infections committed suicide because of the ridicule he faced. And, if you come up with a theory that goes against the grain, you might receive an F on your defence. Universities seem to silence opposition nowadays. In that light, an interesting study would look at which theories get rejected for not conforming.

And yes, my thesis sucked. I didn't fit the critical theory mould. Through these Study Dude articles, I hope to one day find theories that don't focus on victims and oppressors, but that seek compromise between two voices.

Creswell outlines the theories available for mixed methods research strategies:

- You can use "a social science or a health science theory... as a framework to be tested in either a qualitative or quantitative approach" (p. 66).
- One way to use mixed method is to have no bias with your quantitative approach but lots of bias with your qualitative approach.
- For instance, you can use a feminist, disability, racial, critical theory, and other lens in a mixed methods study.
- Questions you should ask yourself include whether the research represents people who experience discrimination or oppression, whether the community studied will accept your findings as representative, whether your findings lead to new hypotheses, and whether your findings will lead to social change.

Creswell doesn't really say much about the mixed methods approach to theory outside of emancipative contexts.

So, there's nothing to fear. The Study Dude is determined to make right for you all the wrongs I made in grad school—one A+ at a time.

References

Creswell, John W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.



In Conversation ..with The Split Seconds

Wanda Waterman



The Split Seconds are a pop-punk band from Washington DC. Known for minimalist garage band style, they've taken the stage at DC9, The Treehouse Lounge, and The Wonderland Ballroom, among others venues. (You can watch the video of their song "Cutting Out" from their soon-to-be-released debut album, [here](#).) Recently the band got together to answer Wanda Waterman's questions, revealing an engaging sense of punk humour.

Who's had the most influence on you musically?

When Drew was playing guitar in Boardroom Heroes he worked with producer Brian McTernan who produced Thrice, The Explosion, The Loved Ones, and a

bunch of other great bands. Brian stressed doing simple things well rather than doing complex things poorly. That has had a big effect on Drew's songwriting.

What's the story behind the lyrics on "Cutting Out?"

Drew wrote "Cutting Out" after his previous band The Coastals broke up, and he was stuck back living with his parents, struggling to find work. The song is about taking bold steps to break out of that rut.

Where exactly did you make the video?

We made the video in about two hours in the alley and rehearsal space behind Dangerously Delicious Pies on H Street in DC.

What are your rehearsals like?

Sean runs the rehearsals with an iron fist. The rest of us basically do what he says until Alex gets mad at Sean. They argue about stupid stuff for a minute while Drew and Tristan look at the ground. Then Drew tells everybody to shut up and play songs.

Has anything funny or bizarre ever happened to you while in the recording studio or on the stage?

We played a show with a sound guy who was a junkie with a fantastic yellow bandanna. Our bassist at the time got in an argument with him during sound check; he kept leaving during the set to take hits.

What's it like to make pop-punk in a city like Washington DC? Does the city help or hinder the muse?

Drew hates DC. Traffic sucks, it's expensive, and there are a ton of lawyers and political types who think they should tell everybody else how to live their lives. His constant frustration with the city and its lousy people are a source of great inspiration for punk rock songs.

What do you love best about the new album?

We're really proud of the songwriting. All the tunes are well put together and there's no self-indulgent nonsense or filler. We're also proud that it's very stylistically distinct from other bands in our genre.

How did you come up with your band's name?

It reflects our stripped down, fast style.

What conditions do you require in your life in order to go on being creative?

Inspiration comes from being exposed to new perspectives. This means we need to keep putting ourselves in new situations and continue to take risks.

What do you feed your creativity? Are there any books, films, or albums that have deeply influenced you?

Drew's favorite movie is *On the Waterfront* from 1954. It's got really tight storytelling, great characters, and an unpretentious message of toughness that is very rare in modern culture.

If you had an artistic mission statement, what would it be?

Write great songs, strip them down, play them fast.

What do you think Donald Trump would have to say about your music?

He would probably suggest a complete ban on The Split Seconds until we figure out what the hell is going on. Wanda also writes the blog [The Mindful Bard](#): *The Care and Feeding of the Creative Self*.

The End

Deanna Roney



The last essay for the last undergrad course at AU—after four years I expected the submission button to become easier to press. This proved to be wildly inaccurate. My final essay was, at least to memory, the most difficult to send. I was closing the door on a chapter of my life, and a chapter that had consumed me completely. I learned many things from my studies, some academic, of course, but many personal, and even more social.

Submitting this assignment has proved the most contradictory. I am excited to be moving forward, I am feeling ready to close this chapter and move on, and yet I feel a sadness at the closure which sending that essay meant. I am proud that I made it to the deadline to attend convocation, and yet it is still completely surreal: I don't allow myself to believe it until the paper is returned, the final mark is in, and invitation received.

I understand the need to have a few steps between uploading an assignment and submitting the assignment, but do we need so many? As I progressed through the all too familiar steps of assignment submission my heart pounded a little harder with each step. I stopped and debated (as usual) at the step where it asks, again, "are you sure?" *Is it done? Is it ready?* Knowing that even if I didn't submit it all I would do is continue to incessantly edit: take out a comma, put comma back; change one word, add an "ly" adverb and remember the rule and rush back to find it and remove it before anyone suspects it's there.

The submission of my first essay came with many of the same emotions. Though the doubt and fear were of a different kind. It was the beginning of a long journey, and one then that I was not sure I could see the end of. With the submission of that first assignment I was a student, it was official and there would be no backing down from it. I knew then that I would be diving headlong into stress, excitement, misery, elation, every emotion you can think of is one likely felt on this adventure. It is surprising that the final assignment submission also comes with a mixed bag of emotions. I expected to feel excited, relieved, and proud. And while I do, I did not expect the uncertainty or the surreal-ness.

Perhaps my time here is not yet complete; but my time with my undergrad degree is (barring that assignment actually needing more editing than I gave it). AU provides a wonderful experience, even if they make you press "submit" several times for each assignment. I suppose it is better than uploading it, pressing submit, and only then remembering you forgot to add your list of references.

Deanna Roney is an AU student who loves adventure in life and literature



Feet First

Have you tried to buy runners lately? Let me rephrase that. Have you tried to buy walkers; runners; cross-trainers; or shoes for basketball, golf, tennis; or casual and lifestyle shoes; hiking and outdoor shoes; skate shoes; indoor court shoes; and shoes with cleats?

God help us all. I was in Sportchek® the other day and there were shoes as far as the eye could see. I didn't even attempt to navigate the women's section myself. A 'consultant' came along to help me.

Normally I buy my shoes where I get my orthotics. It has a smaller inventory and well-trained staff who would rather lose a sale than sell me the wrong thing. But it never hurts to see what's out there. So I found myself in three different stores.

My needs are few but not necessarily simple. A shoe with support and heel cushioning that can accommodate my orthotic. Like with most products on the market there are seasonal launches of new models and colours. Much hype usually ensues whether the changes are revolutionary or merely cosmetic. Stores then need to clear out old stock to make way for the new and improved. A shrewd shopper who doesn't mind wearing last year's colour can save a hundred dollars on a pair of shoes.

Ultimately I saved about forty dollars on a pair of Saucony Grid Exites. Let's face it, no one is watching *me* for the latest fashion trends. If it were so, I might have bought a pair of Reeboks whose top looks like a macramé project or a pair of blue and chartreuse Asics.

I'm tickled with the silvery grey, hints of hot pink, and purple shoelaces in the pair I ended up with. Expressing our personality with shoes is harmless fun. To be sure I've got the right ones, structurally, I'm wearing them in the house to see if they

ease my heel pain.

As if shopping for runners wasn't traumatic enough I tried on pair after pair of Vionics at other stores. Vionics with orthaheel technology advertise a cushioned heel cup and contoured arch to combat pronation (inward rolling of the foot). With summer approaching I wanted a pair of flip-flops or dress shoes to get me through the season relatively pain-free. Birkenstocks are good but aren't going to win any beauty pageants. I was hoping to find pumps. No luck. I did end up with a pair of black, three-strap wedge sandals that are surprisingly comfortable. I still might buy a pair of flip-flops for short wearings. The toe-clenching required to keep them on is a turn-off and exhausting. No one, but no one ever recommends flip-flops as a good footwear choice but these are the lesser of two evils. Cushioning and some arch support lessen the harm. Some styles are even quite cute. Take it from someone who knows: it's never too early to start taking care of your feet, from where I sit.

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

ACE INHIBITOR

IN:

SAVE THE BORDER GUARDS!

But do the border guards really NEED your protection, suh?

Are you kidding me, Farthingham? Haven't you seen the news reels of the refugees storming the borders?



WRITTEN BY
WANDA
WATERMAN

The refugees have lost their homes, possessions, family members, and friends, and they're risking their lives in a bid to escape sure death!



Great shining billy clubs! You're right, Farthingham! The real victims are the police and military!



Were you listening, suh?

The border guards have homes, paycheques, and all the rights and privileges of full citizens!



Besides which, they can count on full support from military and police.



Hold my calls, Farthingham! ACE INHIBITOR is headed to the border to lay some refugee smackdown!



This space is provided free to AUSU: The Voice does not create this content. Contact services@ausu.org with questions or comments about this page.

AUSU Council Changeover Meeting & Second Reading of Bylaw Changes

AUSU's April council meeting is coming up on April 14, 2016.

This meeting will include the **council changeover** in which our new council officially "takes office". To find out who our new council is, visit our website [here](#).

The meeting will also include the second reading of the proposed **changes to the AUSU bylaws**, in which they will be adopted if there is a 2/3 majority vote in favour. The bylaw changes are being proposed as required by law to bring them into alignment with the Post-secondary Learning Act. You can find out more about the bylaw changes online [here](#).

The meeting agenda will be posted on our website [here](#) at least 3 business days prior to the meeting.

If you would like the entire meeting package, just drop a line to admin@ausu.org.

Date: April 14, 2016

Time: 4:30pm MDT



Council Meeting



IMPORTANT DATES

- **April 10:** Deadline to register in a course starting May 1
- **April 14:** Council changeover meeting & second reading of bylaw changes
- **April 15:** May degree requirements deadline
- **April 29:** May course extension deadline
- **April 30:** Deadline to apply for 2016 Convocation
- **May 6:** Deadline to complete coursework for Convo'16

AU is Sticking Around!

Good news everyone! We know there has been controversy lately about the sustainability issues at Athabasca University, and we want to reassure everyone!

On April 5, AUSU Executives and AUGSA Executives met with the Alberta Minister of Advanced Education.

There were 3 items on the agenda:

1. The uniqueness and importance of AU.
2. Funding to AU and the detriment of uncertainty.
3. Be our guest at convocation at AU.

The discussion was robust, informative, and overall positive. During the course of the meeting, the Minister said: **"AU will not be shut down."**

For more information, don't hesitate to contact the AUSU President at president@ausu.org.



From left to right: AUSU Executive Director Sarah Cornett, AUGSA VP Academic Teagan Gahler, AUSU VP Finance Brandon Simmons, Minister of Advanced Education Honourable Marlin Schmidt, AUSU President Shawna Wasylyshyn, Executive Director of the Dept. of Advanced Education David Williams. (Not shown: AUSU VP External Colleen Doucette).

AUSU Bylaw Revisions Background



Hello AUSU members!

As some of you may know, AUSU is in the process of updating our bylaw amendment process, which we are required to do in order to bring them into alignment with the [Post-secondary Learning Act](#) (PSLA) - the legislation that governs student associations in Alberta.

Last year, AUSU was made aware that the amendment procedures currently outlined in the AUSU bylaws did not comply with the PSLA. AUSU bylaws currently state that an amendment to the bylaws may only be done through a special resolution (a vote of the membership). However, the PSLA legislation mandates that bylaw creation and amendment is the sole responsibility of council, which is comprised of the members elected by the membership to manage the students' union and represent the membership.

As soon as AUSU found out there was a possible legal conflict in our bylaws, we set to work making sure the correct steps were taken to address this issue. AUSU contacted the Alberta Advanced Education department to seek out advice. We have since developed a relationship with the Minister of Advanced Education, but they advised AUSU that the Ministry cannot provide legal interpretation of the PSLA. They confirmed that the PSLA provides the council with the authority to make its own bylaws which cannot be contrary to the PSLA, and they advised AUSU to seek out a legal opinion. AUSU also contacted legal counsel for an official legal opinion, and also spent several months conducting extensive research.

Our legal counsel stated that:

- Council must vote to ratify every change ever done to the bylaws under the old process, in order to make the changes legal (*since they were previously voted in by the membership, not AUSU council*).
- Council must amend the bylaws to show that amendment may only be done by a vote of AUSU Council, who is the highest governing body of AUSU, and per the PSLA Section 95 (1) and (2) we cannot delegate that authority to the membership.

We can understand the process is a bit confusing, although the current bylaws state the changes must be made by a vote of the membership, we are legally required to change this part of the bylaws by a vote of council as that is mandated by the PSLA. The Post-secondary Learning Act expressly delegates the power to make or change bylaws to council, and, as per our legal counsel, this is subject to the legal principle "*delegatus non potest delgare*", which means, simply put, that the responsibility cannot be delegated to the membership.

AUSU has also conducted a tremendous amount of research among student associations across Canada, and in particular among those also governed by the PSLA. Our research determined that most other Alberta student associations conduct bylaw changes by a vote of council in keeping with the PSLA. However, there was a variety of processes for keeping the membership involved and aware of the changes. Some have consultations with the membership, some provide notice periods, and some require two readings and larger majority votes of council to adopt changes.

In order to make our process as collaborative and transparent as possible, AUSU decided to incorporate **all four steps** into the bylaw change process. As such, AUSU is providing:

- Two consultations with our membership,
- Two readings of the motion proposing the bylaw changes,
- A minimum of 21 days' notice of the first reading of the motion, **and**
- A 2/3 majority vote of council to pass both readings.

In order to begin the revision process, AUSU passed a motion during the February 11, 2016 council meeting outlining the proposed bylaw amendments to bring them in line with the PSLA (which can be read in full online [here](#)). This motion was passed unanimously by council.

AUSU also scheduled two member consultations in February, as well as posted a bylaw forum for our members to ask questions or provide input online. We held the first reading of the motion during the March council meeting on March 10, 2016. The second reading of the motion is scheduled for our April council meeting on April 14, 2016. We notified all of our members about all of the steps being taken by email on February 18, as well as posted it to our website and social media, ensuring we provided at least 21 days notice prior to the first reading.

Since we value our member's opinions, AUSU has made every effort to be transparent about the proposed changes and has provided numerous ways to gain feedback from the membership, answer any questions, and to ensure that going forward, the bylaw revision process is as collaborative as possible while still in keeping with legislation.

If you wish to observe the second reading of the proposed bylaw changes, it is scheduled for the April council meeting on **April 14, 2016 at 4:30pm MST**. The meeting agenda will be posted on our website [here](#) the week prior to the meeting.

In addition, if you have any comments or questions, please feel free to contact AUSU at executivedirector@ausu.org.

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THE VOICE

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