

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

*Volume 15 Issue 42
November 9, 2007*



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

THE VOICE MAGAZINE

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frequent contributions

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CALL FOR STUDENT INPUT



Student opinions needed for key policy update

The Student Academic Appeals Committee is revising the Academic Misconduct Policy. Before we move this very important policy through the policy approval process, we would appreciate your feedback and input.

Open Forum sessions have been scheduled to provide an opportunity for the AU community to contribute to the policy. The sessions have been scheduled in various locations and times to provide as much opportunity as possible for participation.

A draft copy of the policy will be circulated approximately one week prior to the Open Forum sessions.

The open forums have been scheduled as follows:

AU Central

Date: November 21, 2007
Location: Governing Council Chambers
Time: 9 a.m. - 11 a.m.
Teleconference Option available

AU Edmonton

Date: November 22, 2007
Location: Westin Hotel - Athabasca Room, 10135 100th Street
Time: 6 p.m. - 8 p.m.
Teleconference will not be available for this session

Date: November 29, 2007
Location: AU - Edmonton - Room 1222
Time: 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
Teleconference Option available

AU Calgary

Date: November 28, 2007
Location: Holiday Inn Express - Downtown
1020 8th Avenue SW
Time: 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. *and*
6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.
Teleconference will not be available for these sessions

Contact ausu@ausu.org for teleconference numbers.



Apples and Oranges

The Internet has been compared to the Wild West: an unfettered free-for-all whose rapid developments and opportunity for profit have hordes of people scrambling for a piece of the action.

It's a fairly apt description, and one that a group of content creators wants the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission to change.

The coalition of 18 arts groups is demanding that the CRTC regulate the Internet to provide more Canadian content. They say that the Internet should be subject to the same Cancon rules as television and radio. They also want a share of the profits that Internet providers get when they transmit Canadian content.

The CRTC plans to hold public hearings on the issue in late 2008 (by which time there will have been even more developments in the medium), but as far as making the Internet play by television and radio standards, the issue is moot: it's like trying to compare apples and oranges.

The key is in the very nature of the Internet. A major part of the CRTC's mandate is to ensure that "Canadian artists and Canadian stories [have] access to Canadian airwaves." To apply that expectation to the Internet is impossible.

Why? First of all, because the content created for the Internet doesn't need to be sold to Canadian airwaves, unlike programs that are purchased (or created) by licensed radio and television broadcasters. With a little bit of technological savvy, some inexpensive software, and a desire to express themselves, people can produce and broadcast their own original content, anything from photos to films to music.

Without a filter (i.e., a radio or television network) to sort through what is and isn't considered Cancon—a highly subjective process in the first place—it just isn't possible to monitor the billions of items of content available on the medium. It may be possible to do so for the material posted or broadcast by licensed radio and TV stations, but that's just an extension of those networks' existing material. And a very small tip of the Internet iceberg.

Second, even if it was possible to legislate that Internet providers should become responsible for filtering the billions of data packets they transfer—essentially, searching everything posted through them to make sure it meets the Cancon quota—the logistics are mind-boggling. How would they determine which hits came from Canadian computers? Would the rules apply to Canadian-based websites whose main traffic came from people in, say, the U.S.? And with the constantly shifting nature of the Internet, how could anyone possibly monitor the situation with any accuracy?

The costs of such an undertaking would be astronomical and, as in any for-profit business model, passed on to the consumer. The monthly fees for the average Internet service would skyrocket and, in the end, defeat the purpose of the exercise. After all, if only a small percentage of Canadian households could afford the newly outpriced luxury of the net, who would all that Canadian content be seen by, anyway?

If Canadian artists really want to ensure that quality content reflective of their identity gets seen and appreciated, they're better off to embrace the very qualities of the Internet they're trying to control: use the unfettered boundaries of the net to share their uniquely Canadian vision with an audience unimagined by artists just a decade ago.

AU Profiles:

Milca Sheney

by Christina M. Frey

In this week's profile we meet Milca Sheney, a Bachelor of Arts student living in northern Ontario. In addition to studying, Milca runs a home business and cares full-time for her 21-month-old daughter. She shares how planning and prioritizing allow her to manage her studies, family needs, and business contracts, while still leaving some room for hobbies.

Milca, who is obtaining her BA with a concentration in French, is in her final year of the three-year program.

"It's a little bit of everything, some literature, some language, some translation work," she says. Milca's long-term goal is to teach in French or French immersion schools, at a grade school or junior high level. In the meantime, she plans to use her degree as a springboard to teacher's college.

In Ontario, enrolling in teacher's college requires a bachelor's degree with a concentration in a teachable subject area. Since Milca spent much of her childhood in Quebec and grew up speaking French, concentrating in that language was an easy choice. Less clear was how to obtain her degree.

"My husband was in his final year of college . . . [and] we didn't know where we would be moving the following year," she says. Enrolling at AU allowed Milca to continue working on her degree without having to be concerned about non-transferring courses and prerequisites for different universities. "[It] turned out well because we moved to northern Ontario, where the closest university is four hours away!" she says.

Milca started out by fast-tracking her degree. "We knew we would have kids some day, so I just went for it and got as much done as possible," she says. During her first year, she took 21 credits each semester—while working 30 hours a week.

Since the birth of her daughter, Rachel, however, Milca has slowed her pace. "I did half the program in one year, and the rest really slowly," she says. "It's not the same dynamic now [as] three years ago, when it was only me and the hubby, and we were both focused on the same thing."

Currently, Milca studies in the early morning before her daughter wakes, or in the afternoon while she naps. "I cannot study with her around," Milca says. "I can do all sorts of things and she'll just play beside me, but as soon as I start doing something that requires attention . . . she starts trying to climb up on me!"

To manage the demands of school, family, and business, Milca relies on both short- and long-term planning. "Set yourself realistic goals, goals that are achievable," she says. "Then make yourself a plan to achieve this." For example, Milca advises students to first determine which courses they will need to meet program requirements, and then decide when they should take them. Then, after registering in the individual courses, she says, "make yourself goals of what you want to have done by a certain date." She also recommends looking at all the course materials, not just the study guide, to see how proportional the units

are. "Sometimes the breakdown they give is not . . . even," Milca says. "I just adapt it to the way I know it'll work for me."

Broad course planning is important, but having a daily routine can be a lifesaver as well. "It's the only way I can feel like I'm accomplishing something," Milca says. "I get as much done as possible in the time frame 'allocated' and that's the best I can do." To help stay on track, she makes a point of getting up early each morning to figure out the coming day.

A daily schedule allows Milca to avoid the frustration of having too many competing obligations. By prioritizing everything, she knows what to expect. "My husband and daughter [come] first," she says. Milca's schedule ensures that she spends time with Rachel as well as with her husband after their daughter goes to bed. She also focuses on her small-but-growing upholstery business. Although business contracts may be sporadic, when they do come in, Milca "concentrate[s] on them to finish them quickly."

Her next priority is homework, which she does while her daughter is sleeping if there are no business contracts. In her remaining spare time, she enjoys designing and embellishing children's clothes, particularly for her daughter.

Milca believes that the best kind of planning allows for life's variations. When she makes her master plan for a course, Milca will work in external obligations, such as weddings or holidays. This ensures that they don't take her by surprise and throw her study plans off track. "It . . . made it easier to stay focused and to not get discouraged," she says.

A little flexibility in day-to-day scheduling also goes a long way. Although hobbies may normally be low on her list of priorities, they are there for those days "when I feel like I'm going crazy and just need some 'me' time," Milca says.

Milca has 12 credits remaining in her degree, which she estimates she will finish after another year and a half of studies. Even though it may take a lot of effort to juggle her many responsibilities, she feels it is more than worth it. "I'm lucky that I get to take courses here and there and someday get a BA," she says. "The rest is just a bonus."

Grand:PM - *Party in Your Basement*



Release date: October 30, 2007

Label: Curve Music

Tracks: 11

Rating: 7

A collaboration between the Kaiser Chiefs, Franz Ferdinand, and modern AFI might have produced a record very similar to this one released by Canadian quartet Grand:PM.

The classical vocal and piano of front man Paul Mayer came together with the punk roots of drummer Jeff Moore, guitarist and vocalist Paul Hicken, and bassist Dustin Wood. When the four came together, Mayer traded his piano for the keyboard and the other three band members abandoned what they felt were badly written punk rock songs for something that involved a hell of a lot more synthesizer.

Under the production guidance of Ziad Al-Hillal, Grand:PM morphed into a band whose priority was the guitar and basic rock aspect of music with synthesizers and keyboards thrown in for good measure. The songs are still rather heavy on synthesized sounds, however, and *Party in Your Basement* sounds like what would happen if Depeche Mode had formed 25 years later.

Tracks change back and forth from the average pop-rock sound to the unexpected, ultra-pop approach to music that resulted in Grand:PM's title track and "One More"—two essentially inane songs that nevertheless rope you in and make you feel like dancing under a disco ball.

The band has perfected both the mellow sing-along songs and the dance tracks that could happily be pumped through the speakers at a club, and while it seems that the influence of Paul Mayer and Ziad Al-Hillal shines through more than that of anyone else throughout the record, songs like "Back in the River" pay a small tribute to the Clash and the early punk-rock sound. More than anything, Grand:PM is something you might call a techno-rock band.

The star tracks of this album are fairly diverse in their composition: "Stephanie," "Party in Your Basement," and "Back in the River" are respectively reminiscent of The Killers, Cake, and the Clash. Despite one or two particularly fast-paced songs, the overall feel of the album is quite mellow—this is the kind of record you might play on a long thoughtful drive for the sake of some compassionate company.

All in all the songwriting and execution are flawless; if you are a fan of the burgeoning techo-rock genre and bands like Franz Ferdinand then this is a record you should definitely be picking up.



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

Book: Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*

Publication date: 2006

Publisher: Penguin Canada, Toronto, ON

The novel as a literary form is a road map of social division, a means of exploring caste in order to transcend it, a field guide listing the tools needed to emerge from the social order with humanity intact, enhanced even. It was ever so, and will be until social divisions are abolished and we live in a world where all things are one.

Despite widespread rumours and the delusion of a classless America, the novel is vibrantly alive to those who empathize with the victims of classism and who are insightful enough to know whence comes their perennial and multi-faceted pain.

Yes, all the way back to *Don Quixote* and the *romans* that inspired its amiable caricature of aristocratic pretensions, novelists have demanded we not only apprehend social inequality but also take up a stance toward it. In Cervantes we have a picture of aristocracy as a static way of being, a rigid suckering onto old legends despite the vibrancy of a current reality; the Don himself does not change although his purpose as a member of the nobility is to inspire positive growth in those around him. Which he does.

The Inheritance of Loss deals with a particular series of historical events that spiral out of a specific place in the Himalayas to pierce individuals the world over. The characters do not so much grow and change as prove themselves, ultimately, to be above class division. Open to nearly any page and you will find, rendered in a few deft strokes, at least one character who is real, immediate, and ripe with mystery.

You want to befriend these characters, to share your hard-won leisure with them, but there is a problem: the simple human need for food, sex, shelter, and the less tangible but equally pressing need for beautiful spaces, strong and meaningful friendships, and freedom of expression are trampled beyond recognition, perverted and made false by a historical forking of ethnic streams, separating, dividing, and finally smashing up against the drawn-out horrors of colonialism. According to the experience of Desai's characters, England has cast stones into India whose concentric circles are ever-widening and which even now touch the lives of people the world over.

The characters are shaded more deeply with the unfolding of conversation, memory, action, and reaction. Complex selves appear, selves created by ancient cultures and jarringly personal events. There is the young Indian Cambridge student, driven nearly catatonic by English racism only to return to India hating Indians, who quickly turns back to the religion he has rejected when his dog (the only being he has been unambiguously willing to admit to his friendship), disappears.

There is the poor young Gurkha who falls in love with a wealthy girl only to despise her when he is swept into his people's revolt and later becomes wracked with guilt at the harm he has brought upon his beloved and her household.

There is the young man whose father has sacrificed everything to send him to America where he moves from one low-paying job to another, as good as homeless, enraged when he receives letters from his father asking him to find a job and a place to stay for this or that young villager soon to be leaving the motherland.

Then on a mountainside in Kalimpong there is the tight circle of friends who have woven their own bit of heaven out of food, drink, conversation, and literature, only to have it all torn apart by the Nepalese rebellion, mercilessly enacted by one more group that has been deprived and humiliated for far too long.

What Desai so brilliantly gets across is that as crushed as humans can be by class structure, when humanity emerges from the stranglehold of social order it is truly a marvellous thing, precious and complex, rich and splendid—all of the things that, paradoxically, class struggle both grasps at and sabotages.

The Bard could use some help scouting out new material. If you discover any books, compact disks, or movies which came out in the last twelve months and which you think fit the Bard's criteria, please drop a line to bard@voicemagazine.org. If I agree with your recommendation, I'll thank you online.

CLICK ON THIS - Random Coolness

Lonita Fraser

Sometimes it just beats all what human beings spend their time making, doing, being, and sharing with others. The limitless capacity of the human mind is stunning.

Highway Hi-Fi

It's almost impossible to believe someone actually created that. Can you imagine the skips if you hit a pothole?

Where's Willy?

The Willy in this case is Sir Wilfred Laurier, now a very former prime minister of Canada. This site allows you to enter the serial numbers from your paper money, and hopefully track the paper money's travels. You are advised to mark the URL of the site on your bills so that people know where to go. It is not illegal to write on Canadian bills, by the way.

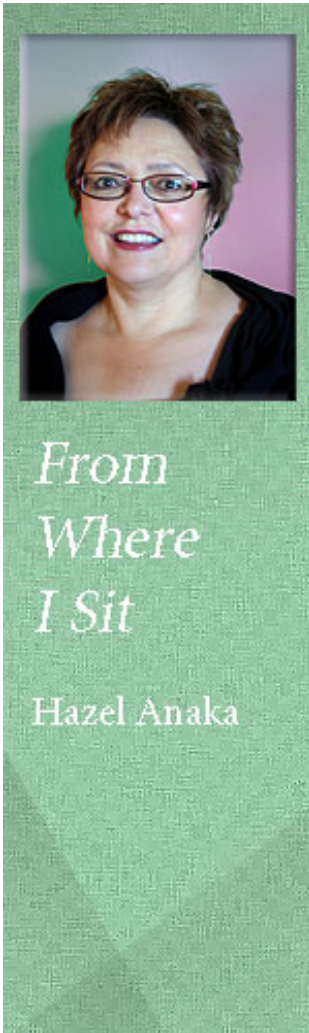
Wallter

No, that's not a typo! A collection of wall treatments that are part wallpaper and part art.

30-Second Bunnies Theatre (and other cartoons)

The bunnies doing movies craze hit the Internet a couple of years back, spawning hundreds of films redone as animated bunny shorts. This site archives a few, ranging in taste and style from "Alien" to "It's A Wonderful Life."

[More Click On This!](#)



Remembering Every Day

On November 11 hundreds of thousands will gather at cenotaphs across the country. Military personnel, RCMP officers, and air cadets will march and form honour guards. Crowds of civilians and fewer and fewer veterans will attend. Politicians will lay wreaths and make speeches. The federal government will name an honorary mother to represent all mothers who've lost a child in the service.

It will be at once both a proud and bittersweet moment. Proud because of Canada's role as warrior or peacekeeper as required by the world community. Bittersweet when we total both the financial and human cost.

We will be grateful that no battle is waged on Canadian soil. We will experience the oxymoron of detached involvement that is television coverage. We see the nightly war coverage but we don't hear or smell or feel the mortar or landmines. We see soldiers' bodies coming home in flag-draped caskets but after 70 such sights, we no longer feel tears welling up. We see full military funerals but don't feel a mother's pain.

We have to accept as true assertions by parents and widows that the newly deceased soldier or police officer was living his dream. That he believed in the mission or the job. That he was trying in his own small way to bring civility back to the world. That he made the ultimate sacrifice doing what he loved.

In my own mind I can't really separate the role of soldier from that of police officer. To have chosen a life based on service, discipline, uniforms, drills, and unquestioning obedience is not for most of us. To put one's life on the line either in Europe decades ago, Afghanistan this year, or rural Canada any day is unbelievably generous. To lose a life to a psycho in Mayerthorpe or Hay River or Nunavut is just as unbelievably sad and tragic as dying in Kabul. The loss is no less to loved ones or Canada the community.

Wearing a poppy and attending a service on November 11 is important. It just shouldn't be a substitute for daily gratitude and mindfulness. We all need to re-examine our beliefs and attitudes about military personnel, the mission in Afghanistan, and increased military spending.

What message are we conveying to our children? Are we keeping this issue front-of-mind? Are we showing and modelling the appropriate amount of gratitude and respect? What do we say and do when we see a police officer or heaven forbid get pulled over and ticketed? Does our behaviour exemplify the respect and gratitude we owe these men and women who leave their homes and loved ones to serve and protect us? If not, shame on us.

I don't understand the dedication and sacrifice but I appreciate it. I wouldn't want my children working in these professions but I'm glad some people's kids do. I don't want to forget or take anything for granted on November 11 or any other day. It's up to each of us to make sure that doesn't happen, from where I sit.

The Chronicles of Cruiscin Lan

by
Wanda
Waterman
St. Louis

... and everyone I interviewed was either lazy, crooked, or lazy and crooked. And they expect US to feel sorry for them.

Different from
You and Me

Chronicles of
CRUISCIN Lan

By the way, can I
leave early today?

I need to
shop for
this
winter's
fur.

You can afford FUR on
what I'm paying you?!!

HEAVENS, no!
I just made a
killing on an insider
stock trading
tip.

And it's high time, too.
FINALLY I get the break
I deserve!

AUSU THIS MONTH



Response to AUSU's open letter from Joy Romero, Chair, AU Governing Council

Athabasca University

Office of the Governing Council

October 31, 2007

Dear AU Students:

I am very pleased to learn, through your elected AUSU representatives, that you share our excitement and satisfaction at the recent Government of Alberta allocation of \$30 million in capital funding for the new Academic and Research Centre on our Athabasca campus. This level of government support does indeed, as your student leaders say, clearly demonstrate the province's strong commitment to post-secondary education and to AU students in particular.

In response to your question about how AU will use these funds to enhance student services, it is first important to emphasize that, as dedicated capital funding, this \$30 million grant is specifically earmarked to cover construction costs of the new building in Athabasca. None of the money may be diverted to operational uses. That said, however, acquisition of our new building will allow us to enhance student services in many ways.

As you may know, AU academic and support staff members have for some time now been suffering from a critical shortage of work space. Our main campus was designed to house a staff serving the academic and support needs of a 10,000 member student body. Last year, in contrast, 37,000 students enrolled at AU. In the past five years alone, our staff complement has grown by more than seven per cent annually, and finding adequate office space, meeting space, research space, etc. has grown increasingly difficult. Many staff members have been forced to work in environments that are not suited to their professional needs, and such compromises have impacts on operating efficiencies and, inevitably, if not addressed on the quality of service provided to students.

The new Academic and Research Centre will greatly strengthen Athabasca University's leadership role in addressing distance education challenges and opportunities. In addition to providing badly needed space and services for the academic and research centres of the university, including work space for 210 additional staff members, it will enhance and support increased collaboration between researchers and academics giving impetus to research into teaching practices, innovations and implementation strategies associated with e-learning. It will also house the university's new Technology Enhanced Learning Research Institute—an Institute dedicated to using technology in learning. All of these improvements are destined to have a direct positive impact on the quality and quantity of the university's academic and research programs.

In addition, in 2010, when academic and research staff move into the new building, the space they now occupy in the existing main Athabasca campus building will be renovated to house student support staff. The altered building will be transformed into the Athabasca University Learning Centre and, in addition to expanded student service facilities, will house a significant teaching laboratory.

These are indeed exciting times for AU and for current and prospective AU students. These and other proposed capital projects as well as the planned introduction, over the next several years, of a number of new academic programs, the creation of several new research institutes, including the Technology Enhanced

Learning Research Institute mentioned above, the adoption or creation of innovative educational technology in support of distance learners and the planned expansion of our student financial supports are positioning AU to both broaden its outreach and expand its services to students. Over the coming few years, AU students will benefit from a broader range of academic choices and enhanced opportunities to participate in research, and they will be supported by a broader (and deeper) range of non-academic services.

Thank you for your letter and your interest in the changes affecting your university. At AU, the focus is on you, the student, and all developments, whether they involve bricks and mortar, technological innovation or academic research, are calculated to enhance the opportunities that we can provide to you.

Sincerely,

Joy Romero, P.Eng., MBA PM

Chair

Athabasca University Governing Council

cc: Frits Pannekoek

An open letter to Joy Romero, Chair of AU Governing Council

Dear Ms. Romero:

On behalf of the students of Athabasca University, we are excited and encouraged by what Dr. Frits Pannekoek has called the “second greatest milestone” in the history of Athabasca University. The approval of \$30 million toward AU’s new administrative and research center, as announced today by Minister of Advanced Education and Technology Doug Horner, is a tremendous step toward ensuring that AU will remain one of Canada’s finest educational institutions.

This funding demonstrates Alberta’s strong commitment to Alberta’s students, and the students of Athabasca University. Athabasca University also demonstrates this commitment through its focus on increasing affordability, accessibility, and quality of education for our members. Recent limits imposed on annual tuition increases are an important first step toward ensuring affordability. Today’s funding announcement will further address accessibility issues for AU students.

In early 2007, AUSU presented the government and AUGC with a document detailing our Vision for a Skilled Alberta. It is clear that our concerns have been heard and that steps are being taken to ensure that students’ views are incorporated into revisions to our education system and university services. We are encouraged that we have reached this milestone to improve the main campus of our university and ensure that AU has sufficient staff to address growing student needs.

We now look forward to learning how AUGC and Athabasca University will use these funds to enhance the quality of AU’s offerings and we request a communication from AUGC to our members explaining how this new funding will enhance student services.

We continue to look forward to reaching future milestones that will ensure that AU can address the urgent need for enhanced learning and virtual communication technologies, more courses and programs, and research opportunities for students.

AUSU



At Home: Smog is costing us billions in health care

According to Canadian researchers, rising levels of smog in cities are not only raising concerns about health in children and long-time residents, but are also costing taxpayers \$2 billion annually for health care resources. After a study conducted in Toronto, it was determined that car pollution and smog were responsible for the deaths of hundreds of people annually, as well as the rising level of asthma in children. Researchers concluded that the primary factor in the failing health and related deaths of Canadians in cities was car exhaust.

According to [MediResource](#), smog is composed of many different substances, including pollution from vehicles and coal-fired power plants, other gas-powered machines, and pesticides. These substances mingle with fog particles and can be carried for miles by the wind, making even rural areas subject to their harmful components. The primary concern with elevated smog levels in cities such as Toronto has been asthma. However, other respiratory diseases have been linked to such

pollution and can affect people young and old.

In conjunction with this research, city planners and scientists agree that the best way to deal with rising smog levels is to introduce a more effective public transportation system in Canadian cities. It is estimated that \$1 billion in health care costs could be saved each year if the government were to invest more in public transit systems such as the subway and buses. Other suggestions to save money, promote better health, and cut down pollution involve different approaches to energy production, household heating systems, and better-insulated homes.

The problem is not a new one; city planners and all levels of government have, however, remained slow in addressing the issues of smog and the related risk to both the environment and human health.

In Foreign News: Writers Guild of America strikes

If you are a fan of Hollywood-produced shows like *The Daily Show*, *Back to You*, *Rules of Engagement* and many others then you may have noticed repeat episodes being shown in place of the new ones you were expecting. What's happened? Thanks to ongoing complaints from the Writers Guild of America, Hollywood writers have officially gone on strike and left their respective actors, directors, and late-night talk show hosts without so much as a line to work with. An estimated 12,000 writers are participating in the strike because of a dispute over their share of DVD and Internet revenues.

A correspondent on CBC News Today remarked that currently writers in Hollywood are earning "pennies" for each DVD sale and Internet download; by striking, the writers are showing the industry's dependence on them and making it clear that it is not only the actors and TV personalities who should be making good money from their work. A writer from *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* commented that if Jon Stewart were to proceed with his live news-satire program without his writers it would be "funny" if he spent the entire half-hour slot staring at the camera.

The Writers Guild has been negotiating with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers for some time now. However, MSNBC says that talks finally broke down on Sunday over the key issue of Internet revenues. Members of the Writers Guild have not yet rescheduled their negotiations with the Alliance, but have instead told members of the press that they are expecting a long wait. Picketing is taking place outside various studios until a compromise can be reached between the two parties; until then we are left with reruns.

CLICK ON THIS - Random Coolness

Lonita Fraser

Sometimes it just beats all what human beings spend their time making, doing, being, and sharing with others. The limitless capacity of the human mind is stunning.

Instructables

They aren't kidding when they call it the world's biggest show and tell. This site is a wealth of art, games, toys, gadgets, crafts and so much more. And you the user can add your own!

The Poster List

A fabulous collection of wonderful posters to suit every taste. I wouldn't pass this up, even if you just look for some visual jollies.

Drive My Car

You can navigate a remote control car around this guy's office. There might be a bit of a lineup when you hit the site, though.

American Society for Velociraptor Attack Prevention

Unless there's something someone hasn't told me, I think we're pretty safe.

Old Superstitions

Oh man, we're a loony lot, us humans. Can you believe the stuff some of us believe? Interesting, and a tad humorous in parts.

Life-Size Model Car

Yes, that's right, someone made a 25:1 scale model of a 1:25 scale car model. No, really; there are pictures to prove it!

EDUCATION NEWS



Alberta tuition outpaces national average: Stats Can report

Natalie Climenhaga

EDMONTON (CUP) -- Post-secondary tuition in Alberta is now \$430 above the national average according to Statistics Canada's annual report.

The report, released Oct. 18, showed that Canadian full-time students in undergraduate programs will pay, on average, 2.8 per cent more in tuition fees in 2007-2008 than they did last year.

Alberta tuition fees rose at nearly twice that rate, going up by 4.6 per cent.

According to Steven Dollansky, a vice-president with the University of Alberta Students' Union, Alberta's increase is indicative of the level of investment that the provincial government is putting into post-secondary education.

"Albertan learners have seen tuition rises that have drastically outpaced the national average, the focus on reducing barriers of access to learners has not been recognized by the provincial government as it has been by other jurisdictions," Dollansky said. "As a result, we are falling behind our peers."

However, University of Alberta provost and vice-president Carl Amrhein questioned the merit of comparing Alberta's tuition fees to a national average.

"I think the average is a misleading number," Amrhein said, noting that while Quebec is renowned for having the lowest tuition levels in the country, the differential fee for non-Quebec residents makes comparing up-front tuition fees problematic.

Zach Churchill, the national director of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), said that different provinces charging different tuition fees affects students' mobility within the country.

"[I want to stress] the importance of the federal government and the provincial government taking a leadership role on assuring that we have an affordable and accessible post-secondary system in this country that is mobile [and] that allows students to study wherever they want," Churchill said.

Amrhein doubts that a lack of student mobility can be linked to tuition fees. He pointed out that most of the tuition levels are tightly clustered around the national average.

"There's not a lot of student mobility across the provinces to begin with relative to what you would find in say the US or within the European community," Amrhein said. "[However], I don't really see that [a] \$400 difference is going to affect many choices."

According to Dollansky, though, high tuition fees in Alberta are contributing to a demographic change in the students able to attend the University of Alberta.

"Ten years ago, [there was a] wider spectrum of students from a more diverse economic background," he said. "Just because the slots are being filled, doesn't mean that the institution is accessible, it means that it is accessible to a smaller and smaller portion of the population."

By continuing to pursue maximum tuition increases every year, Dollansky said that the university's administration isn't recognizing the fact that students are being turned away by heavy fees.

The students' union would now like to see a "fully funded tuition roll-back" that would commit the government to fund whatever revenue the universities lose from a reduction in tuition.

"We don't want to see the University left out in the cold," he stressed. "[But] the fact that we're above the national average, in a time of prosperity like this in Alberta, and we're not passing that prosperity onto learners who are going to sustain that growth, is just unacceptable."

Duncan Wojtaszek, executive director of the Council of Alberta University Students, (CAUS), echoed Dollansky's criticisms.

"In an environment like Alberta, where the government has plenty of resources to affect change and also in a place where the cost of living is so much higher than the rest of the country, we would have thought that that was a powerful reason to have lower tuition when compared to the national average," he said.

Wojtaszek noted that while finances are rarely the only barrier to education, tuition fees are a significant one.

Amrhein, however, noted that tuition fees are only a fraction of the costs students face and that in order to ensure accessibility, the entire spectrum of financial hardships associated with post-secondary education must be addressed.

"[Tuition levels are] clearly important, but I worry also about those students in Alberta who have to come to either Edmonton or Calgary to get to one of the two big universities. Tuition is only about a third of the cost they incur; room and board is twice tuition roughly speaking," Amrhein said.

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THE VOICE

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