

THE

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BEST OF 2016



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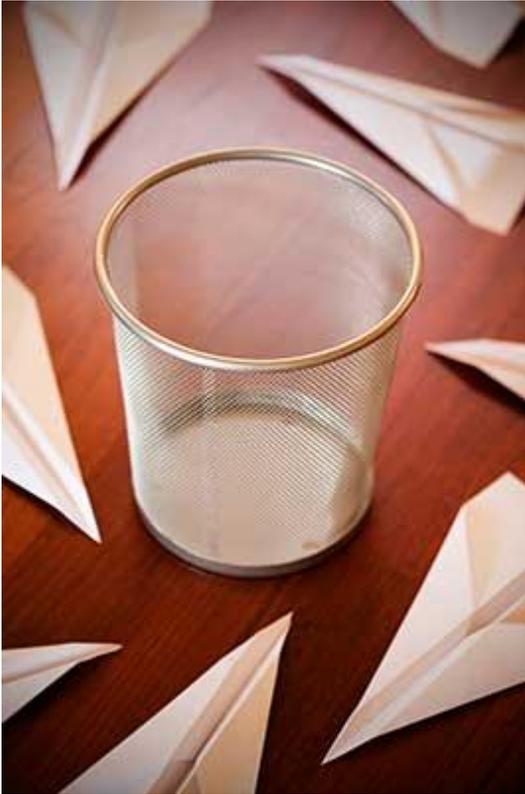
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



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**Karl Low****Getting off to a Good Start**

One more trip around the sun complete, we again take a moment to take a look at our lives, see our many faults, and vow to do better. It seems odd that we'd reserve such behavior for a single day each year, in the depths of winter when the nights are near their longest. Maybe it's because we don't want anybody else to see us as we do so. That would also explain the drinking.

And even though most of those resolutions don't make it through the year--or even the week—it's a bit of hopefulness in the face of the realization of what's gone before. Personally, I resolved to spend more time with creative writing each day. I promised myself that I would start small, seeking to write only five hundred words of creative writing each day. It's now the 6th of January, and as I look at my total, I'm already a thousand words short. But that doesn't mean I can't be hopeful that maybe tomorrow, over the weekend, I'll catch up with my total and perhaps even get a bit ahead.

This is also the time of year where you'll find a lot of retrospectives, as we all try to make sense of what just happened, so that we'll be better prepared for the future. That's where this issue of *The Voice Magazine* comes in. Not only does it let us feature some of the best

writing from AU students over the past year, it works as a great primer for the kind of material that we like to feature here in *The Voice Magazine*.

Almost every article in this issue was nominated by a student very much like you. There were also a lot more that were nominated that I didn't put in, usually because another nomination covered the same area of what we do here at *The Voice Magazine* in a slightly better fashion. There are also one or two that I chose myself, just to make sure that our "Best Of" issue is one that exemplifies the full range of the kinds of things we published over the past year, and, if you ask me, it looks like it was a pretty good year. If we ever get around to doing a "Best of the 'Best Of issues'", I think this one will be a strong contender. I've tried to add a little insight to each article included here, giving some background on why it was selected. If you disagree, think that something else would have been a better example, or just think there was something I missed, let me know. After all, to be a better magazine for you, we need to know what you like – and don't.

However, doing this issue reminds me of some of the writers that have moved on. Whether they graduated and have gone on to other things, or simply became too busy to be able to put together a new article, it means that *The Voice Magazine* is always looking for fresh material, or even just a fresh look at an old column. In particular, I realized that we haven't had a Course Exam in quite a while, nor an interview with AU staff, or a music review. All of these are, I think, important aspects of *The Voice Magazine*, so if you're a person who's interested in doing the work to put something like this together, get in touch with me at voice@voicemagazine.org and I'll be happy to see if we can work something out.

Beyond that, next week we're back to normal, with all original material for AU students by AU students. Until then, however, enjoy the read!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karl".

MINDS WE MEET



Amanda Gillis is an AU student and a life-long resident of Calgary AB. She is in the Bachelor of Arts program at AU with a double major in History and Anthropology. Ultimately, Amanda plans to be an elementary school teacher.

The Voice Magazine recently interviewed Amanda, and here's what she had to say about school, Brownies, and Jane Austen.

Besides school, what do you do?

I'm a Brownie leader. I've been in Guiding since I was young and I've received my 20-year pin. I took a break from Guiding for a while, but got back in around five years ago. When a new Brownie unit was formed in my area, I jumped at the chance to be a Brownie leader. I'm looking forward to leading our pack on a camping trip in five weeks.

Why did you choose AU for your studies?

Mainly for the flexibility, which allows me to take temporary work assignments. It also gives me the opportunity to participate in extra Girl Guide activities, and visit my fiancé at his farm in Minnesota. Also, I'm due for some knee surgery

soon so I can't take regular classes and chance that I'll need surgery in the middle of a semester.

When I began my program at AU, I was originally majoring in History. I began filling up the blank spots in my course requirements with Anthropology courses. After a few anthropology courses, I looked into it and realized I could add Anthropology to History as a double major.

What do you do like to do when you're not studying?

In addition to Guiding, I like geo-caching, and I take my dog, Sprocket, along. I do cross-stitching and crochet. I also participate in Postcrossing, which involves sending postcards to people all over the world, and receiving postcards back. On the Postcrossing.com site, people register and then are assigned five random addresses to send postcards to. You mail those out and the receivers register them on the Postcrossing site. As each card is registered, random participants worldwide are assigned to send postcards to you, and you can receive more addresses to send cards to. The number of cards you can send and receive increases once you become a regular postcarder. Since I registered to participate five or six years ago, I've received about 700 postcards from all over; the most unusual place was Uzbekistan.

Who in your life had the greatest influence on your desire to learn?

My Dad. He went back to school when I was eight years old. He got a degree in History, then a teaching degree. Even after that he was always learning. Recently, he went to AU to get his Master of Distance Education.

Although our programs and courses are quite different, we have a friendly competition to see who gets the higher marks on assignments.

What famous person, past or present, would you like to have lunch with, and why?

Jane Austen. I am completely obsessed with her. I have all her books. I have to keep buying copies of *Pride and Prejudice* because I re-read the book so often the spine cracks and the pages fall out. My fiancé bought me a beautiful hardcover copy, but I'm afraid to open it—I don't want to damage it.

My second choice for lunch would be Lucy Maud Montgomery. As with Jane Austen, I have all her books and the movies based on the books. I re-read the books and re-watch the movies often. When I'm studying, I sometimes put one of the movies on. I find having it playing in the background has a calming effect.

Describe your experience with online learning. What do you like? Dislike?

I love the freedom. If I have an appointment, or if something is going on in Girl Guides, it's easy to get away from school work. And I can study anywhere: I've even studied on a beach in Hawaii. What I don't like is e-texts, especially since I've already paid for a full text in my course fees. I'm a tactile learner and I prefer a physical textbook. Reading an e-text makes it so easy to get distracted online, too.



The results of Postcrossing

Have you had a time when you wavered about your education?

Yeah, when I was at SAIT (Southern Alberta Institute of Technology.) I couldn't decide what I wanted to take. I switched focus four times before deciding what I really wanted to do. I started in the hotel restaurant management program at SAIT, then later switched to business administration. I liked business but I knew I didn't want to be behind a desk all the time. I took a break from school, and when I decided to return I was accepted into the library tech studies. Ultimately I decided to focus on history and anthropology.

It was Brownies that helped me to decide. Leading the younger girls—seven-to-eight year olds—I could see that they really wanted to learn. It's been fun watching them go from where they were at the beginning of the year to now; they've really grown in confidence. Leading Brownies really got me thinking about being a teacher because I can apply my Brownie experience to teaching.

What was your most memorable AU course?

History 215, which I'm working on now. I'm just finishing the unit on Ancient Greece and it's been fascinating. There's just so much I didn't know. For example, the Greeks had an atomic theory in 450 BC!

If you won \$20 million in a lottery, what would you do with it?

I'd move to Hawaii and say goodbye to snow-shoveling. I'd finish my AU degree, then get my Masters in Anthropology and Archaeology. Conveniently, the University of Hawaii has that program (and AU doesn't.)

What have you given up to go to AU that you regret the most? Was it worth it?

I don't think I've given up anything. Maybe some cross-stitching time.

If you were the new president of AU, what would be your first project?

Get rid of e-texts! That would be job number one. Then I'd develop a Masters program in Anthropology and Archaeology.

What is your favourite sound?

My Brownies having the time of their lives. We recently arranged a "lateover" (at which the girls stay late but they don't sleep over) and we took the pack out for pizza and then to Build-a-Bear. They had the best time ever, building teddy bears and showing each other their creations. The laughter was incredible.



Amanda's Blanket of Badges

What is your most prized possession?

My Guiding camp blanket. It has 20 years of crests on it—all hand sewn on. The crests on my blanket are from different camps and events I've attended. Some were my mother's when she was in Guiding and some I've traded with other Guiders or had given to me when they went on trips or as a thank you. I've got about 130 crests on the blanket and 10 more waiting to be sewn on. My blanket is a treasure and I'd be heartbroken if anything happened to it.

What is the most valuable lesson you have learned in life?

Don't take yourself too seriously. Laugh at your mistakes. Don't care too much what others think about you.

How do you find communications with your course tutors?

Overall the experience has been pretty good. I've only had to switch tutors once. I'm quite independent but I try to stay in contact with my tutor throughout the course. It helps keep me accountable.

Where has life taken you so far, besides Hawaii?

I spent five weeks at Laval University in Quebec in the French language program, which I needed for work. I spent two glorious weeks in Italy where I traveled around the whole "boot." I've been to Paris, and I spent twelve weeks in Prague—I have family there. I visit Minnesota often to see my fiancé, and I make quick trips to Iowa to visit a cross-stitch store there.

What (non-AU) book are you reading now?

I just finished *The 5th Wave*, by Richard Yancey, a teen book. Next I'll read the second book of that series, *The Infinite Sea*.

--Requested by a student (not Amanda, in case you're wondering) I like this installment of Minds We Meet in part because of the extra pictures she submitted, but also because, to me, Amanda strikes as such a typical example of the extremely busy AU student. This one was from our Jan 22nd issue.

Truth and Reconciliation

Tamra Ross

Will Your Next University Program Have a First Nations' Content Requirement?



Truth and
Reconciliation
Commission of Canada

During a recent research project on students' unions in Canada I came upon a motion passed by the University of Saskatchewan Students' Union (USSU):

[Be it resolved] that the University of Saskatchewan Students' Union call on the University of Saskatchewan to

commit to implementing Indigenous content into the curriculum of every University of Saskatchewan College and degree. (USSU)

The motion was a surprise because I wasn't aware of the background, and curious to know if something similar had been considered at AU. After a little discussion with fellow students, it became clear that many of us need more information. But first, a little background information is needed:

In 2015 Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) released a series of reports on the enduring impact of residential schools in Canada; these included a number of [Calls to Action](#) for government, educators, health care providers, and the legislators to help "advance the process of Canadian reconciliation" for Canadian First Nations' peoples, which comprise more than 600 bands and about 4.3% of the Canadian population ([from the 2011 census](#)).

The Calls to Action include many points directed toward post-secondary education, including requests to:

- Repeal Section 43 of the criminal code of Canada (which protects parents and teachers who physically punish children using "reasonable force")
- Develop strategies to eliminate educational and employment gaps between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians
- Eliminate funding discrepancies affecting First Nations' children accessing education on and off reserves, and provide funding to end the "backlog of First Nations' students seeking a post-secondary education"
- Take measures to improve education attainment and success of First Nations' students
- Provide culturally appropriate curricula including post-secondary courses in First Nations' languages, to support the preservation of language and culture.

(Paraphrased from the TRC Calls to Action)

Saskatchewan has taken a lead in addressing the TRC recommendations for post-secondary learning; in November, 2015 executives for all 24 post-secondary schools in the province met with aboriginal leaders to examine "how universities can respond to the ... TRC calls to action for post-secondary education" ([USask News](#)). The summit resulted in an accord thought "to be the first province-wide commitment of its kind in Canada." University of Saskatchewan president, Peter Stoicheff, commented that U of S is "committed to strengthening our efforts across the institution to ensure the success of our Aboriginal faculty, students and staff, and to working together with other post-secondary partners provincially and nationally to rebuild some of the trust that has been lost in the educational system and advance reconciliation" ([USask News](#)).

The USSU motion came as a response to these comments, but what is most interesting is that it goes a step further than the TRC goals and asks for First Nations' content not only to be available to U of S students, but to be incorporated into every degree the university offers. The goal of the motion is to bridge "the gap in education and in general between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people, ... and [combat] stereotypes, prejudice and racism [while giving] ... indigenous students a sense of belonging, identity and culture that" was lost through the residential school system and colonization (USSU).

AU and the TRC goals

To learn more about the issues, and AU's response to the task force, I had a preliminary interview with Priscilla Campeau, chair and program administrator of the AU Centre for World and Indigenous Knowledge and Research (CWIKR), and Dr. Maria Campbell, AU's Elder in Residence. CWIKR currently offers 23 undergraduate courses and 1 graduate course, and two business degrees with a focus on indigenous nations and organizations. Among the courses are two on the Cree language which are offered as group study (in person) offerings.

At this time, AU doesn't offer an arts degree in Indigenous Education, but I'm told that one is in the works. There is no estimated date on when it will be offered. A lack of funding is the main cause of the delay but it seems to be a glaring omission from the program offerings given AU's apparent status as a school with a strong First Nations focus (more on that later).

We spoke about many issues related to the TRC and AU's indigenous content offerings, and I learned a great deal about the current status of AU's indigenous content and how it might adopt the TRC recommendations. The following overview should help students get up to speed about pending changes to Canadian post-secondary education in light of the TRC review.

Preserving languages with a verbal history

Toward the goal of preserving languages, AU offers two grouped (in-person) courses in Cree studies: the choice of language is based on the location of the main AU campus. Other universities offer First Nations' languages relevant to their locales (there are 60 or more indigenous languages reported across Canada). While all of these courses are of value, students today would have to take courses from a number of schools to get a good overview of the various indigenous languages in Canada. There is no university in Canada currently offering a comprehensive degree in indigenous languages. Another problem is that AU's Cree offerings may not be as useful for students who are studying at AU from other provinces where the dominant aboriginal languages differ; there is a clear need for broader language coverage either at AU or through coalitions with schools across

History of residential schools and the NCTR:

- *In the span of 150 years, over 15,000 First Nations' children were required to attend residential schools established by Canadian government and churches to aid in the "assimilation" of aboriginal children. Families were granted little to no access to their children.*
- *Children in the schools were denied their cultural heritage and language, and many were sterilized to limit the First Nations' population.*
- *Many children who attended the schools never returned to their families.*
- *The history of sexual, emotional and physical abuse in these institutions is well-documented.*
- *At least 6,000 children died while attending the schools.*
- *The last residential school closed in 1996.*
- *In 2008 Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued a public apology to First Nations in Canada.*
- *In 2009 the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) was began the lengthy process of documenting outcomes of the residential school system, and developing guidelines and recommendations to being the healing process.*

the country. The current offerings tend to be focused on teaching the language for use; there are few (or no) courses focusing on critical analysis of First Nations' stories or writing. An interesting challenge is that there are few people qualified as experts in formally teaching First Nations' languages: this issue is likely to persist until there is an increased pool of indigenous language scholars to offer inquiry and development into improved language instruction. Because much of indigenous history is based on verbal communication, there are limited written resources to which scholars can refer.

For my own interest, I did some research to find out how someone could learn First Nations' languages in Canada outside of the university system. At this time, neither Rosetta Stone nor duoLingo (two major language learning software packages: the latter is free) offer any indigenous languages. Further, while the ATPN network in Canada runs some shows with indigenous language content, Dr. Campbell notes that the subtitles are typically word-for-word translations that fail to account for the structure of the language; as a result, the translations are often difficult, if not impossible, to decode. At present, there are no easily-accessible resources to help Canadians learn First Nation' languages, and this issue must be addressed to achieve the goal of language preservation. I'm told that a language software company from the U.S. has been in contact with CWIKR about developing indigenous language courses, so there is a clear interest and it is possible one will be offered in the future. DuoLingo (which is an excellent resource in general) does not have any indigenous languages on its list of modules in development: curious, considering that it is 21% done development on a language course in Klingon (yes, Klingon).

Adding indigenous content

Regarding the initiative to include indigenous content in all university programs, no one – not USSU, University of Saskatchewan, or AU's CWIKR team – are certain at this point how it would work, if indeed it does become a reality. It could mean that increased indigenous content may be included in existing courses where appropriate, or, students could be required to take a specific course, such as AU's Indigenous Studies 203. Several AU courses outside of the CWIKR department already include indigenous content, including many of the anthropology courses and several from the English department. It is not likely that this requirement would be grandfathered into degrees in progress, but at this time any details are merely conjecture.

Currently, though, all of the courses offered by the CWIKR department are taught by First Nations' instructors. The department has the smallest budget of AU's centres and a very small faculty, but offers a wide range of courses to about 200 students at any given time. There is considerable room to build new content toward both the goal of an Indigenous Arts degree and increased indigenous content at AU overall.

Funding, of course, remains a major issue but there are increasing reasons for students to ask for this content, beyond the obvious benefits of enhancing our knowledge and understanding of one of the fastest growing populations in Canada. The government of Canada, the Provinces, and the Colleges and Universities of Canada are taking the TRC recommendations very seriously, and this has resulted in an increase in jobs available for people with the knowledge and skills to help with implementation. Many people working in government are also increasingly accessing First Nation's language training to help them with their jobs. There are likely a number of additional opportunities that will arise from implementation of the TRC asks, for students who have education in First Nation's languages, issues, and history.

At this time, there is much to learn about how Canada will adopt the recommendations of the TRC, and how it will affect post-secondary education in the country. It is, however, important that students learn more and understand the changes that may be coming. For those who are not aware of Canada's history of residential

schools and their impact on indigenous populations, see the sidebar for a short history.

An oft-asked question

I also had an opportunity to ask Dr. Campbell and Ms. Campeau about an issue that, in my experience, has long been puzzling to AU students: that is, AU's use of indigenous symbols and presumed status as a First Nations' school. The confusion stems from AU's inclusion of significant First Nations' content in its convocation ceremonies, including the prominent inclusion of the Ceremonial Mace, annual booking of First Nations' entertainers, and the use of indigenous animal symbols in the new University coat of arms. Yet, AU actually has a very small First Nations' student population (exact numbers are impossible to determine since AU does not ask First Nations' students to declare their status), despite ties to the University of the Arctic (curiously, AU still lists this collaboration on its web site, yet UArctic no longer lists AU as a supporter) and collaborative classes at several northern First Nations' schools. Dr. Campbell explained this apparent discrepancy: AU's main campus is in Treaty 8 territory, and in accordance with tradition offers recognition and thanks to the indigenous people of the region for hosting the university. I note that students have long expressed curiosity about this; it is clear that AU needs to better inform students of its relationship to northern peoples.

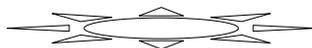
It is likely, though, that the TRC recommendations will empower many schools to increase resources in the development of indigenous content toward the goal of increasing university access and success of indigenous learners. AU seems uniquely poised to offer this content to learners across the country, and develop much richer First Nations' content.

Additional links:

[Truth and Reconciliation Committee](#)

[The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#)

-- I'm always a little bit unsure about putting Tamra's work in as part of a Best Of issue, because, really, I think everything she does deserves the label, that's part of why I married her. So, I could be a bit biased. Fortunately, it seems I'm not alone, as I had a few requests for this article, from our February 19th issue, to be included.



Fly on the Wall The Chattering Class

Jason Sullivan



While walking for a study break I looked up and noticed five squirrels silently scampering along a mesh of branches above my head. After hearing so much spring squirrel ruckus in recent weeks their stealthy passage came as a surprise. "Hmm," I thought, "perhaps I'm seeing another side of squirrels." Maybe all conflict contains more than mere repetitive argumentation; perhaps there is potential for the discovery of new joys within old preconceptions. It could be that litigious interactions contain possibilities for actual pleasure. Social media, at present, seems rife with strife as everyone within and without post-secondary education has an opinion on

political events down south. Perhaps if we take a step back some more pleasant realities can emerge from fractious discourse.

Whether it's nuts or numerology, the truth cannot be pinned down like a butterfly in an insect collection. And even if it could, would we want it to? "We murder to dissect" intoned the poet William Wordsworth (Wordsworth, online). In life, and learning, we seek to gather data that will bring us to certainty. Yet, as David Hume once stated, "knowledge resolves itself into probability" (Hume, online). That the sun will probably rise tomorrow is not the same as knowing with absolute conviction that it will. Hume also reminds us of something we know all too well when we furtively and with dismay read the comments in online discussion about political events of the day: "reason is, and ought only be, the slave of the passions" (Hume, online). Beneath the desire for truth lies a vigorous, yet perhaps unreasonable, desire for certainty. The silent troupe of squirrels reminded me that, although they are known most for their chatter, their essence is perhaps much more. Perhaps the essence of our studious inquiry into truth, and voracious desire to acquire knowledge, is based more on a joyous hope for a new mental intimacy than on a litigious impulse to quash all opposition.

Roland Barthes, in *The Pleasure of the Text*, suggests a flirtatious approach to learning and conflict. Like wild animals tussling and testing their boundaries as they pursue potential mates, he asks us to consider how the space between obvious reference points drives us forward in our interactions. Arguments that devolve into mudslinging and personal attacks miss this point entirely. Barthes states that "the most erotic portion of a body is where the garment gapes" and suggests that "the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing" attracts us far more than the clothing itself (Barthes, 1973, p.9) Just as online litigants often appear similar to naked emperors waving sceptres to and fro, Barthes leads one to consider that beneath superficial differences may lay a similarity that actually binds combatants together. Backstage, as it were, we are all squirrels who run along in the same direction because we share the same basic desires of body and mind.

Conflict, then, becomes a kaleidoscope of self-expression rather than a churning morass of clashing ideas. Barthes succinctly states that "conflict is nothing but the moral state of difference; whenever (and this is becoming frequent) conflict is not tactical (aimed at transforming a real situation), one can distinguish in it the failure-to-attain-bliss, the debacle of a perversion crushed by its own code and no longer able to invent itself: conflict is always coded, aggression is merely the most worn-out of languages." (Barthes, 1973, p.15). As soon as we forget the playful nature of jousting with words, our interactions become animated tropes for which there is no referent in our shared natures as human beings. If opponents disrespect each other, as happens so often in social media, we become less than squirrels who, in the end, assert their differences along the same common denominator of acquiring the means to life. In as a backdrop to interactions, Barthes asks us to "let difference surreptitiously replace conflict." (Barthes, 1973, p.15).

Besides asserting that within conflict we may discover shared terrain, Barthes also suggests that there is pleasure to be found in the struggle of learning itself. Who hasn't battled with an essay and ended up hating it, at least for a time? Barthes firmly intones that we may achieve a kinder, gentler interaction with a text we are reading. He introduces a word: *brio*, meaning vigor and vivacity, and applies it in terms of Nietzsche's conception of life as being based on a "will to power". "The brio", says Barthes in terms of a text, "is its will to bliss: just where it exceeds demand, transcends prattle, and whereby it attempts to overflow, to break through the constraint of adjectives—which are those doors of language through which the ideological and the imaginary come flowing in" (Barthes, 1973, p. 42). Texts don't want us to hate them, they just want to be understood.

We may see shards of ourselves reflected in a text, even one so turbid that we just wish for the clarity of something we would prefer to read. Faced with a frustrating tome, Barthes asks us to don our Nietzschean

animal suits and ask "always the same question: What is it for me?" (Barthes, 1973, p.13). Jurgen Habermas would here note that we each inhabit a personal "lifeworld" which imparts meaning to us according to our social conditions; it's important to realize that each of our lifeworlds are different (Habermas, online). Whether it's a difficult text or an adversarial person, we may find things to enjoy and relate to and maybe learn more about ourselves if we genuinely seek personal meanings.

To find pleasure in interaction with unwieldy course material or with prickly humans, we need only find a tiny fissure through which may shine the light of commonality. Here Barthes introduces a term *tmises* which means 'to cut' as in, along a seam (Barthes, 1973, p.42). When faced with a monolithic opponent of any type, he asks us to find "the seam between them, the fault, the flaw ... the dissolve which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss." (Barthes, 1973, p.41). There's more to a squirrel than a woodland full of chattering and scrapping, and there can be more to challenging coursework or social media warriors than meets the eye.

Beneath preconceptions new truths may arise which bring us closer to a version of our selves we are proud of. And really isn't that what education and self-development is all about? I can't think of a better outcome from my AU experience than learning to see the world and everything within it as part of a whole. Instead of an insatiable desire to be right we perhaps need to consider the underlying substrate of life itself, which somehow finds room for all oppositions. Martin Heidegger, in his considerations of the primordial nature of our being, wonders if "the opposition of correctness and incorrectness, validity and invalidity, may very well exhaust the oppositional essence of truth for later thinking and above all for modern thinking" (Heidegger, 2009, p.26). Beyond probabilities and certainties, and the desire for absolution from the ambiguities of life itself, lies the potential for us to learn and grow by interacting in new ways with the people and ideas around us.

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Jason Hazel-rah Sullivan is a Masters of Integrated Studies student who loves engaging in discourse while working in the sunny orchards and forests of the Okanagan.

-- Part of what makes The Voice Magazine different from many other student publications is that we're able to go beyond just covering the events and issues relating to AU and do things like interviews with fellow students and sometimes more philosophical or perhaps even academic explorations, as students expand their own horizons through their learning. Jason Sullivan's articles are along the latter variety, and I get a few votes for some of his articles each year. This time, it was this one from our March 25th issue that caught the attention of some. I think it's the squirrel reference, personally.

The Girl in the Pink Sweater

Carla Knipe



I see this girl, wearing the pink sweater. I look at the freckles and big eyes and remember growing up in an average small town and in an average family. That seemed like such a long time ago, but even now some of those memories of what she went through make my muscles tense and my stomach nauseous, because I know what happened to that girl just a couple of years after she was pictured in that pink sweater.

You see, that girl? That's me. And I was bullied. Not just the brunt of teasing, or teenaged mean-girl stuff. What I went through was far more vicious than that. It was being systematically and deliberately targeted over a period of years. I can't remember what started it all, but I know that once the bullying started, a cycle was set in motion that didn't stop. I became the joke of the school, the punching bag. And yes, I did try to tell people. Over and over again. But the answer I got was; it's not really so bad, everyone goes through it. It's just a phase they're going through. Just take your lumps. So I will never have the answers about why it happened to me or understand why no one stood up for me when they knew it was going on. That bit hurts the most.

Can I forgive? Perhaps. I don't want to guilt any of my classmates who I am in contact with now (thanks, Facebook) about what happened because I want to be the bigger person. And besides, what would be the point of dredging up the past? And if I dared to confront the perpetrators after all this time, I'm not even sure whether they would remember what they did, never mind care. But though that girl is now a woman, I can never forget. I remember everything that was done to me. I remember the pall of fear I felt every day going to school, wondering what fresh hell would be inflicted on me that day. I remember feeling that nobody cared about me or thought I mattered and therefore I didn't even deserve to be on this planet. My inner tape recorder continually played these messages and it took years of effort after the bullying stopped to create positive new ones. But the negative messages can never be fully erased, and they still occasionally pop up even now, when I'm in my 40s. I can never forget what happened because the bullying I experienced during my childhood and teenage years is an indelible part of my narrative of growing up. It will always be there, and perhaps something will always trigger those memories no matter how old I am.

Yes, I am a bullying statistic, but I survived. With the utmost effort of my entire being, I survived. I may not have a Ph.D or a successful career in the worldly definition of success, but I am proud to say that healing has happened. I never thought I'd find a partner and start a family, but I did, and my supportive husband and wonderful son have healed me. I have worked hard to create a safe home and loving family despite feeling the brunt of so much hate in my earlier life. I want to use my experience to encourage others and say to them, you can survive it too.

It's difficult to have that conversation. There is always that taboo. In the back of my mind, society still doesn't know what to call those who have experienced bullying, so I am labeled as a victim. As such, there are connotations. For one thing, being handed this label has taken a bit of my power away forever. Some of my

innocence and sparkle from the girl in the pink sweater was removed, and it can't ever be returned. I know that I can't just bring up the subject of my bullying at dinner parties or in casual conversation. I always fear being judged all over again, that people would say it was down to something I did or said that made my peers turn on me so viciously—or really, I shouldn't be bitter about it. But that is part of the "victim" label. It says that the bullies won, because my feelings became relegated to being not a big deal.

My son is now a bit older than that girl in the pink sweater, and I am so thankful that he has a strong self-esteem and is still carefree and innocent. Yet I worry about what he will encounter during his teenage years. I have not told him what happened to me. Maybe I will at some point. The best legacy I have to give him, despite my emotional scars, is to raise him with kindness, tolerance, acceptance, and love, and to encourage him to treat others the same. One thing that I am grateful for is that the Internet and cyberbullying did not exist when I was young. God only knows how that would've affected me if it had.

I am so glad that the cover is being lifted about bullying and that people are talking about it a little bit more than they once did. After all, bullying thrives in secrecy. It loves hiding in the dark corners, never daring to be spoken about, so the silence gives it the freedom to carry out its ugliness with impunity. Bullying is ultimately about holding power over a person and holding their spirit captive. It is about creating fear. Once that fear is gone, some of its power disappears.

To be honest, I have a lot of mixed feelings about Pink Shirt Day, a recent creation designed to stand up to and ultimately eliminate bullying. I see the sea of pink worn by both staff and students at the elementary school I work at. I wear my own pink shirt as a pledge to do my bit to stand up to bullying. But I am wary that Pink Shirt Day will reduce anti-bullying to something to "celebrate" one day out of the year. I worry that a pink shirt with jaunty slogans on them purchased from a corporate retailer will reduce the seriousness of bullying to just a catchphrase.

What I want to emphasize, in the midst of all the pink shirts, is that bullying is not just a concept. It is a face and a person. Both the one doing the bullying and the one who is the "victim" are real people. The sad thing is, despite the new awareness, bullying is still happening today--perhaps worse than ever now. Bullying still likes to hide and it is terribly crafty so it just gets pushed into other corners and finds dark new environments to thrive in. Social media is a great place for bullying to exist because there are so many methods to be virtually anonymous. And within the maze of cubicles in workplaces, bullying still finds a way to happen.

So how can bullying be stopped, if not by wearing pink shirts? The solution will be found when people stand up whenever they see its ugliness in action. It will be stopped when indifference to injustice ceases to be an option. It will be stopped when people adopt the mindset to willingly and consciously treat people with respect and

Something to think about:

- Canada ranked 26th and 27th out of 35 countries on measures of bullying and victimization. One of the reasons for this is our lack of a national campaign to address bullying problems.
- In about 85-88% of bullying incidents on the school playground, peers were present and watching. Peers spent 54% of the time watching the child who was bullying, 21% of the time joining in and only 25% of the time watching the victimized child.
- Adults who were bullied as children are more likely to suffer from depression in adulthood.
- 2 in 5 parents report their child has been involved in a cyberbullying incident; 1 in 4 educators have been cyber-harassment victims.
- 73% of educators are familiar with the issue and 76% believe cyberbullying is a very or somewhat serious problem at their school.
- Educators consider cyberbullying (76%) as big an issue as smoking (75%) and drugs (75%).
- 40% of Canadian workers experience bullying on a weekly basis

kindness in the big ways and (most importantly) the small ways--no matter what the environment and circumstances are. **It's ultimately about who each individual decides and chooses to be as a person.** Pink Shirt Day is not just for schoolchildren. It is for everyone, and we need to let everyday be our Pink Shirt Day.

References

<http://www.prevnet.ca>

<http://www.stopabully.ca>

<http://www.hbsc.org/publications/international/>

Many local and national organizations in Canada are recognizing the seriousness of bullying and are working to take action by implementing programs and strategies to educate citizens on the issues and assist those who have been affected by bullying. Among them are The Red Cross, Canadian Safe Schools, Pink Shirt Day as well as local school districts and chapters of the Canadian YMCA.

Carla loves paper. She has far too many books, compulsively buys craft supplies, has several boxes of cards and letters from years back years that she just cannot throw out, but feel free to say hi to her on Twitter @LunchBuster.

-- This article, from the February 26th issue of the Magazine, was both a student pick and Carla's own pick. This piece exemplifies some of what I think The Voice Magazine does so well, taking a serious topic, giving it serious thought, and melding that into the real experience of students of AU.



The Fit Student Managing Your Mind

Marie Well

End Depression; End Eating Disorders

Standing on the scale, I hit my target weight. Yet nothing feels different. I long to have that high—that feeling of exhilaration—that is supposed to happen when you skinny down. So, I aim for a lower weight—that is until I feel weak and lifeless, until I see a picture of a boney dying soul that could very well be me within a year or so. It's a turning point.

As a student, to perform at peak, you need a healthy mind and a healthy body. Whether you want to prevent eating disorders or depression, your life's purpose and your self-worth can help you overcome. The book *Managing Your Mind* by Gillian Butler and Tony Hope shows that weight doesn't change the inner you. And time for fun keeps you healthy.

Prevent Depression? Indulge in What You Love

Doesn't the idea of indulging seem kind of, well, self-absorbed? You bet it does, and you need to take lots of time during the day, like me, to get full of yourself: indulge in hot bubble baths, indulge in journaling for pleasure, indulge in shutting off that foul morning alarm for an extra thirty minutes of sleep. No shame in that.

More importantly, find out the activities you truly value and love and spend your time absorbed in them. I dream of becoming a PhD, so I read academic material daily to bring me closer to that goal. As another example, I love my boyfriend to Saturn's moons and back.

So, I spend as much time with him as possible. I also enjoy reading about mental health issues, as it seems I've been stricken by a number of them throughout my life: OCD, anxiety, PTSD—you name it. Taking daily time-outs for niceties keeps me strong.

In fact, by indulging in things you love, especially in things you value, you buffer yourself against depression, according to Butler and Hope. So, align your goals with your passions and with the tasks you do each day for enjoyment: it's as simple as that.

If you don't know your passions and values, then explore, inquire, seek them out. The more you do the things you love, the more likely your passions will tap you on the shoulder for some play time. Opportunities await the daily doer; and opportunities, passions, and goals quell the flames of depression.

Break Free from The Fat--Skinny Cycle

For most of my life, I struggled with weight. I played sports and ate well during my youth, but when I stopped engaging in physical activity, I resorted to excessive dieting. In one photograph of me on the beach of Hawaii at the age of about 21, my bones protruded from my flesh. Recalling that day in Hawaii, I shudder at the number of insults people hurled at me: "Bone wrack!" "Anorexic!"

When I began eating (and wow—did I ever eat), I gained almost eighty pounds within a four-year time frame. I appeared on the local news as a protestor, horrifically obese. I felt like crying. So, I started swimming regularly, timed my chewing rate with the second hand of a clock, and ate half my normal portions. Within a year of reaching my peak weight, I lost the eighty pounds. The only problem was that I returned to an anorexic state.

Eventually, with the influence of a dear friend, I started eating regularly and exercising voraciously. I exercised strenuously for hours daily, six days a week. I ate like a pig, too, yet stayed super lean. All of my money went to new clothes, frequent tailoring, or expensive makeup from The Bay. What a waste! (Now I hoard books, instead.)

Since then, my weight has fluctuated significantly more than once. Recently, I dieted to the point that my weight dropped to an unhealthy level. I started getting wobbly-kneed from lack of energy. I avoided eating. Someone pointed out a picture of a woman whose eating disorder spiraled and whose bones almost pierced through her skin, and the photo shocked me. I was fast-tracking to a similar state.

As a solution, I began reading books on anorexia. I learned in Butler and Hope's book *Managing Your Mind* that when we don't eat regularly (consuming just enough to stabilize weight), we often develop issues with obesity and anorexia or bulimia. Yet, the biggest takeaway was that we often think having control over our weight bolsters our self-esteem; the truth, however, suggests that no matter what weight we reach, we are still the same person. If I gain ten pounds, well, I'm still the same me. I used to think that the skinner I became, the better I was. Yet, every time I reached my weight goal, I felt like nothing changed. No fireworks went off in my head. No bands played. Neither did I jump on stage to be whisked away by John Travolta in a dance to the 70s band playing Xanadu. I was still the same me.

Now I eat more regularly, and don't eye the weigh scale on a daily basis. I feel freer than before. I manage to eat just enough to sustain my current weight. I found my set weight of 123 pounds, and I rarely sway more than six pounds away from that mark.

Regardless of what weight I'm at, I think I'm a kind and gentle person, and kindness and gentleness matter more than skipping breakfast, don't they? When I look in the mirror, whether I weigh 123, 110, or 180, I still see the same twinkle in my eyes and the same broad smile: the marks of spiritual beauty.

-- Many of our articles provide advice of one kind or another to students, whether that's on how to improve their academics, study habits, relationships, health, or even just state of mind. The Fit Student series of articles was one of these and ranged over a few of the areas, so it was nice to get a student recommendation for this one, from our April 1st issue, in particular.



Grandma

Barb Godin



Barb's Grandma

I still remember the feeling when I came home to Grandmas' house after an evening out with friends. The kitchen was softly lit with an under-the-counter fluorescent bulb, displaying a neat and orderly the kitchen. I could hear the low murmur of the television in the next room and I knew Grandma and Grandpa were watching television and, if it was a Sunday night, it would be Bonanza. I loved living here, I felt like I had finally found my forever home.

Grandma was small in stature, with white hair and smooth unlined skin. She suffered from a heart condition that prevented her from walking further than the house next door. Her back was curved with a Dowager's Hump that was so prevalent among older women at that time. My sister and I would jokingly tell her to straighten up and she would struggle to pull her shoulders back, but to no avail. As teenagers we just thought that is what happens to you when you get old. Grandma wore socks with sandals before it was

fashionable. She also wore flowered housedresses and always an apron. Very little jewelry adorned her except her ring finger which was a threadbare wedding band. She had not removed her ring for fifty-one years, as she believed that for each minute your ring was off your finger a tear would fall from your eye. Grandma and mom did not get along and I did not understand why, as to me Grandma was a wonderful, loving, caring woman, whom I loved tremendously.

I went to live with my grandparents when I was fourteen years old. My life up to that point had been fraught with neglect, abuse, and abandonment, and the social system was running out of options as to where to put me. At this time Grandma was 70 years old and had always taken care of my uncle, who had some issues of his own. I wasn't sure whether grandma would take me in when she was approached by the social worker, but she did without hesitation.

Grandma had a warm, loving nature and she cared deeply for all her family members. She taught me what true devotion for your family really meant. As I settled into the routine of having normal meals, a cozy home, and not having to listening to drunken people fighting all the time, I felt a peace within myself. I knew this was what

I wanted for my own life. Grandma not only cared for me, my sister, and my uncle, she also cared for Grandpa. His memory was failing and she did her best to fill in the time gaps and reassure him that everything was fine.

Saturday morning began as any other, as we all pitched in and did our chores, but something was different with Grandma. Several times I noticed her sitting on the sofa, obviously out of breath, anxiously twirling her fingers on the empty sofa cushion beside her. At one point I asked if she was alright, "Yes, Barb, I'm fine, just a little tired this morning." I was concerned, but then continued my cleaning. When we had finished our chores grandma was warming up soup and making grilled cheese sandwiches for us. I just assumed she was fine and my sister and I chatted during our lunch. After lunch my sister went out with her boyfriend while I met friends nearby. In the back of my mind I thought about grandma, but my thoughts were focused on my friends and having fun.

We all met at the neighborhood hang out and sat around drinking coke and laughing. Out of the corner of my eye I saw my neighbor walk through the door and head in my direction. "Can you come outside for a moment Barb?" I followed her out. "I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but your grandmother has passed away and I think you should come home to be with your grandfather." I could feel my breath catch in my throat! It can't be, they must be mistaken—oh no! Oh no! I sat silently in the car, feeling sick to my stomach and unable to talk.

As I walked through the door I saw Grandpa and Uncle Jack sitting at the kitchen table wiping tears away. Tears flooded my eyes as I hugged grandpa and he whispered in my ear, "How can we go on without her?" It was the saddest day of my life. How would I go on without grandma? Without the one who had saved me and given me my forever home? As in life, eventually we were all able to move on, however an irreplaceable hole was left in our lives.

Barbara Godin is a graduate of AU and writes the "Dear Barb" column. She lives in London, Ontario with her husband, two dogs, and one cat. She can be reached on twitter @BarbGod

-- Also from the February 19th issue, "Grandma" was the story by Barb Godin that was requested by the most students, it's a great demonstration of the heart-wrenching stories that might be hidden behind those electronic words you see on the screen. A reminder of the wealth of experiences that can affect AU students.



Understanding Our Fear

Deanna Roney



It seems that often what motivates us to do, or not do, something is fear: fear of missing out, fear of heights, fear of danger. Sometimes these fears are justified and keep us from doing things we do not want to do, and will serve no purpose for us. While this topic can be wide ranging, I am going to focus on a fear I think most afflicts students: the fear which comes with decision making. Students are faced with a myriad of choices, programs, courses, electives. These decisions are "life changing" as we are often told. "We are deciding our future" so, no pressure.

I have been bumping back my decision about whether to continue on to a master's degree or forge my own path for awhile. In this choice I have had to confront my fears and attempt to understand what was going to be the best choice for me, in this moment. I needed to consider what was motivating my decisions. What was my gut feeling (though this seemed to change with every breath). How can we know what our gut is telling us? How do we know which fear is motivating us and which is holding us back? Do we jump off the proverbial bridge, or keep our feet planted firmly on the ground?

Through my studies I came to understand how to question my motivations: me, or societal expectations? I learned to consider my thoughts and actively question why I think that way. When it came to making this decision though it was much more difficult. Wading my way through my fears and coming to understand which one to listen to was a challenge, more of a challenge than any similar I had faced before.

In both corners I had a fear of failure. I feared applying to an MFA and getting rejected, I feared getting accepted and learning I wasn't good enough. Pursuing writing without an MFA presented me with a fear that my writing would not be accepted. I feared I wouldn't get picked up and I would be forced to "face the music" early. I can't allow fear to dictate my choice, but which fear did I need to push beyond, and which was only a façade? Which was serving me no purpose but to make my decision more difficult?

When making these choices, no matter how hard we may try, no one will be able to tell us what to do. Some may try, but this is a choice we have to make ourselves. In my case, after months of consideration. I came to understand my fears, I took a critical look at both sides, and the feelings each gave me. I feared failing, this thing I am pursuing has been a dream of mine since I can remember. I started my BA because of this dream, and to quickly learn that it might not happen was too much. But an MFA, while I may pursue it in the future, will only prolong my debut into this world. And, in my gut, prolong the chance of failure, well, unless I got rejected from the master's program. But the MFA was giving me an out, a way to still be working toward my dream in the safety of a school-setting.

I told myself early I would not let fear stop me. I just needed to learn which fear was stopping me. As I let the thoughts percolate I understood that my fear, the one stopping me, was the fear that I would enter this world of publishing and writing, and flop. I felt like the choice about an MFA was one I needed to make now. I couldn't wait an extra year, or two, it was now, or never. But this is not the case. There is the possibility that I will lose some of the letters of recommendation offers I received near the end of my degree, that I may lose contact with some that offered to help. But, there will always be the option to go back, and to go back when I feel ready to take on a master's degree.

I have had my head buried in books for years and I need a moment to breathe. I learned from my late-start-BA that undertaking a degree when we better understand what we want means we get more out of it. So, right now I am facing my fear of stepping into the world of query letters, novel-writing, and pursuing publications. There may come a time when I choose to pursue an MFA. But, for now, I need to write, I need to find my voice; I need to face my deepest fear and step off the bridge.

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

-- This one received a few nominations. From our September 16th edition, I think this article made an impression on students not just because of the subject matter, but from how Deanna expresses it in a fashion that almost becomes poetry by the end.

The Travelling Student A Night on the Town

Philip Kirkbride



Update: It's been a while since I've sent in a travelling student article as my schedule got a bit hectic. A lot has happened since and I've had the chance to continue my travels in Thailand, Alaska, Quebec for a French immersion program, and Newfoundland where I recently finished a semester as a visiting student. I now have an apartment just outside Montreal and look forward to telling these stories of the course of 2016.

My name is Philip Kirkbride. I'm a college graduate from Ontario studying at AU. I've always wanted to do an exchange program or study abroad but never found the right time to do so. This is the story of how Athabasca University has allowed me to create my own study abroad program. In the last instalment we stopped in Byron Bay, Australia, for the night,

making our way to the main street for a night on the town.

Both being exhausted from our travels, and excited for a cold beer, Dylan and I headed into the first bar from the beach: a large patio bar—half indoor, half outdoors. After grabbing a beer we went to the outdoor half to enjoy the combination of music, beer, and beautiful scenery. With the Australian summer starting we weren't the only ones, though in Byron Bay the difference between summer and winter is just the difference between 'the water is perfect' and 'the water is almost perfect'.

By our second round we had joined three Australians, Jen, Sarah, and Kyle, at their table. Kyle and Sarah were a couple from Sydney who were meeting up with their friend, Jen, who'd moved to northern Australia. Dylan and I told our rag tag story of joining forces to get my rental RV and ourselves across the country. While Kyle told us of his experience taking a working Holiday in Canada living it up at Whistler and flying back to Sydney broke.

As we finished the last drops of our drinks it was decided we'd head to our new friends' hotel room for another round—or two. It was a nice place only a block behind Main Street. We sat up on the balcony drinking rum and laughing at anything and everything. At some point I agreed to get an Australian flag temporary tattoo. For the rest of the night we forgot of the journey ahead and the many hours of driving we'd have to do the next morning.

After we finished the rum we found ourselves with our new friends at Byron Bay's self-proclaimed backpacker bar, Cheeky Money. The bar is far from classy, as the 2.2 star rating on Google maps will tell you. Despite this, having the cheapest beers on the strip keeps it packed with young people from around the world. Playing a game of giant Jenga I even ran into the two German girls I had met in Sydney.

As the night went on the hours blurred until closing time, when the bouncers started kicking us out. It was only walking back to the RV ready to get some sleep that I remembered the distance we still had to drive (not to mention the mounting deadlines for class assignments). I jumped into the top bunk of the RV dreading the early morning ahead.

-- This, from January 22, is the last installment of The Travelling Student series of articles that we've received (to date.) A couple of students throughout the year have asked me if we'd ever see how Philip's trip ends, and the only thing I can say is, "I hope so."



Marie Well

Course Exam

AU courses, up close

English 255 – Introductory Composition

Adien Dubbelboer, an instructor in the English Centre for Humanities in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, is the Academic Coordinator for Effective Writing and the Course Coordinator for English 255, Introductory Composition. She was kind enough to set some time aside from her busy schedule to speak to The Voice Magazine about the course.

When was the last update of the course?

Adien: The course is currently in revision 7. It went into revision 7 in 2014, I think.

What was the process for getting the course made?

Adien: The course has been at AU for a long time, when I first started, students would sometimes send me handwritten work, which I would then mark and return. Eventually it's all gone online, of course. Since 2014, we are completely online, including the electronic textbook.

The course has not changed so much in its approach as it has changed in its format. The course that was initially created by David Brundage and Marian Allen, who is still a tutor, and has gone through various transitions over time. The first transition that I was involved with was revision 4. Revision 5 is where I started putting more and more things online. It initially went into Moodle as revision 6, which was the most dramatic change in the format and in the way we presented the information.

Revision 7 was just the addition of the electronic textbook.

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

Adien: Personally, I think that as long as the student is able to download the e-text to an iPad or a tablet, then the tablet starts to function like a book. It becomes a lot easier to flip through the e-textbook. If you have to do it online or on the computer, it's just simply more difficult because you can't quite treat it as a textbook. That would be my most important advice to students: put your hands on a cheap e-reader, and use that for your e-textbooks.

About how many students take this course, on average?

Adien: The average in the last two years? We are close to 2000 students a year. Together, with the accounting course, it's one of the biggest courses in the university.

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

Adien: It tries to give very detailed instructions. Sometimes it's not detailed enough, apparently, because I get a lot of calls from students who are a little confused--especially about the discussion assignment.

Because we are trying to get students to think in an academic way about writing and to get them to write in a variety of rhetorical modes, different forms of essay writing, we are quite specific in how we explain what it is that we want from them.

It's always a bit difficult. It's almost like a vicious circle: you are asking students to improve their writing by reading, but, if they are not good readers to begin with, then the information doesn't necessarily come across the way it should. That's something I'm currently struggling with: how am I going to get to a point where I can improve that by using Internet and by using Moodle?

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

Adien: That's an interesting question because it is mostly a required course by a variety of programs: Nursing students, a lot of psychology students, English students. For them, it is either this option or take another English course, but very many of them are asked to take English 255 as a core component early in their program to help them set up for success in their courses. However, there are students who say, "This is the last course I need to complete my degree," and you go, "Okay, so you are in year 4 of your program and doing your first year English writing course?" Hmm. Sometimes those are already accomplished writers, but sometimes you wonder how they managed without taking this course first.

That is probably the other big challenge in the course: there's such a variety of skill level that it's not always easy to accommodate every student the way you'd want to.

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

Adien: Figuring out what it means to rhetorically analyze a text. That really forces them to think about how someone else has "built" a text, so it really requires a high level of reading skill. And then you have to figure out how to write that all down. So, you get some of the best papers in the final paper of the course and some of the worst papers. It really demands that they think about both the reading and the writing.

What is rhetorical analysis?

Adien: (Laughs.) Now you've got me. In a rhetorical analysis, you are trying to analyze the rhetorical tricks the author uses. You are trying to figure out what the author does to persuade you, the reader, to believe, feel, see, understand what he or she is trying to persuade you of. It's a variety of textual elements that you would look at. Mostly within this course, because it's a beginner academic English course, we look at things like logos, pathos, ethos. What are the logical argumentation tricks the author uses to persuade you? What is their ethos? Ethos is how reliable the author is, how authoritative are they in the field they are discussing. And then there's pathos. What kind of emotional tricks are they pulling to persuade you?

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

Adien: I'm always tempted to say, "Stay in touch with your tutor." There are fourteen of them on the course right now. But some of them have a very heavy workload and that makes it more difficult. If students have any trouble whatsoever getting in touch with their tutor, they should always just contact me. I am the fulltime staff member. (Laughs.) Technically, the others are not. I'm easily reached: they don't even have to know my name, which most people don't. They can just use the 255online@athabasca.ca link, which is in the materials at various points within the course, and that will always bring them to me.

Are the assignments fairly similar in the amount of work required, or are some of them much larger?

Adien: The first assignment is a diagnostic. It really asks the students to write a small introduction, first of themselves and then of their community or their environment. That gives the tutor an opportunity to get to

know the student a little bit. It also functions as a way that says, "These are the areas of strength, and these are the areas of weakness." That's the first one. And it isn't weighted, so it doesn't cost the student anything in terms of marks. That is where we also sometimes have to say to students, "Look, you are not ready for this course. It is likely better for you to do English 177 or English 155 just to get you up to steam and up to par with what you need in this course."

It only gets harder after that. The second assignment they do is an online assignment that consists of three sessions, for which they have to post their own post, their introductory paragraphs. Then they have to summarize a debate that's ongoing in their own community. And, lastly, they have to analyze rhetorically a text from our textbook. And that's assignment two; it takes about six weeks in total, but during that time, they can be working on the other assignments because the third and sixth assignment reinforces what they do in assignment two. They have to repeat that, or do it at the same time with assignment three and six.

So, it's a bit of going back and forth in the textbook, and it's going back and forth in the course as well. Assignment three is a summary assignment: they write two summaries for that. For assignment four, they start doing research. It's their first research paper. And assignment four, that's where all the fun stuff with APA and MLA come into play. That's one of the things that students struggle with, but we try to help them through that. And then there's assignment five, the two last papers in the course are around 1500 to 2000 word essays. I think it's about four or five pages. Assignment five is an argumentative essay for which we have a lot different topics to choose from.

And the final one is another four or five page essay: rhetorical analysis of a text of their choosing, but we have limited the number of texts that they can choose from.

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

Adien: It varies. At one point, I wanted to know how people were experiencing the online discussion groups, so I set up a tiny little survey in Moodle, and I invited students to respond to that after they completed the discussion group, and responses were quite mixed, to my surprise.

I thought there would be far more interest in more online stuff or more group stuff, but a lot of the responses were actually, "No, I'm taking this course through distance ed so I don't have to be talking to other students all the time." So, fair enough, that's a reasonable thing to say. At this point, we've made the online part mandatory, so they can't just willy nilly say, "No, I want to do an alternate," but there are circumstances in which we the alternate version of the online assignment is necessary, for example for incarcerated students, and you know, we have to make accommodations here and there, for people who cannot manage the time frames that we have set up for the assignment.

So, I think I've mostly heard that students enjoy the variety of topics, the variety of ways of writing essays. Overall, students do find it a reasonably challenging but doable course.

What is the exam like? Is it a couple of essays? Short answer questions? Multiple choice?

Adien: There's one exam. We do ask them to write a final exam. It's a three-hour exam, so it is quite long. They re-show us the skills they learned in the course.

They write one essay. Then they write a summary of an essay that we have given with the exam. They write a small analysis of that as well. That's all just about a paragraph long, and, although with the online exam, and it's online, too, the paragraphs seem to get shorter and shorter. I'll have to revisit that at some point exam.

They have to write an excerpt explanation. So, in the course, they read a number of texts, and from those texts, we selected twelve essays, the student knows the titles going into the exam. We found some interesting quotes for each of those titles, and they have to explain how that quote works within the text. That takes a bit of memorization for them.

What we're testing in the exam is the student's skills, and not so much knowledge.

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

Adien: If I had money and time and everything--and the university had the same--I think what I would try to do more of is have more student-tutor interaction points that are sort of set but free. But also student-student interaction points that are always public.

So, that's what I'd like to see, but these things are not easily accomplished, especially in a course where you have such a variety of students, so many of them, and little time to spend with each student individually - except through our responses to their assignments.

Basically what I'd like is to make it a course for people who want to study in their own way: to have an individual learning path through the course, but you can set that up, so if you are someone who works better if you have regular contact with your tutor, then that should be possible--more so than it is now. If you are someone who learns best by cramming everything in the last two months of the course, then that should be possible, too. In each case, though, it works best if the instructor and the student both know this before the course actually starts.

So, I want to allow individual learning styles to be possible within the course, but that's not a super easy thing to accomplish, especially when you have so many students and so many styles *and* so many tutors.

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

Adien: Right now, it requires somebody who is self-motivated. It can be difficult to have more than once a week contact with your tutor. But, for some students, that's necessary.

I would like to see it be made possible that students can also, say, text a particular number and get a more immediate response than from an email, but these are demands that we can't put on our instructors at this point. That's just because of our models. I'm sure you've heard that before, too.

How can students prepare for the course?

Adien: I would say that it depends on the type of student they are. One of the things a student can do is enroll a month in advance so that he or she has access to all the course material except the tutor, the assignment drop box, and the online discussion group, but then the student can feel his or her way into the course over a longer period of time and then start. So, if you are okay starting in June 1st, but if you sign up now, you pretty much get access now. you'd have a long runway to get started.

-- I was quite pleased to see a nomination for this Course Exam, as the column is, I think, a valuable one for AU Students; it digs into a course beyond the syllabus, to give potential takers some real insight into what they're getting into. This one, from March 18th, is especially note-worthy because of how it also gives us some insight into the instructor.

The Writer's Toolbox

Writing Outdoors

Christina M. Frey



Have you ever been possessed by the glorious desire to commune with nature in a writing retreat outdoors? Of course you have. What could be more peaceful, more fulfilling, more conducive to the flow of ideas than an afternoon spent writing in the quiet of the woods?

Uh, maybe an afternoon spent writing indoors in the quiet of an air-conditioned house?

But you don't believe me, so you decide to try it anyway. You take your notebook, you take your pencils, you leave your phone and electronics behind, and you head up to a secluded corner of the woods. You settle yourself under the graceful canopy of trees. And then you put pencil to paper—paper!—and a thrill of excitement runs through you. You know this is going to be amazing.

Because how could it not be? There's inspiration in every direction. You could write about the soft rustling leaves, and the way their sound blends into the greenery itself. You also

could write about the dew that glistens on the soft early summer leaves and which, by the way, is soaking into the bottom of your jeans right now.

You get up and move your location, wishing you'd thought to bring a towel. Or a cushion. Is that really communing with nature, though? *Real* nature? And your new writing spot is perfect, with violet flowers spreading out in front of you like a light-dappled velvet counterpane. And it strikes you how each little petal plays its own role in creating that broad violet vista, and then your thoughts wax philosophical. And you go off on tangents. And you amaze yourself at your own brilliance. Also you forget that you were supposed to be writing all this down.

But that's what the pencil is for! Unfortunately, you left it under the trunk of the first tree, which seems inconvenient, but it turns out to be a good thing.

Because in the same area where you were communing with nature, where in fact you just made one of the most brilliant philosophical observations of your life, some very large animal was also answering nature's call in a somewhat less philosophical manner. Hazard of writing in the outdoors. You retrieve your pencil, move far from the flowers, and the minutes pass, your pencil scratching away on the pad the only sound in the quiet of the forest. No, not completely silent, but the ambient noises of nature fill your soul.

And your ears. Well, just one ear, a damn mosquito—*slap, squish*—but surely it's not as annoying as your phone ringing off the hook at home! You write some more, but the mosquito broke your concentration. You can't finish the sentence you started. How do you spell that word again? Dictionary—oh, right. No Internet. You write the word anyway. You cross it out. You try it again. No, but really, you should know how to spell this. You write it a third time.

Relax. Breathe. Think about the beauty. The atmosphere, the mood, the not-really quiet around you—an unobtrusive soundtrack for your writing retreat. White noise. Brown noise? How would you describe the color of nature's sounds? Green, like the soft swish of grass in the breeze. Violet noise, like the barely audible flowers rustling across the way. Or...the black and grey buzz of insects playing merrily in the background. Or the foreground, actually. No, that's not a black and grey noise, and it's not playing either. That's a black-and-yellow-striped noise, an angry noise, a furious noise, a get-the-hell-away-from-my-house noise, and holy shit, you are sitting right next to a beehive. And its inhabitants have just discovered you.

You drop your notepad and flee. To your car. Away from nature and its brutal reality. And you drive all the way home as fast as if the bees are still pursuing you, which maybe they are. And when you get home, you call your notepad a loss, and you load your computer and pull up the Internet and find out that yeah, your spelling of that word was completely off. Glad you checked. And also? There's white noise here too. The air conditioner makes a lovely background accompaniment to your writing. And who doesn't want to wax philosophical about staplers and printer ink? Your fingers fly, words singing their way from your mind onto the screen. You write and write and write, and finally you close your laptop, happy with a good day's work.

And you go to bed satisfied, thinking how lucky you are. You had a great writing session, and you owe your inspiration to the time you spent communing with nature today. You'll definitely need to do it again.

Christina M. Frey is a book editor, literary coach, and lover of great writing. For more tips and techniques for your toolbox, follow her on Twitter (@turntopage2) or visit her [blog](#).

-- "The Writer's Toolbox" normally handles those niggling questions of how to get your grammar or sentences just right, but every once in a while The Voice Magazine writers decide on a theme issue. Christina joined in the fun with this submission for the July 1 camping themed issue, and students suggested it was fun (and true) enough that it should be in the Best Of issue. Who am I to argue?



Music Review Butcher Knives

Samantha Stevens



Photo by Ano Pinto Lorez

Musician: Butcher Knives

Album: *Misery*

Throughout my studies at Athabasca University I have been encouraged to approach the world just a little bit differently and with an open and flexible understanding. I have spent hours mulling over a philosophical concepts originating from a culture much different from my own, determining the significant differences between an individualistic to a collectivist culture and its effects on behaviour, and I have been (metaphorically) walking alongside

someone as they tell me what effects post-colonialism has had on them and their country. Thanks to my studies, I now have a much broader understanding and sense of the world.

However, when it comes down to the fundamentals of what brings people together, regardless of country, culture, race, or religion, I have always found that the lowest common denominator is music. And no other band embodies this unifying power of music better than Brooklyn-based Butcher Knives.

Boasting the creation of their own music genre, Butcher Knives' gypsybilly is an amazing blend of languages and musical influences from all over the world. Members of the band come from Morocco, Israel, Colombia, New York, and New Orleans, each musician brings with them their ingenious musical talents and together the Butcher Knives have created something truly unique.

Citing The Clash, Johnny Cash, Gogol Bordello and Bob Marley as some of their influences, the music on their debut album *Misery* challenges conventions and proves that music has the power to overcome any cultural and language barriers.

"Drunken and Down" is my favourite song on this album. The strong accordion intro is incredible in its simplicity. The ensuing chaos of the remainder of the song feels like a dizzying spiral into oblivion. There is a distinct punk influence in this song, but there are also elements of Eastern European music, making "Drunken and Down" feel like a peculiarly fun escapade.

"Nobody Know Me" is a superbly exotic venture. The Eastern European musical influences are most predominant in this song, but the infusion of rap-like lyrics that blur language barriers create a track that surprises and mesmerizes listeners.

However, it is the track "American Dream" that forces audiences to move out of their music comfort zones. It is in this song the Butcher Knives demonstrate exactly what gypsybilly is all about. Demanding to be cranked as loud as possible, "American Dream" blends languages, cultures, and musical traditions. The result is a song that defies not only genres, but the idealization of the American Dream.

With ten tracks in all, *Misery* offers listeners the world of music in a harmonious blending of sounds and melodies from all over the world. As a homage to the many peoples and nations that come together to create culturally complex cities like New York, Butcher Knives offer audiences an opportunity to experience the world through a multifaceted lens. As university students, it is music like this that will ignite thoughts, spark curiosities; it is music like this that gives us the opportunity to appreciate not only how diverse our world is, but what can be created when cultures and languages work together, and what happens when something as simple as a musical genre is overcome.

Samantha currently uses her skills as a writer to promote independent musicians and raise awareness and support for many global, environmental, and humanitarian issues. Check out her website and blog at: <http://sstevenswriter.wix.com/writer>

-- I like music reviews. No matter who you are, where you are in your career or studies, where you live, what you believe in, or what you do, music is something that we can all relate to. This is one of the best of the last year, tying together a review with comments on the human condition and then back to you, AU students. It also doesn't hurt that I've really gotten into this album since the review came out on May 27.

In Search of Fisherman's Tea

Wanda Waterman



If you live in Southwestern Nova Scotia and place a "For Sale" sign in the window of a car parked in your dooryard, be prepared to provide the Bluenose Tea Ceremony to any potential buyers, especially buyers from the more traditional cultures here—the African Canadian, the Mi'kmaq, the Irish, the Scottish, and the French—who've been here so long that their cultures have joined to become nearly all-of-a-piece.

The ceremony begins with the question, "Izzat yer car yer sellin'?" and carries on with long silences, slow nods, the odd query, and, often enough, the rolling of

cigarettes and a hunkering down in the driveway to get a good look at the vehicle (and if your visitor hunkers, you'd best hunker, too).

In such instances you simply must offer tea. And if you wish to inquire about such a car parked in someone *else's* dooryard, you may find that none of your questions will be answered until you *accept* a cup of tea from the seller.

The Bluenose Tea Ceremony has an ambience and a *raison d'être* all its own. It isn't a thing that can be scheduled, because scheduling teatime makes you uppity (*Who d'ya think y'are, the Queen?*). You can't see it coming and so must always be ready to stop everything to either accept a cup of tea or to serve one.

Oh, how my workaholic soul used to rage at these interruptions, these demands that everything be put on pause for the hunkering, the small talk, the knowing looks, the smoking, and the silent breaks, all so necessary to making the deal. *Holy ol' jumpin,' can't we just seal this without putting my whole life on hold?* my inner Calvinist shrieked. The torture was even harder to bear knowing that most of the time no deal would be reached.

The only silver lining was the wonderful quality that obligatory tea, which we often referred to as "fisherman's tea," a secret blend of choice black and orange pekoe tea leaves, generously spooned into the pot and steeped for a good five minutes, if not boiled on the back of a wood stove and topped up periodically with more water or tea leaves as needed. When poured out the colour is a rich, deep amber, to which you add canned evaporated milk and lots of sugar if you want it. Drinking it black would be insupportable, and even whole milk is sometimes too weak to buffer the tea's kick.

Fisherman's tea isn't a gourmet taste; it's one of those things you love because you grew up with it. Outsiders don't often take to fisherman's tea, just as they don't often take to dulce, rappie pie, hodgepodge, or Solomon Gundy (to our great bewilderment), but there you go.

East coast grocery stores sell the same variety of teas as can be found anywhere, including that ubiquitous American brand of tea whose name I won't mention but whose flavour is hardly better than that of dishwasher.

But true fisherman's tea is produced only by three Canadian brands, two of whom are uniquely Maritime: King Cole, Morse, and Red Rose. Not only do these brands deliver the right flavour and strength, they have just enough—or just the right *kind* of caffeine to renew one's optimism in the face of life's storms. The caffeine rush actually *feels* different, more elated, without the grumpiness, bad nerves, and confusion that often accompany too many coffees.

A cup of fisherman's tea is like a sweet, apple-faced friend waiting for a chat in the house after a morning of stacking wood, a pleasing ritual marking the intervals of your household chores, an essential component of church suppers, a steamy brew comforting hunters by the fire while their boots dry, a comforting aroma steaming on the table next to a warm stove when you wade home through the slush, sniffing and shivering, and yes, an elixir that grants fishermen the boost they need to keep up those long, gruelling stints at sea.

When I leave Nova Scotia I don't bring any of this tea with me, so confident am I that I can find its equivalent just about anywhere. At the very least, I think, I can order it online.

In New England kitchens I find all kinds of specialty teas, black, green, and herbal. I also find the ubiquitous American brand of tea whose name I will not mention but none of whose many products tastes much different from dishwater. The American tea sensibility, I learn, is vastly removed from that of the Maritime Provinces, where tea is nothing short of a robust brew singing with tannic acid.

The closest equivalent to fisherman's tea that I can find is Irish Breakfast tea. Few New Englanders drink it, preferring to get their caffeine, if they get it at all, from coffee, so Irish Breakfast tea is easy to find, though often a bit stale, having sat on the tea shelf for several years in its cramped little square tin waiting for a Nova Scotian to come along and rescue it from a dusty demise.

But drinking Irish Breakfast tea from a pretty little tin, in addition to not exactly being the same blend, goes against the spirit of fisherman's tea, which sees a "specialty tea" as something like a prissily dressed little girl at a family picnic. Fisherman's tea must be purchased in bulk: either loose leaves pressed into a block and wrapped in foil or cardboard boxes harbouring great bunches of teabags.

I try to order fisherman's tea online with no luck. I get on Facebook and whine: *Does anyone know where I can find good stout black tea in New England?* A friend quickly replies, telling me about a wonderful online tea company. I order Earl Grey, Jasmine Green, and Irish Breakfast. I thank my friend, who turns out to be a total tea snob, using a special teapot that brews and steeps teas at the precise temperature and time length required for every type of leaf. She wants to buy me a teapot like this, as she's mistakenly taken me for a tea gourmet. *No*, I say gently. *No. Thanks so much, but I'm Nova Scotian.*

On my visit to North Africa I find just two types of tea served in homes: a delicious green tea served with spearmint, and what the locals call red tea—actually a black tea satisfyingly similar to fisherman's tea, boiled over a charcoal fire and served with lots of sugar.

The red tea is nice, but the absence of canned milk or cream does set one's teeth on edge, so I rely on green tea and Arab coffee for my daily caffeine fix. When I ask for "English" tea in the cafés I'm repeatedly offered, to my horror, that ubiquitous American brand of tea whose name I will not mention but whose flavour is hardly different from dishwater. I soon stop asking.

Next, Montreal. I'm surprised that even here I can't find my triumvirate of Canadian tea brands, even in the big box stores. In the ethnic sections I find black teas of low price and average quality, which are fine for mornings, but I need something more apt for that afternoon pick-me-up. Someone tells me about a local "tea boutique," a term that makes me shudder but which does suggest a broad variety of choices.

In the boutique I find just one brand of extremely high-end tea of manifold types. The clerk looks like a diplomat, reserved, beautifully dressed, and charmingly cordial, speaking in a soft voice and looking up at me with profound sincerity as he opens one great round tin after another, extolling the virtues of each product while using the tin's broad lid as a fan to waft the heavenly fragrances my way.

"This jasmine green," he says reverantly, "has been picked over seven times by rural villagers in order to ensure its purity."

I decide to buy some China black, too. He highly recommends I also buy one of their special small metal tins to store my tea, to preserve its special flavour and quality. I decline, not bothering this time to offer the excuse that I'm Nova Scotian.

Again the tea disappoints. I bring some of it back with me on my visit to Nova Scotia. When I get to my parent's yard I pull the little sachet from my purse, pour the tea leaves on the ground in a little heap, light it on fire, laugh fiendishly as it burns, stomp on it furiously, then go inside to make a pot of *real* tea.

The stores are closed, so if my folks are out of tea, I'll have to go looking for a car to buy.

Wanda also writes the blog The Mindful Bard: [The Care and Feeding of the Creative Self](#).

-- I was especially happy to see the nomination for this one, because, I'll be honest, I was going to put this one in anyway. This one, from September 30th, made me laugh because it's so true. I know those routines, I know those teas, I know those people – heck, I am one.



Interview with the Director Behind the Scenes of AU Press

Scott Jacobsen



Fellow undergraduate students might or might not know about the university press for AU called AU Press. It is an important resource for the representation of the academic and scholarly aspects of the university. Recently, Scott Jacobsen interviewed the acting director and marketing and production coordinator, Ms. Megan Hall.

What are the tasks and responsibilities of your position?

Ms. Hall: The role of acting director is one that I took over in October 2015, but I have been the marketing and production coordinator at the Press since 2012. The tasks and responsibilities of the marketing and production coordinator include the last two phases of the publication process, the design, layout, and printing of a book and the promoting of a book once it is published. The duties are varied. I write the descriptive copy for each

book which appears on our website and elsewhere on the web, I coordinate with cover designers and interior designers to create the right look and feel for our publications, I collaborate with authors to determine the specific audience for the book and how to reach them, and I organize the appearance of both the Press and our authors at book launches and conferences.

In the role of acting director, I work alongside Pamela Holway, senior editor, and Connor Houlihan, associate editor, to shape the Press' list of publications. I also spend a good deal of time applying for grants and arranging for publication funding for our titles in addition to advocating for the open access movement in Canada and managing the budget for the Press.

What are the selection criteria for the inclusion of materials for AU Press?

Ms. Hall: All AU Press books, journals, and website publications must be peer-reviewed in order to receive our imprint—so that forms the basis of our selection criteria. When an author or journal enquires about publishing with AU Press we first collect some information about the project and evaluate whether it fits our mandate and our mission. We have cultivated a strong list of publications in the areas of online education, labour studies, indigenous studies, and the environment, but we also consider manuscripts outside these subject areas when we feel that the work makes an important contribution to scholarship.

How is AU Press funded?

Ms. Hall: Although the operational funding we receive from provincial and federal granting agencies is key to running a complete publishing program what is far more important and significant is the financial support provided by AU. Acquiring, shaping, curating, certifying, editing, promoting, and disseminating scholarship requires investment and although we make the culmination of all of these efforts—the book, the journal, the website—free, the costs of producing it are in no way reduced by an open-access mandate. Our publishing activities are subsidized by AU and we could not distribute the publications in the way we do without this support.

You also mentioned grants. What is the grant-writing and submission process for AU Press?

Ms. Hall: We apply for grants from both provincial and federal funding agencies. We receive operating grants from the Alberta Media Fund and the Department of Canadian Heritage's Canada Book Fund and we receive specific title-funding from a number of different sources including the Awards to Scholarly Publications Program offered through the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences. Applying for grants includes describing our publication program, our evaluation process, and our open-access mandate as well as laying out our publication plans for the forthcoming year.

In 2014, for open access week, you wrote, "inasmuch as the need for knowledge is fundamental to human culture, that knowledge should be shared rather than restricted to those who can pay for it" (Holway & Hall, 2014). Nearly two years have passed since you wrote these words, would you say that this still reflects AU Press's mission and mandate?

Ms. Hall: We are still very much committed to the mission upon which the Press was founded—in fact, I might argue, that an economic downturn is just the time to continue the conversation about how the future might be shaped by the sharing of knowledge. In a recent AU Press publication, *Alberta Oil and the Decline of Democracy in Canada*, the authors discuss the potential for the erosion of democracy in single-resource economies while the authors of *Scaling Up* describe the potential that the social economy has to create a more sustainable way of life. These two books cover some of the most pressing challenges of our time and it's important that policy makers, citizens, and educators know what the leading edge discussions are on these issues. The information and knowledge contained in our publications are valuable to the advancement of scholarship and to the

betterment of our society and we believe that by making them freely downloadable from our website we are reducing one of the significant barriers to valuable work of this kind.

Why was AU Press founded as an open access press, and what challenges do you face because of your chosen publication model?

Ms. Hall: The founding of AU Press as an open-access publisher grew out of Athabasca University's mandate—its commitment to excellence, openness, flexibility, and accessibility. In 2007, at the time of our founding, there were very few open-access presses in North America, in fact we were the first scholarly monograph publishing house, but since then the open-access movement has grown and we have three university presses in Canada that are regularly publishing open-access monographs. Experimenting with an open-access publishing model does bring with it particular challenges which include reduced revenue. Our solution is to watch our budget closely, to use next-to-free marketing techniques and platforms, to seek out funding for each title, and engage in partnerships with other presses and organizations when possible. Our commitment, first and foremost, is to scholarship and quality and we hope that AU Press helps to promote the open access movement by proving that open and free material can and should uphold all the hallmarks of good scholarship.

AU Press also runs a blog, the Open Book Blog. How does that fit in with what you do?

Ms. Hall: Yes, we've started a blog. The idea was to create a space where we could feature the work of our authors in an accessible style. There has been a notable decline in the coverage of books in print media so our blog is an opportunity for the general public as well as the AU community to find out more about who we are and what we publish.

What future initiatives are in-progress for AU Press?

Ms. Hall: We have a new catalogue coming out in a month announcing the titles planned for next season—we can't wait to let people know about the forthcoming books we're excited about! We will also be building on already established partnerships with the University of South Africa Press and the Canadian Committee on Labour History. In addition, we'll be displaying our books at the Congress for Social Sciences and Humanities being held in Calgary this year along with the University of Alberta Press and the University of Calgary Press. Students, staff, and faculty will also have a chance to see our books on display at Convocation in June in Athabasca, a wonderful chance for us to meet the people of AU in person.

Thank you for your time, Ms. Hall.

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

-- From May 6, this interview gives us a look at a department of AU that many students likely don't know exists, but really should, not only because it means free stuff, but it's something that adds to AU's credibility and can be mentioned when people ask, "Distance university? You mean like degrees by mail?"

Hits and Misses

AUSU's Annual Report

Barbara Lehtiniemi



AUSU's annual report for 2016 was presented at the Annual General Meeting on April 7, 2016. If you weren't at the meeting—and I suspect you were not—you missed the official presentation of the report to the membership. Not to worry.

You can access the AUSU 2016 Annual Report from AUSU's [website](#)—look for Annual Reports under the Governance tab, or click [here](#). The 31-page report provides the financial statements for the fiscal year ending September 2015, describes AUSU's activities over the same period, and sets out goals for the current year.

What has AUSU been up to for the past year? Here is my take on a few of the hits and misses from the annual report:

Hit: The updated AUSU website, which now includes online applications for AUSU scholarships, course evaluations, and a fun student survey posted every two weeks. I was pleased to read the new website retained the "instant chat" feature—I thought it got dropped, but it turns out I just can't access it using Firefox.

Miss: The new website excludes the members-only student forums, despite the report's assertion that all previous web

content was incorporated into the new site. I miss the valuable information in the forums, as well as the ability to communicate easily with AUSU council through the Ask AUSU forum.

Hit: Increased direct communication with students. AUSU now sends out welcome messages to new members instead of just waiting for students to spontaneously discover AUSU. AUSU also regularly posts info for students on their website and on social media. With a dedicated Communications and Member Services Coordinator on staff, communication from AUSU to students is on a noticeable upswing including regular e-mail newsletters sent directly to members.

Miss: The new AUSU mobile app was launched in September. Since this service is restricted to students with mobile devices—which I don't have—this is a miss for me.

Hit: The Student Lifeline service was launched in September 2015, providing AU students with free access to a suite of mental health services.

Miss: The new dental and health plan collapsed about a year after AUSU launched it, suffering from lack of promotion and low enrolment. Given the resources that AUSU put into implementing this plan, it is unlikely they will consider a student healthcare plan in future.

Hit: AUSU commits to working collaboratively with *The Voice Magazine*, which it recognizes as a "important member service and form of communication for AUSU." After AUSU's attempt to turf the magazine a year ago, this is welcome news to readers. A plan is under development which will see all stakeholders—including writers and readers—working toward a future strategy for *The Voice*.

Miss: Valuable staff time was spent last year investigating a Writer-in-Residence (WIR) program, presumably to cover the fact that AUSU hadn't already looked into what a WIR was before the aborted proposal to replace *The Voice* with one last April. Research might even have included reading *The Voice's* own [article](#) about Writer-in-Residence programs. Oh, the irony!

Hit: AUSU patted itself on the back for the 2015 weekly planner which contained, "information about AUSU services and council, important AU deadlines, and a variety of other useful tips to help AUSU members with their studies." I love my 2015 planner so much, I'm keeping it forever because...

Miss: Not mentioned in the report is the move to cease production of the customized AUSU student planner. For 2016, AUSU ordered generic pocket planners customized with AUSU's logo. I found the new planner a large letdown from the student-specific planner of previous years.

AUSU's annual report is worth the read. Whether you're a highly-engaged student or not, it's good to know how your member fees are being spent. You can access the current report [here](#), and, if you're really keen, you can access previous year's reports going back to 2001 [here](#). (Note—reading the older reports can be surprisingly addictive, not to mention informative.)

Judge AUSU's hits and misses for yourself. Let us know what you think at voice@voicemagazine.org.

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

-- This one is a bit unusual. One vote from a student for it said, "although I disagree with her on some points, I thought it was well-written and interesting." I see that as a very high compliment, as finding something to be well-written while disagreeing with it is an unusual combination. And I couldn't let a Best of the Voice issue go without something that points out one of the important features of the magazine, helping students have an outside perspective on what their student council is doing.



The Voice Magazine needs your help!

We're looking for students who are willing to be interviewed for our Minds We Meet column.

By giving us a bit of your story to share with other students, you help create a solid AU student community. And in return, we give you stuff like you see in the picture here! Contact us at voice@voicemagazine.org if you're interested.



Can't Wait to Start

We're now four months into 2016. If, like me, you began the year with a pristine new planner, how's it looking now? Are there entries for every day? Is it serving your life and your purpose? Is it a glorified daily to-do list? Is it a record of your life for posterity?

Planners are available in all styles and price points. For recording the bare bones of my wedding bookings I use a month-at-a-glance dollar store version. Investment: \$1.25. In the past for my main planner I've used the leather-bound zippered binder style with refill pages. It's an expensive professional look with pockets and space for business cards, clippings, more. However, it's not very practical when at year-end you've got 365 loose pages to deal with.

Gradually I moved to a coil bound, large format book, by Brownline, because there was plenty of room and the book lies flat. It was in the thirty-five-dollar range. This year I hesitated buying anything because I never last all year making entries. I waited so long, though, that my preferred planner was sold out at Staples. Finally, I plunked down more than forty dollars for the hardcover Brownline executive quotidian one like Roy has used for years.

And so far, other than for the two weeks we were away, I've made entries. Other than those pages done with coloured pens or stickers as a visible reward for exercising, it's ho-hum—utilitarian, but oh-so boring.

However.

In late December I clipped an Edmonton Journal article about the planner obsessed. There are many Pinterest boards (#plannererd, #plannerlove, #plannerobsessed, #plannerjunkies) dedicated to the subject. One woman has turned her interest into a business. Erin Condren believes there's a market for "a colourful approach to not only scheduling every day but truly celebrating every day."

I am thrilled with the possibilities for combining my need for an artistic outlet with the necessity of managing a busy schedule. I already have an arsenal of tools: coloured pencils and felt pens, a collection of stickers, a leopard-print roll of washi tape, rubber stamps, several books of quotations, and a creative eye.

Pinterest examples show dozens of options. Inspirational quotes like 'You've Got This!' or 'Just Start' or 'Get it Done!' or 'You're Running Out of Time' are peppered across many planner pages. Planners, printable stickers, or margin strips are available for sale. Of course I see the crossover between scrapbooking, adult colouring books, and journaling. There's also a crafting aspect to it. Paper clips embellished with colourful ribbons are fun and practical for marking special pages.

In one example someone is using her journal as a sketchbook by drawing glasses to track her water intake. Someone else is recording her measurements in a fancy table during a weight loss journey. Another identifies "Habits to Break".

So, my lovelies, if ever there was a reason and a way to make scheduling fun and creative, it has arrived. Grab some supplies and take some time to play. I can't wait to start, from where I sit.

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

-- A student selection from the May 6th issue, The Voice Magazine wouldn't be complete without an installment of "From Where I Sit"



Dear
Barb

Barbara Godin

Down on the Farm

Dear Barb:

I grew up in a farming family, three previous generations of farmers. So it was always expected that me and my brother would become farmers. My brother is heading in that direction, but I chose to go to university instead. My parents are heartbroken that I did not choose farming. I can tell my dad is offended that I did not want to follow in his footsteps. I do not see farming in my future, the work is physically hard and the money not that good. I want to get a business degree and see where that takes me. My parents are not supportive of my education. They expect me to work on the farm as much as my brother does and that doesn't leave me enough time to do my school work. My marks are sliding and I'm way behind in most of my courses. I don't know how to explain to my parents that this is what I want to do without hurting their feelings. Thanks Gregg

Hi Gregg:

Great question! Often children grow up with the parental expectation that they will follow in their parent's line of work, but this doesn't always happen and the children and parents are both left feeling unhappy and disappointed. The family farm is fast becoming a dying lifestyle and this is unfortunate because farming provided stability and bonding for the family. Pulitzer Prize winning, agricultural author Louis Bromfield wrote about farming that it's "the only profession in which man deals constantly with all the laws of the universe and life." On the other hand, you are right it is hard work and can entail 14-hour work days, plus farm income has been constantly dwindling as huge agribusinesses take over distribution and processing of farm products. Perhaps you need to sit down and have a heart to heart discussion with your family about what you personally want to do. Include them in your plans, show them that you can have a successful life and that this is what you truly want for yourself and explain that you need to spend more time on your studies. Assure them that you will still help out on the farm when you can, but you cannot spend as much time working the farm as your brother does. If they refuse to accept your choice, you may have to move out for a while. The prospect of you moving out at this point, may cause them to realize how serious you are and that this is what you want for your future. You have to be true to yourself, while also respecting your parents' way of life. Thanks Gregg, for writing in.

Follow Barb on twitter @BarbGod

Email your questions to voice@voicemagazine.org. Some submissions may be edited for length or to protect confidentiality; your real name and location will never be printed. This column is for entertainment only. The author is not a professional counsellor and this column is not intended to take the place of professional advice.

-- Dear Barb has become a staple here at The Voice Magazine, and a couple people have told me it's the first thing they read. Take out the rural setting, and the primary concern in the June 17th edition here could apply to a lot of students, and was noted on Facebook. It obviously had to be included.

THE NONPARTISAN: IN THE KNOW



WRITTEN BY WANDA WATERMAN

-- This, from the August 12th issue, was the last comic before we started the graphic novel "The Doppelgänger Cure". So was a contender just because of the significance of that, but what sealed it was the nomination came with the note, "Kinda sums 2016 up." Happy New Year, folks!



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.

IMPORTANT DATES

- **Jan 10:** [Deadline to register in a course starting Feb 1](#)
- **Jan 10:** [AUSU Council Meeting](#)
- **Jan 13:** [February degree requirements deadline](#)
- **Jan 15:** Deadline to write exams for Dec course end date
- **Jan 31:** [Deadline to apply for course extension for March](#)
- **Feb 10:** [Deadline to register in a course starting Mar 1](#)
- **Feb 15:** [February degree requirements deadline](#)

Advocacy at AU

One of AUSU's most important roles is to provide Advocacy for AU undergraduate students. AUSU advocates on behalf of all students at the provincial and national level, but we also provide advocacy at the University level, both on an individual basis and on behalf of all students.

If you are experiencing issues at AU that you would like assistance with, please feel free to contact us at admin@ausu.org. AUSU is always here to advocate on your behalf, or to provide you with information to assist you in your communications with the University.

Also, did you know that AUSU councillors sit **on over 20 boards and committees at Athabasca University**, where they actively advocate on your behalf? Here are just a few of the committees that AUSU represents you on:

- AU Board of Governors
- General Faculties Council
- Academic Excellence Awards Committee
- Student Academic Appeals Committee
- Student Experience Team
- Faculty Councils
- E-Text Advisory Committee
- .. and more!

Find out more about AUSU's advocacy efforts on our website [here](#).



Lawrence Decore Award for Student Leadership

The Laurence Decore Awards for Student Leadership are intended to recognize those post-secondary students who have demonstrated outstanding dedication and leadership to fellow students and to their community. **The award is valued at \$1000.**

Each post-secondary institution in Alberta chooses a winner for one of the awards. The winner for Athabasca University is chosen by the AUSU Awards Committee.

ELIGIBILITY: Must be an Alberta resident enrolled full-time (min. *9 credits) at AU. Nominees must have been involved in student government, societies, clubs or organizations.

NOMINATIONS: The application form is online here. Forms **must be submitted to AUSU at admin@ausu.org.**

Application Deadline: January 15, 2017

Council Meeting

AUSU's next council meeting will be held on **Tuesday, January 10** at **5:30pm MT**. Meetings are held by teleconference, and all members are welcome.

The agenda will be posted online [here](#) at least 3 days prior to the meeting. Email services@ausu.org if you would like the complete meeting package.



**AUSU
Council
Meeting**



CLASSIFIEDS

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

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