

THE VOICE MAGAZINE

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December 14, 2007*



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THE VOICE MAGAZINE

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Dear Santa

Dear Santa, I know you've probably already heard the latest news from Rear Admiral Steven K. Galson, the acting U.S. Surgeon General.

And I know that, being a wise old gent, you'll ignore it. But I just had to write and let you know that this business about you setting a bad example by being a little, um, plump, is the most *incorrect* politically correct nonsense to come drifting up the chimney in a while.

When the Surgeon General told the *Boston Herald* that you should slim down, I'm sure he meant well. After all, he has a point that it's "really important that the people who kids look up to as role models are in good shape, eating well and getting exercise."

I think he's forgetting, though, that we shouldn't judge our role models on one narrow characteristic—especially not one as superficial as looks.

In fact, Santa, I'd like to remind all those jumping on the trendy thinner-red-suit bandwagon that this is just one more example of style overshadowing substance in our appearance-obsessed society. If the Surgeon General is really concerned with having good role models, he needs look no further than the end of your jolly red nose.

For starters, you and Mrs. Claus are a shining example of the sense of emotional well-being that comes from a happy, stable relationship. You've been together forever and still seem as much in love today as when you met. We all know the emotional and societal upheaval that comes from unhappy relationships, divorce, and unsafe sex. These issues always end up affecting the kids, and in an age where movie stars and pop icons collect (and discard) spouses faster than you can twinkle an eye, you and Mrs. Claus present a model of devotion and constancy—perhaps the only one some kids ever see.

You've also given up smoking. For a guy that was hooked on pipe tobacco as far back as the 1800s, that's no small feat. Not only are you a good role model for kids to not *start* smoking, you also walk the walk when it comes to showing your tiny admirers they can do anything they set their minds to.

Your kindness to animals is legendary. I mean, Rudolph and the others have been with you since they were calves. They're well fed, their coats shine, and, in all the photos I've ever seen, they look happy. (There are rumours this has something to do with all that magical flying dust, but I prefer to think it's because you take such good care of them.) All those kids who get puppies, kittens, or iguanas for Christmas would do well to follow your lead.

Perhaps most important of all, you set an example of love and acceptance for everyone. Even before tolerance and inclusion were the catchwords of the day, long before John Lennon sang "Imagine," your annual journeys knew no boundaries. True, not every household in the world believes in you, but wherever you're welcomed you bring happiness. In your eyes, there are no colours, no countries, no prejudices—only kids.

So, Santa, for what it's worth, ignore the critics who tell you you're setting a bad example by being too fat. You bring out the best in us, setting an example of giving without asking anything in return. To your naysayers, I counter it's your generous spirit, not your generous girth, they should be looking at.

Oh, and one more thing, Santa. Merry Christmas.

AU Profiles:

Peter Tretter

by Christina M. Frey

This week's profile focuses on an AU student who hasn't let his health problems get in the way of earning his degree. Peter Tretter, who is enrolled in AU's Bachelor of General Studies (BGS) program, explains how he's turned his health issues into a studying advantage. He also tells why distance education works for him, and gives advice on where to find that extra study time in a busy schedule.

Peter, who currently lives in Ottawa, Ontario, is required to spend 15 hours a week in a hospital dialysis unit. He admits that studying while dealing with a health issue poses its own special challenges: "There are days," Peter says, "when you really don't feel like doing homework because you're too tired. I'll do as much as I can, even if only an hour or two, and . . . reward myself with a break."

AU and distance education have helped make his dream of completing his degree possible. AU's Access to Students with Disabilities (ASD) office has been "very compassionate and understanding," Peter says.

Moreover, because he doesn't attend traditional classes, Peter is able to take his studying with him wherever he goes—including the hospital. He's decided to stay positive and productive, turning his hospital time into an opportunity to get his reading and studying done. "A happy side effect [of dialysis] is that I have lots of time to do homework," he says.

Distance education worked for him when traditional university was no longer possible. Several years ago, Peter was a technical theatre student at Ryerson University in Toronto. However, after three years of study, he had to withdraw due to his illness, leaving his degree unfinished. After taking another three years off, he decided to complete his studies. "I was looking for the easiest way to apply my specialized credits towards a degree," he says. A friend recommended Athabasca University; Peter was impressed to learn that its BGS program would allow him to transfer most of his Ryerson credits and apply them to his degree.

The BGS program's flexibility was another drawing point. "I really liked that there was no residency requirement for the BGS," Peter says. Moreover, he is taking the BGS's applied concentration; because it has no prerequisites, it has allowed him to take a wide variety of courses in fields unrelated to his initial theatre studies.

For example, he has taken several criminal justice courses. In fact, he calls it his "very minor focus," but that doesn't necessarily mean a career change to the criminal justice field. "It's entirely possible," he says, "but the courses themselves are valuable even if I don't go into that field." An example is his course on special needs policing, dealing with minorities in the community. Peter believes that what he learned will be useful regardless of what career path he chooses: "You're always dealing with various folks from different cultures," he says. "It's applicable in IT where I work now."

Distance education has yet another advantage for Peter: he can work more efficiently than at a traditional university. While a traditional university requires reading homework in addition to attending classes, Peter says that "at AU, you don't have the hours of sometimes boring lectures, you just have the reading."

"I find my marks are higher now than when I was [at] Ryerson," he adds.

Peter has found distance education to have some disadvantages, however. "I miss the social interaction," he says. Although he uses discussion forums such as those run by AUSU, "it's just not the same as the in-person contact with your classmates." To stay motivated, Peter reminds himself that "the work won't do itself . . . [and] it has to get done."

His secret to getting it done is making good use of those blocks of time that we typically waste without thinking. "Lunch time at work is prime studying time," Peter says. By spending half the lunch hour on homework, he was able to get a great deal accomplished while working full-time. "I'd [also] go into work early and do homework before I started my shift," he says.

Peter is approaching the end of his degree: with only six courses remaining, he plans to finish one shortly and begin the remaining five in January. He has not yet decided what will happen after graduation. "I'm always looking for a career change," Peter says. "It is a great way to meet new people, and have valuable new experiences."

On the other hand, he also feels that further education with AU fits well with his situation, and he is considering applying to AU's Master of Arts—Integrated Studies (MAIS) program. "The MAIS program is a natural progression of what I'm doing now because I can do the work while at the hospital," he points out. "I'd like to take it at the very least to advance within my current company."

In his spare time, Peter has begun a forum website for Athabasca students, www.aurocks.com. He envisions it as an "independent . . . community where AU students [can] gather to discuss the university." He adds, "The site is also there to let people know that there's an independent place that thinks that AU is a great place to be a student. Let's . . . let people know it's a great, credible place to study."

CLICK ON THIS - Give It

Lonita Fraser

It's a time of year when many of us think about how to stuff stockings, pick presents, and get the gift that'll make the receiver love you forever. If you're stuck, or want something a little off the beaten track, why not some of the following?

Crazy Cat Lady Action Figure - Sadly only comes with six cats. JUST six! That's not even crazy cat lady in training!

Radioactive Products - Uranium ice cream? Atomic energy lab toy? Heavy-water dispenser? You know you want to; I can see the glow of excitement from here.

Honey, I Left it On The Toast - Want to send your loved one a message, but haven't got a pen and paper handy? Why not leave it on the toast!

The Design Team - The tagline says "Everday, Different Design," and they aren't kidding!

Waste Some Cash - "Premier site for cool gadgets, funny gag gifts, and pranks." Perfect if you're the naughty type who likes to trick on Christmas morning, rather than saving it all for Devil's Night or Halloween. Just remember, Santa can leave coal in your stocking too!

Retro Planet - A little bit of everything from gifts to furniture to toys and more. A nice little blast from the past that might soothe the ruffled feathers of the person you just pulled one of the above gags on.

The Chronicles of Cruiscin Lan

by
Wanda
Waterman
St. Louis





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

The Jimmy LaFave Interview

Jimmy LaFave is a folksinger-songwriter who was born in Texas but spent his late teen and early adult years in Oklahoma. He has performed in Canada, the United States, and Europe, and has had a devoted following for the last two decades. For a review of his latest CD, Cimarron Manifesto, see last week's Mindful Bard.

Are you happy with *Cimarron Manifesto*?

Oh, yeah. It turned out the way I expected. Some of my CD's I've done a little quicker. To make a CD you need two things: a plan, and not enough time.

That touches on another question—what, for you, are the best conditions for creativity? I take it a time crunch is part of the mix.

Dylan has that great quote, that chaos is his friend. I like a little bit of chaos when I record. A mix of musicians come together and we all come up with ideas. Nothing's set in stone. I don't put music charts in front of them and say, "Play this, play that." I guess spontaneity is a better word than chaos. There's a couple of songs on *Cimarron* that I totally started over, from the basics. You just cut the rhythm tracks first, then the bass and the drums. Then you can add whatever you want—fiddles or dobros or electric guitars.

You had a hand in the production.

I've produced all my records. When I first started recording I did it because it was cheaper. Then I just continued with it. I usually take a lot of input from the people involved.

Does it help to have the right people or do you tend to get along well with everyone?

We recorded in this studio here in Austin called Cedar Creek. They've done some great records there. The Dixie Chicks even did a record there. Fred Remmert, the engineer—I really trust his ears. He'll say, "That take didn't really have the magic of the last one," so we'll do it again.

Why did you decide to record Donovan Leitch's "Catch the Wind"?

I always really liked that song. You know that Dylan documentary, *Don't Look Back*?



Dylan kind of disses Donovan in a way. I really like a lot of Donovan's songs. But I think the main reason I did "Catch the Wind" is that it popped up on a car commercial a couple of years ago. It was sad because a lot of people probably thought it was just a commercial jingle. I always heard it in my mind at a slow tempo. And since I recorded it I've seen it on another commercial, for wind power or something. According to Eric Peltoniemi, the president of Red House Records, there's a Donovan connection to Red House. I think maybe they have a label that he recorded his last record on. Someone took the time to play him my version and he really enjoyed it, so that made me feel good, too.

What music have you been listening to lately, besides your own?

I've been listening to all kinds of stuff. When you travel around you get a stack of things, so I just put them in and see what clicks and what doesn't. I tend to listen to a lot of older stuff too; I always have some Dylan with me on road trips. I recently went to a music conference in Nashville and I ran into a lot of people so I had a whole stack of CDs.

"We know different people hold to specific religions or political beliefs but we're very open-minded and we don't really stick to any belief system, even though we are pretty cohesive in our political views."

You get to listen to a lot of new stuff.

Yeah. One of my favourite new songwriters is a guy here in Austin named Sam Baker. He has a CD called *Pretty World*. It's a really beautiful CD. Sam's not like some virtuoso guitar player or singer. He's kind of a poet that puts these little poems to music. Unless you're looking for someone to be singing perfectly, with vocal gymnastics and everything, you'd really like Sam Baker.

He has a really interesting life story. He was on this train in Peru which some terrorists bombed, and the bomb blew up in the same car he was in. He lost part of his hand, but he was lucky to come out alive. He hosts a little thing here every Monday night here in Austin. He's finally blossomed in the last year. People have known about him for a while but I think the time is coming for him to be known as one of America's next great singer-songwriters.

Have you met Dylan?

No. I was in the same room with him one time but I didn't really say anything to him. My friend Steve Ripley in Oklahoma actually played in his band for a couple of years, and I've known people who've been really close to him.

What do you like to do to unwind?

I usually go up to Oklahoma, where I grew up. I was born here in Texas but my family moved to Oklahoma. I like to do photography because that's something you can do on your own, you don't need anyone to help you with that.

What state was the most musically stimulating for you, Texas or Oklahoma?

Definitely Oklahoma. A lot of the artists who come here to Austin are actually from Oklahoma. I don't dare say that in Texas; they have this thing about everything being bigger and better in Texas, but really Oklahoma is more musically fertile. I really like going to the Woody Guthrie Folk Festival there. You get to hear some great stuff and play with a variety of interesting people, so that's very stimulating.

What was on your mind when you wrote "These Blues"?

It was a composite of experiences with friends and loved ones. Sometimes people ask me, "Do you know what you wrote?" and I don't really. It's just what comes to me and I don't analyze it too much.

Was "Don't Ask Me" the result of a personal experience?

My band is made up of a bunch of pretty intelligent people; we all have inquiring minds, and when we're travelling together we often get talking about a lot of things. We know different people hold to specific religions or political beliefs but we're very open-minded and we don't really stick to any belief system, even though we are pretty cohesive in our political views. We observe a lot of things, and we get talking about the way the country's going, and what Bush is doing.

You sound like Canadians. Especially the part about Bush. Is your name an Americanization of Lefebvre?

Yeah. My people are actually from Quebec and came down to North Dakota years ago.

In the song "This Land," there's a line, "I simply want my country back again." Was there ever a time when you felt the country was yours?

When I was younger. The past few years have been really bad here. George W. Bush has removed more freedoms than any president I ever knew. And people here in Texas are so apologetic for him because he used to be governor here; they'll say, "It's not him, it's his administration." I just don't know. I know musicians who've worked for Bush and they describe him as a regular guy. His administration is definitely very secretive and unaccountable.

Would you say you're all mostly left wing, right wing, or—?

As Woody Guthrie says, "Left wing, right wing, chicken wing." I keep my mind open. Whatever you believe, it's all a mystery in the end.

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.

THE VOICE WANTS YOU

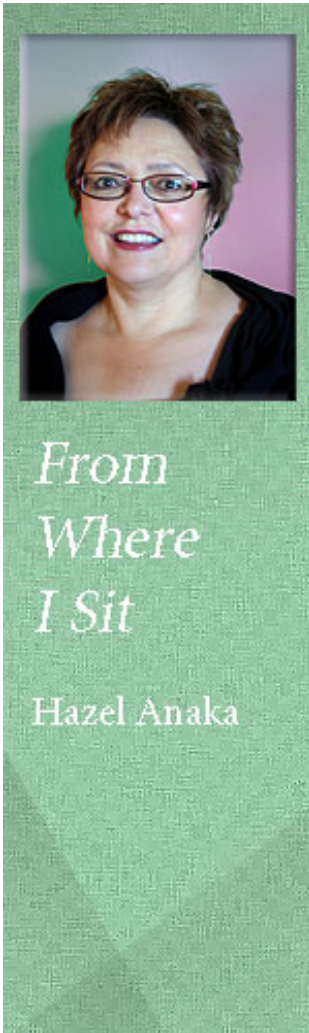


The Education Beat

Do the latest developments in education interest, intrigue, or even infuriate you? Do you follow the ups and downs of college and university life and the federal and provincial decisions that affect students?

If this sounds like you, here's a chance to make your opinions pay. *The Voice* is looking for a writer with a keen interest in the politics (and peculiarities) of Canada's post-secondary system.

To find out more about becoming a regular education contributor for *The Voice*, just email voice@ausu.org.



Have Yourself a SARK-like Christmas

Since I opened a blank Word document to write my weekly column I've trawled through my library looking for inspiration, put a roast in the oven, put a load of clothes into the washer, checked a dictionary to ensure correct usage of a particular word, putzed with a vanilla candle on my desk, and had several sips of water. But by far the greatest procrastination tool available is the Internet.

I simply wanted to write a Christmas column that was fresh and relevant. To take a new slant on an old challenge. To avoid the drippy sentimentality or the predictable rant against commercialism. I had hoped a random quote from one of several compilations would be a springboard to brilliance. No. Usually the newspaper is a reliable source of story ideas, but this year nothing has caught fire for me. Chance conversations, people-watching, and real life can always be counted upon to jump-start a mind gone blank. Well, maybe not always.

Perhaps adding to the pressure and self-consciousness is the fact I've been reading some books about writing. Talk about raising the bar, questioning one's intentions, offering conflicting advice—aren't these all supposed to be helping fellow writers?

I had hoped flipping through a wildly decorative, endlessly cheery, psychedelically swirled book by SARK would kick-start my own creativity. Instead it led me to her website, with all its attendant side trips onto other pages and links to other sites. I watched a video and read a column about her, and ended up at Amazon.com through a book link. Still, I was no closer to having a fresh take on a Christmas column.

When I look back at Christmas 2006 I realize I went through it in a pain- and medication-induced state. All those activities (like decorating a tree, sending out cards, shopping for and wrapping gifts, preparing a feast) that normally help set the mood were absent because of my surgery.

This year Roy and I decorated the tree weeks ago. The gifts were bought and wrapped. Our immediate family will be together Christmas Eve for our gift exchange. The larger, extended family gathering is planned for Christmas day. But it too will be different with many members missing. Shift work, Jamaica, and the Czech Republic are three very good reasons. Also missing from the mix are any young children or grandchildren to re-ignite the wonder of the season. This is the reality for us this year.

Maybe this column has come full circle to SARK. She lives (and preaches) the notion of creativity, inner wisdom, magic, letting go of perfectionism, and so much more. Christmas is the perfect time to put her message into practice. Let go of expectations and pretension. Become childlike again in our innocence, exuberance, and joy. Don't mourn the jobs left undone. Delight in the here and now, however imperfect that (and we) may be. Believe that even micro-movements (tiny actions) of five seconds to five minutes in duration can move us along to our creative dreams.

I'm willing to try it SARK's way this year. Merry Christmas, from where I sit.

AUSU THIS MONTH



AUSU Job Posting Chief Returning Officer

The Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU) represents AU students and their interests. The Union strives for a fair and accessible election process for members to the Students' Council. To this end, AUSU is seeking a student to fulfill the role of Chief Returning Officer (CRO) for the 2008 AUSU General Elections.

Position Duties and Responsibilities

The CRO's responsibilities, as outlined in AUSU policy, are collecting nominations, verifying the eligibility of nominees, informing candidates of campaign policy, enforcing campaign policy, collecting votes, confirming voter eligibility, counting ballots on March 13, 2008,—and as needed for any recounts—and reporting election results to council. The election will be open from March 9 through March 12 and the CRO will be required to be reachable by phone during that time. Throughout January and February, a commitment of 1 hour a week (via email or phone) may be required.

The CRO reports to the Executive Director of AUSU and AUSU Students' Council.

Selection Criteria

- Applicants must have strong organizational abilities.
- Applicants must be comfortable with Excel and email, including attachments.
- Applicants must be able to analyze and apply policy to ensure a fair election process.
- Candidates in the 2008 AUSU General Election are ineligible for this competition.
- Candidates must be able to operate out of the AUSU head office located in Edmonton, AB.

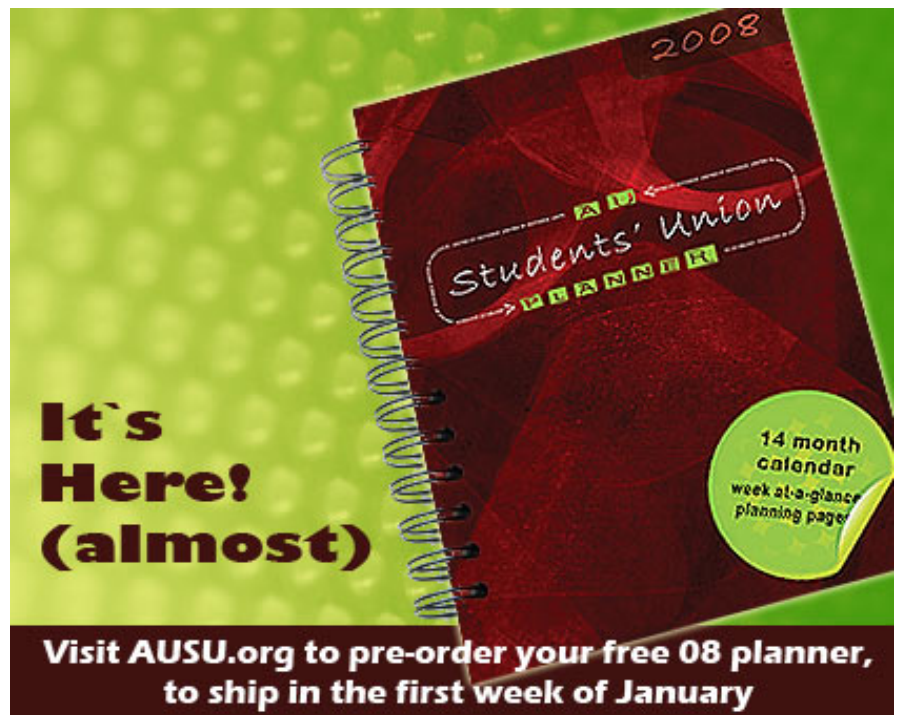
Apply to:

Please submit a resume and cover letter to executivedirector@ausu.org

Application will remain open until a suitable candidate is hired.

Remuneration

\$500 stipend, payable upon completion of the election process.



Holiday Happenings



There's no shortage of stress in the mad dash to have everything ready in time for the holidays, so here's a lighthearted look at some of the strange—and embarrassing—news items related to the season.

A group from England's Cheltenham and Gloucester sports and social club booked a holiday shopping trip to Lille, France, but the gift that should have been first on their list was a map for their driver.

As the group set out for a fun weekend of shopping, the coach driver entered their destination into his satellite navigation system. Seven hours later, they ended up in the right city—but the wrong country.

Instead of programming his sat nav for the city of Lille, France, the driver had chosen a village of the same name in Belgium. Apparently, the passengers became curious when they started noticing signs for Eindhoven, a city in the Netherlands, but the driver assured them all was well. When the mistake was realized, the driver unplugged the high-tech navigation system and found his way back the old-fashioned way—using an atlas.

The passengers may have been unhappy, but at least they didn't take out their frustrations the way an 18-year-old Louisiana man did. The man was arrested after tackling—and bursting—an inflatable Frosty the Snowman lawn ornament.

No explanation was given for why the man tackled Frosty, wrestled him to the ground, and popped him, but police report that he was apologetic. He posted bond and was released. At last report, inflatable Rudolfs in the same neighbourhood were seen fleeing.

Frosty's attacker isn't the only one feeling sheepish this holiday season: a grocery store in Manhattan apologized after advertising hams as "Delicious for Chanukah."

Balducci's grocery on 14th Street posted signs promoting the hams for the Jewish holiday—even though Jewish dietary laws forbid the consumption of pork. A woman spotted the signs and posted photos of them on her blog, and the company quickly followed suit, posting an apology on their own website.

But if those holiday blunders have put a damper on the seasonal spirit, a mystery elf in New Jersey is sure to brighten things up. It started just before the U.S. Thanksgiving: Christmas ornaments started appearing along the Garden State Parkway.

The decorations have been tied to two large pine trees, and include glittery red and green balls, a large silver bell, and other colourful baubles.

There are no clues to the identity of the mysterious decorator, but as a spokesman for the New Jersey Turnpike Authority, Joseph Orlando, observed, "Somebody has a lot of holiday spirit, which is great, but a lot of spare time at night, which is not so great."



Profs more stressed than general population, study shows

OTTAWA (CUP) -- Canadian university faculty experience a higher-than-normal level of work-related stress, according to a study from the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT).

Inspired by similar studies in Australia and the U.K., it is the first of its kind in Canada to fill the void in quantifiable knowledge related to occupational stress in academia.

"There had been a lot of anecdotal evidence that university faculty were experiencing lots of stress in relation to their work," said James Turk, executive director of CAUT, but there was no data on the trend.

Turk said he often hears of colleagues taking stress leave, or having trouble coping with the changing demands of their jobs.

The study, which measured participant perception, suggests "stress in academia exceeds that found in the general population." Professors and librarians from 56 universities across the country took part in the survey.

The group of 1,500 men and women were asked to fill out an online questionnaire rating seven stress factors, including work-life balance, workload, and fairness in the workplace.

For 85 per cent of staff surveyed, workload was a source of elevated stress. The next most common stressor, at 82 per cent, was role conflict. A professor who teaches, advises students, and conducts research would feel this kind of pressure when trying to juggle their duties.

Finding a balance between work and personal lives stressed 76 per cent of academic staff, according to the study. This number was higher for women, who came in at 80 per cent, eight points higher than their male counterparts. Faculty members in tenure-track positions felt the most stress.

"Publish or perish has intensified," said Turk. The pressure to produce papers, he added, falls especially hard on those who are trying to further their careers. Increased stress in the workplace can also lead to health-related side effects.

"Over time, high work-related stress can lead to related illnesses, such as heart disease and depression," said Ted Haines of the Department of Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics at McMaster University.

Haines, along with scientists at St. Mary's University in Halifax, began the study on behalf of CAUT in 2005.

One in five professors and librarians reported heavy physical symptoms of stress, including anxiety, frustration, memory lapses and an inability to make decisions. Psychologically, 13 per cent of people exhibited "signs of distress."

Turk hopes that the study will force universities to acknowledge that stress is on the rise in their employees and to do something about it.

Despite the high levels of stress, though, two-thirds of librarians and professors were happy with their jobs. The more seniority and job security respondents had, the higher their level of contentment.

Sixty per cent of respondents also felt emotionally attached to their institutions.

classifieds

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THE VOICE

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