

THE

VOICE

MAGAZINE

Volume 17 Issue 26

July 3, 2009

Convocation 2009

Behind the Scenes

Photos, grad interviews,
and more

Rockhead

Reversible damage

BettySoo

Heat Sin Water Skin

Plus:

*The Mindful Bard, From Where I Sit,
Dear Barb, and much more...*



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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.



Re: "Drive-Through Decorum" by Kimberley Sanders, v15 i16 (2009-04-24)

Hi,

Great article.

The textbox call-out that reads "If you can't demonstrate common courtesy, civility, and the spirit..." really resonates with me. I think as a society, we have somehow or another taken the old and antiquated notion of how we treat "servants" and transposed that on to the "service providers" that help to make our world tick. That includes the good people at Starbucks and Tim Hortons that provide the service that gets folks like me up and running and off to execute daily activities. A big part of my day is that warm and cheerful welcome that I get from my Starbucks Barista just before I ingest their delightful concoctions that usually help get my day off to a great start.

I try to take this experience and "pay it forward" to other people I come across during my day. To be mean or disrespectful to one of these Barista's is unthinkable.

If Sanders' stats are right, here's word of advice to the 40-ish year old cranky pants women barking meanness at the Starbucks window:

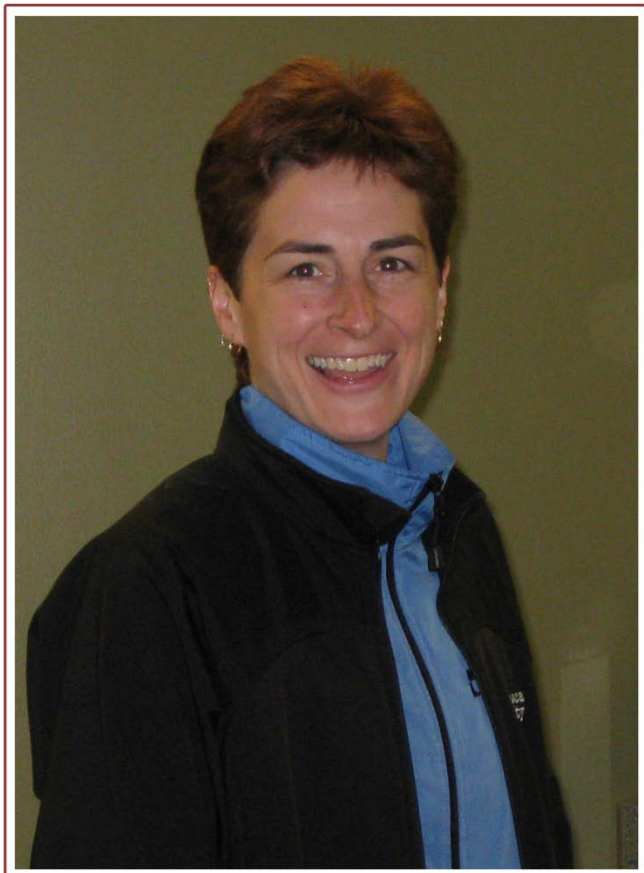
Buy yourselves a coffee machine, some Starbucks' coffee beans from Costco, and make your coffee at home. Then get in your car and drive to wherever it is you go to with your windows closed and the air conditioning on, if you so chose.

Sincerely,

E.

CONVOCATION 2009

Sandra Livingston



Events Coordinator Mel MacGregor

Behind the Scenes

This is the third of a special three-part Voice report on Athabasca University's 2009 Convocation, which took place June 11, 12, and 13. The Voice offers its warmest congratulations to all this year's graduates!

For most people, the experience of AU's convocation ceremony is seen from one of two perspectives: either from the stage, waiting with excitement (and nervousness) for their name to be called; or from the audience, watching with pride as that special grad crosses the platform.

But there's another vantage point to catch all the action from. It's the one behind the scenes, and that's where AU's Mel MacGregor took *The Voice* for this special peek at just what it takes to pull everything together.

As Events Co-ordinator, Mel has pushed more than one pedometer beyond the breaking point during the three days of convocation—but she says the work starts long before that.

"We start planning a year in advance," Mel explains.

"This year for example, once we knew we were moving the event to the multiplex, we had to rejig convocation to determine what would work best where and how the event would flow from one area of the building to the other. We revised the floor plan a few times based on comments from the venue operators, what the President requested, and from what we thought students would be thinking and seeing when they arrived. We also like to book the musical entertainment as soon as possible so we can get the top-notch acts that we really enjoy."

Switching the venue from the large tent to the multiplex may have brought challenges, but it also offered plenty of fun new options.

"The AV aspect of Convocation 2009 was probably my favourite part," says Mel. Along with the two large screens that flanked the stage, Mel and her team were able to incorporate a 7.5 x 10-foot screen suspended from the ceiling and facing the stage "so the students could watch what was going on."

Convocation 2009 Fast Facts

Total number of chairs - 1,650

Total number of meals - 4,600

Pounds of beans served - 800

Square footage of the stage (2008) - 48' x 52'

Square footage of the stage (2009) - 60' x 64'

Average length of ceremony - Thursday and

Saturday: 2.75 hours, Friday: 3.5 hours



Just one of the many delicious meals prepared for grads and guests

Another interesting addition was the gobo, which Mel explains is “a flat metal disc that you place in front of a light, and then light shines through the areas that are cut out of the metal—in this case, the AU logo—projecting the image onto a backdrop.” The AU logo, projected onto the white Lycra circle hanging centre stage, created a striking backdrop for the grads.

Venue details are just the beginning, though, for Mel and Events Assistant Corina Hetze, who have been part of the convocation team for the past three years. As AU grows, so does the event. “In 2004 Convocation was two days,” Mel says, “divided into undergrad and grad, but when those ceremonies got too large they

were split into the three ceremonies as we know them now” (a big difference from the first convocation, with a total of two grads).

This year, AU welcomed around 600 people each day for the Thursday and Saturday ceremonies.

But “the Friday ceremony has a greater number of grads and therefore a greater number of guests,” Mel adds, so the team plans for over 800. “This year we accommodated approximately 1,000 people on Friday, which would be very squishy if we were still using the tent,” she says. “The tent could hold close to 200 people on stage and 600 on the floor. The multiplex has a lot more room to manoeuvre!”

When asked about the number of people it takes to plan such a large event, Mel summed it up in one word. “Lots!”

For all you list-lovers, here’s the breakdown: 3 Events Office staff; 3 photographers; 4 florists; 12 Athabasca Regional Multiplex staff; 18 employees from the rental company; 17 Facilities and Services Staff; 25 audiovisual, lights, sound, and webcast crew; 45 catering-team members; 50 individuals from community groups (the groups that clear tables after breakfast and lunch); 59 musicians; and 130 additional AU staff.



No time for a coffee break yet!



Sgt. Brian Scott, Mel, and Cpl. Ted Soltys

fact, getting to know the stories behind the names is one of the most exciting aspects for Mel, as she explains the locations some grads travel from.

"The grads who travelled the farthest this year came from Japan, China, Hong Kong, and Tanzania, Africa. We also had five grads from the USA attend in addition to all the provinces and territories in Canada."

Once they arrive, it's clear that their stories are as diverse as their locales.

"Thursday was a really unique day," Mel says. "Usually we have the tallest grads on Saturday (6' to 7'), but this year the tallest grad came on Thursday. What made it even more fun was that the smallest grad came on Thursday too! We ordered a kindergarten size gown for her (4' 5") and a super tall gown for him (6' 6")."

"Thursday also featured a set of twin sisters," adds Mel, "Ana and Adela, graduating on the same day with the same degree. How fun is that? And to make things more exciting, we had a mother-daughter team convocate," though with different degrees on different days.

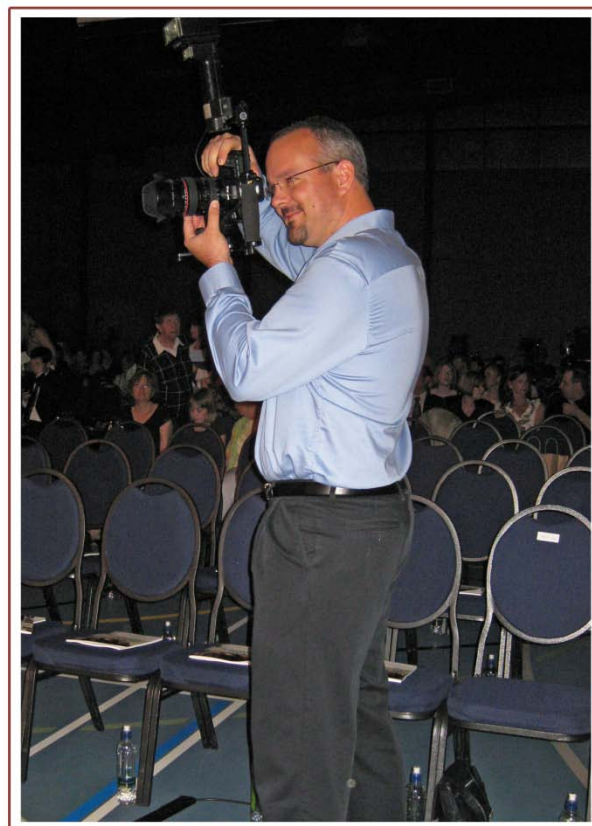
That makes for a grand total of 366. "Plus," adds Mel, "the business people in the community who help in the background and no doubt there are more that I missed."

Along with the obvious things like arranging seating, invitations, meals, and parking, all those hands are kept busy with details like "wrapping 5,140 sets of cutlery so that everyone can eat [and] coordinating the arrival and departure of 37 boxes of gowns and hoods for the three days," Mel explains.

As Mel knows, the unexpected often happens, and inclement weather has played a big role in the plans.

"Last year we added extra tenting to cover the procession from the library to the red carpet in case it rained," she says. "This year, we were well protected from the elements inside the multiplex. It could have rained, snowed, sleeted or overheated outside and we would have been fine inside."

All this activity takes place before the first guest has even arrived, but grads and their families are definitely front and centre when it comes to convocation plans. In



Photographer Michael Leenheer captured official photos of the day



Staying in touch

Still another inspiring grad story took place on Thursday as the oldest grad received her degree. "She is in her seventies," Mel explains, "and wasn't going to come to grad because her daughter was getting married three days later. When her daughter heard this, the daughter said that graduations were very important and weren't something to be missed." So the graduand and her daughter "got on a plane, came to graduation, and then returned home to Ontario for a wedding. Neat!"

The energy of each day's ceremony is different too. "It's interesting to watch and listen to the personalities of the groups each day," says Mel. "Thursday is the Arts day so the crowd is fairly easygoing. Friday is the Science day and the nurses are chatty and lively . . . Saturday is the business day and it's usually a very precise, perfunctory, no-nonsense kind of energy that permeates the crowd."

With so many different facets to planning convocation it might be hard to choose a favourite—but Mel's got that figured out too.

"I like all the action on the days of convocation. I take great delight in making convocation an amazing, unbelievable, phenomenal success for students. AU's

convocation is unlike any other convocation out there and until you've experienced it firsthand, it's hard to understand the magic and intimacy of the event.

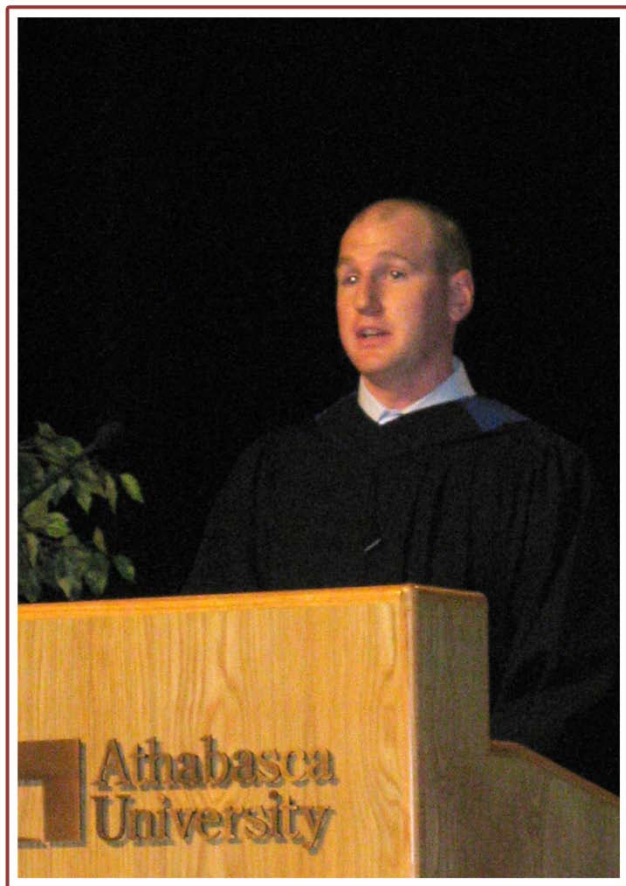
"And then the coordinator part of me gets quite excited when I put together a nine-page production schedule that outlines who does what, where and when, and everything goes according to plan, with some extra excitement thrown in to keep us hopping. It's all good," she adds with a smile.

Athabasca University

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CONVOCATION 2009 – ADDRESS BY GRADUATE

Russell Permann



During each of the three days of convocation, one graduate addressed his fellow students and convocation guests, sharing his thoughts about graduation and the journey that brought him there.

On Saturday, June 13, the graduate address was given by Russell Permann, of Calgary, Alberta, who received his Master of Business Administration.

The Voice thanks Russell for sharing the text of his address, which is printed below.

Madam Chair, Mr. President, distinguished guests, members of the platform party, graduates, families and friends, ladies and gentlemen.

What a privilege and honour it is to be before you today delivering the address to the graduating class of 2009. I want to extend my congratulations to each graduate on this very impressive accomplishment. When James D'Arcy called to ask me to deliver this talk I hesitated for a moment, not out of fear of speaking before such a large crowd (which I am picturing in their underwear right now to calm my anxieties, by the way) but because it is at that moment that I realized I had truly reached

another very significant milestone in my life. Being asked to deliver this speech has really afforded me yet another one of life's opportunities in disguise to be reflective and contemplative not just about my educational experience but about life; so I hope you'll indulge me as I share some of my thoughts.

For any person who has known me much of my life and definitely during those oh-so-important formative years, you would appreciate just how significant this accomplishment has been for me personally. I am most definitely of very humble academic origins. If you were to tell anyone who knew me in high school that I was delivering this address, they might ask if you had me confused with another Russ Permann. If I had a focus in my early life, it most definitely wasn't on academics. But in this crowd, I believe that I am far from unique.

I am sure that if I were to ask everyone in this graduating class about how they found themselves here at this point in life, there would be an interesting story about a learner who has led a fascinating life, most likely has overcome some challenges, but has somehow found a way to accomplish a great deal so far. It seems to me that it is in no small part because of the Athabasca University experience that so many of us who may not have been good as traditional learners or those among us who weren't afforded all of life's opportunities have found a way to unlock so much of our potential.

Because I am just one of the unique success stories among this group today, I wanted to talk about what the experience of completing my MBA at Athabasca has meant to me so that I might pay some respect to the great lessons that I have personally learned along this journey. I hope to once and for all answer the question that everyone invariably asks when you tell them you have finally completed your studies: "So,

what have you learned?" and in so doing I hope to share with you some of the lessons I have taken away from this experience. More importantly, I hope that this gives you pause to think about your own "story" and what lessons you have learned as you have completed this important leg of your life's journey.

"There is no doubt in this era of great uncertainty and change it will be those people, families, and businesses that learn to make good plans and then adjust when circumstances change that will not just survive but thrive."

I started the program in 2005, with two small children and a little more hair. At that time I was extremely anxious about the journey that lay before me. In those early days I truly had no idea what I was getting myself into both academically and with respect to life experiences, challenges, and opportunities. Since 2005 we have relocated across the country twice, welcomed a third child into the world, underwent three fairly significant job changes and innumerable other experiences that all characterize the life of a young family.

Again, this is not so unusual among this crowd; it is just life happening in its ordinary way. What was so unique for me was that I somehow managed to continue my studies through all of these usual personal dynamics. One of the things that really got me through all this change was having a clear objective and a good schedule with

weekly milestones to achieve; but just as importantly I took advantage of some important deferrals between a couple of courses so that I might make some adjustments in my personal life. At the time, these deferrals felt like real setbacks, extending my timeframe for completion and making the journey all the more long. But in hindsight, these changes to the plan really afforded me the opportunity to place my focus on what needed my attention at the time.

This was really learning number one for me: *always have an objective, strategy, and supporting tactics in place but remember that the environment can change so one needs to be ready to revisit, revise and retool strategies as circumstances dictate.* It was the facilitating learning method, the online distance learning format, and the independent, self-paced study that really allowed me to make these adjustments and helped drive this lesson home for me. The strategic management gurus will tell you to scan the environment, develop good systems to organize and synthesize your findings, and make sure you have the ability to execute. There is no doubt in this era of great uncertainty and change it will be those people, families, and businesses that learn to make good plans and then adjust when circumstances change that will not just survive but thrive.

I mentioned briefly my family before. They have been so instrumental in making this accomplishment possible for me. My wife, Erin, and my kids—Matthew, Adria, and Nicholas—made so many sacrifices so that I could diligently participate in the databases, complete my readings, and get all of my assignments done on time; they were my supporters and cheerleaders throughout. I can't pay my family and (I suspect) all of the families of the other learners present today enough respect for all of their support.

Beyond my wife and kids, our extended family and our circle of close friends celebrated alongside us in times of victory and pitched in when we needed their help so that I might have some life beyond my studies. Just as importantly, my fellow learners and the instructors played such an important role in facilitating my learning. As my studies progressed I learned that taking the time to understand other students' experiences in various businesses, gleaning as much knowledge from instructors as possible, and leaning on this newly developed network for support during challenging times only served to enrich the learning experience.

For me, this really underscores learning number two: *One should always seek to surround themselves with great people, spend time understanding what makes each of these people so unique and so special, and to invest heavily in these relationships using both conventional and unconventional tools available.* The experience at Athabasca allowed me to expand my network and experiment with new online technologies that allowed me to get to know people. The way things were structured encouraged sharing of experiences which facilitated gaining a fairly deep understanding about others while allowing the academic staff to really provide us with a depth of insight.

Those who study HR and organizational design in-depth will tell you that the way in which we work is changing, the knowledge worker is becoming more prevalent, educated workers are becoming more migratory, the world is becoming less constrained by geographic boundaries, and the interconnections among people throughout the world are being facilitated and enabled by technology. For me, this means that we can't stop experimenting with new technologies, we must continue breaking down barriers to communication but most importantly, we must make the time to really get to know the people that are important in our lives and we must reach out using all of the tools at our disposal to keep these relationships alive and healthy.

When I began my studies back in 2005, I expected that through all of these courses I would get the answers to some burning questions about business that would ultimately make me a better manager and a better leader. However, in my early studies (and if I am being truthful, pretty much during the entire first phase of the program) after I finished a reading, a weekly lesson, or even after completing an entire course I often found myself thinking "I didn't get any answers, only more questions." Sure, we were being introduced to new concepts and frameworks but I kept waiting for someone to tell me the special secret—the answer—that would finally tell me what to do as a manager.

It wasn't until later in my studies that I realized, that I myself was asking more questions; not just regular questions but more informed and insightful questions, questions that led to better discovery when it came to searching for answers. In essence, I discovered something that has come to be one of the most cherished treasures unearthed during my academic expedition in that there are very few right answers in this world, there are only the right questions to be asked. Just as importantly, once the right question has been asked, one can assuredly go about developing an appropriate answer but in so doing, one is likely to uncover yet more questions that deserve to be explored. It became apparent to me that the learning isn't in the output of the analysis but rather the learning occurs when one discovers how to source, utilize, adapt, and even develop a framework that helps us better understand this complex world in which we live. I feel that I have become a better manager and a better leader because I have come to accept that I will never have all of the answers but I can focus on asking good questions and then framing the analysis.

It is this nugget that must be counted as learning number three: *One can never stop learning; life, business, relationships, spirituality, and anything we hold dear are worth exploring and we should seek to ask great questions, endeavour to keep adapting and refining the paradigms through which we see the world, and put these paradigms to the test by using them to analyze the world around us; if we're doing it right, we should end up with some insights but even more questions worthy of our exploration.*

"... I discovered something that has come to be one of the most cherished treasures unearthed during my academic expedition in that there are very few right answers in this world, there are only the right questions to be asked."

Even accountants and quantitative analysts will agree that one needs to read data and figures that we often accept as “fact” with a careful eye knowing that such data only becomes information through the lens of interpretation. The true nature of lifelong learning was never made more apparent to me than when I completed my applied project where I discovered that although I had come up with some great answers to my research questions there were still so many facets of the problem left to explore. I have Lee Ann Keple especially to thank for her guidance through my project; she helped me refine my understanding of how great it is to discover that we have more questions to answer. (I suspect for the instructors and professors in the crowd this concept of indefinite exploration is especially reassuring from a job security standpoint.)

This brings me to the conclusions and recommendations section of this talk, because if we have learned anything over the course of our studies, a good paper ends with a summation of the findings and some actionable items for us to undertake. If I am to really sum up my learning and provide any recommendations to this audience it is that we all need to have a plan but be wise enough to know when to make changes; we need to be genuine and caring managers, coworkers, spouses, parents, siblings, children and friends; and we need to never stop learning, never stop asking questions, and always strive to discover more about the world in which we live.

But, I must caution you; this is just one man’s thoughts on what the Athabasca University experience has taught me. I hope you too will take the time to think about what you have really learned; you’ve accomplished so much and yet you all have so much more to accomplish. I hope for each of you that this is not the end of something but rather just another milestone passed in life’s journey.

I want to once again congratulate my colleagues—all of you graduates—on this enormous accomplishment, I want to thank the unsung heroes—the staff and management at AU—who seamlessly manage a very complex operation every day, I want to acknowledge the teaching staff at AU who are truly world-class academics, and last but certainly not least I want to tell my family how much I appreciate and love you.

DID YOU KNOW?



Open AU

Physical fitness, research projects, hockey, environmentally friendly cars: where can you find stories on all these topics and more? At [Open AU](#), Athabasca University’s online publication that “features stories about our students, faculty, research, awards and events.”

Along with fascinating feature stories, you can also find Alumni Profiles, Twitter feeds, and links to AU news. And if you’re an AU student or graduate, you can also submit your own story for publication.

Whether you want to open an account and post comments, keep up on the latest news, or read about the latest titles from AU Press, Open AU is the place to be, so don’t forget to add it to your favourites!

CONVOCATION 2009 – GRADUATE INTERVIEWS

Sandra Livingston



This is the third of a three-part *Voice* series featuring interviews with some of AU's 2009 graduates.

For many graduates, convocation weekend was the first time they had seen the beautiful grounds and buildings of the AU campus, and they attended the ceremonies from places near and far, including Peace River, Alberta, and Toronto, Ontario.

The Voice would like to offer its sincere congratulations to all this year's graduates, and knows that their accomplishments will encourage all those students who are still completing their studies at AU.

Zil-E-Huma Lodhi

Bachelor of Administration

Huma travelled from Waterloo, Ontario, to attend convocation but it wasn't her first trip to AU; she's visited the campus before in her role as an AUSU councillor.

She enjoyed the whole experience of earning her Bachelor of Administration degree, and says that distance learning brings unique challenges.

"I think you have to be more disciplined because there's no one there to push you through. You are the master of your own destiny, so you have to set your deadlines, you have to set your goals, and you are the one who will be meeting them."

For students still in the program, Huma offers this advice:

"There will be times where you feel no motivation whatsoever. Let them pass and just keep your eyes on the bigger picture and you'll reach it. If you have to take one day at a time, don't rush yourself [and] don't give up. Keep working, keep pushing yourself, and you will reach your goals."

When it comes to pursuing goals, Huma already has the next one in sight: after a short break from studies, she plans to start working on her MBA.

Congratulations, Huma!



Timothy Busch

Master of Business Administration

If there's one grad who can tell prospective students all about AU, it's Tim—he was an AU staff member for 20 years, and took part in the university's move from Edmonton to Athabasca.

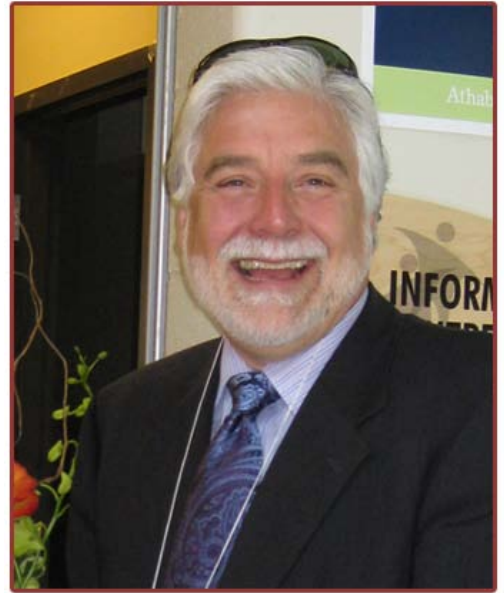
One of the most enjoyable parts of the program was being able to apply those real-life experiences to his assignments.

"Being an employee of the university and then taking part [as a] student, that was very rewarding and interesting."

For students who've been accepted into the MBA program, one of the most important things to ensure success is to plan ahead, he offers.

"Think about the end result up front," Tim says. "Plan your project, start thinking about your project right from the very first course. That would be my advice."

Congratulations, Tim!



Norman John

Bachelor of Commerce

Norman travelled from Toronto to attend convocation, graduating with distinction from the Bachelor of Commerce program. One of the most memorable parts of the experience was the independence required for distance learning.

"This was . . . an individual journey," he notes. "It made me grow."

Managing time well was another important part of Norman's success in the program. "A surprising aspect was how accountable you are for your own time. You don't get that in a [traditional] university."

While peer support can provide motivation in a traditional setting, Norman sees the independence of distance learning as a strength. "I'm not looking at it as a negative, I'm looking at it as a positive. It made me more self-reliant."

Norman says his degree will continue to open doors, and he's already been accepted into an MBA program. "I would not be able to continue at the master's level if not for AU," he says, noting that AU's flexibility played a large part in planning his grad studies.

Congratulations, Norman!



IN CONVERSATION WITH . . .

Wanda Waterman St. Louis

**BettySoo**

BettySoo is an Austin singer-songwriter who sings her own country-flavoured ballads in a tender, evocative style. She has just released her latest album, *Heat Sin Water Skin* (see *Voice* review this issue), to ecstatic reviews. She'll soon be touring with this CD and plans to go to Europe this fall. Recently BettySoo took the time to talk with Wanda Waterman St. Louis.

How Did I Get Here?

I actually didn't plan on a singing career at all. I was in graduate school to be a counsellor. I was also getting married and just sort of leading a normal life. A good friend and mentor of mine sat down with me one day and shared something. She was the kind of person who could look into a person's life and be very discerning.

She told me, "Look, *this* is what you should be doing." I said, "You're crazy!" I kept it to myself for a few days, but then it started to bother me. Finally I went to my husband and told him and he agreed with my friend. The more I thought about it the more I realized I *did* want a music career. I went back to my friend and asked her how to go about it. She told me to start writing songs and then go after it.

A Musical Home

My whole family was really musical. I grew up playing the flute, piano, and violin. I wasn't really exceptional at any of them. My sisters were all much better than I was.

Never the Pretty Girl?

I was on the way to my high school reunion and thinking of my high school class in yearbook terms. Our class had a "class favourites" section for those voted most beautiful, most likely to succeed, etc.

I wasn't any of those things and it took a long time for me to realize that those who were chosen were six people out of five hundred kids, but when you're 16 or 17 you feel like you're the only one that hasn't been picked. Not being singled out for being exceptional sometimes feels like being singled out for being unexceptional. Not being picked actually makes you normal.

Regarding Gurf Morlix

It was great working with Gurf—so comfortable. He's so funny and interesting and has such great stories. He's a person with really long friendships and I think that speaks well of him. Every summer he goes up to New York where he grew up and then to Canada to visit old friends. He stays connected with everyone he feels close to.

As soon as I started working with him I thought, *I want to be one of those long friendships*. He's such a champion of people and people don't always realize it because he seems so quiet. He seems dark and brooding but he's really not.

What's So Great About Austin?

Part of it is the really great community. People really support each other. In a town that has so many musicians you'd expect it to be competitive and cutthroat, and that's just not the case. The prevailing thought is: *If it's good music, then it belongs*. People will always buy bigger hard drives or more CD racks. If it's great music you'll get it even if you already have 400 CDs.

A Funny Thing Happened on Tour .

. .

Not all small towns in the South are used to seeing Asian people. At one town I went to they had one of my posters on the wall and next to my poster was a blackboard. Somebody had copied my poster onto the blackboard and on the blackboard version, in the place where my show information was, they had a running haiku contest.

Every day they would choose a haiku that somebody in the bar wrote and that would be the haiku of the day. And they had a countdown of the number of days until I got there.

It was the funniest thing because they meant it as such a tribute, but a) I'm not really a poetic writer, and b) I'm not Japanese. But it was their way of trying to connect. It was sweetly intended, so how could I take offence?

Foundations

I'm a Christian, a Protestant. Politically I'm pretty split.

Depending on which group of friends I'm around I'm either the most liberal or the most conservative person in the group. The sad thing is that the kind of polarized thought that we have in this country really makes any line of thinking inconsistent. You can't say you're the party of the people and then cheat half the population. And you can't say you're the party of compassion and values and then spit fire at people. To me it's amazing that the people who oppose the death penalty and the people who oppose abortion hate each other. Either you really believe that all life should be preserved or you really don't. There should be some higher values that most of us do agree on.



The Interviewer

It is the ninth decade of the twentieth century...

written and illustrated by Wanda Waterman St. Louis

Rockhead #30: Reversible Damage



As a baby Reuben had endured a fever so high it had damaged his brain.



The doctor said that this damage would gradually reverse itself, but Reuben still had to go into a special ed class when he started school.



In grade two he discovered books. But there were only baby books in special ed.

Mizz Oickle, can I go into the regular class now? Please, please, please?

No, Reuben. You cannot.



The local kids threw rocks at him on the way home from school and called him "ree-tard".



Finally with his mother's help Reuben passed into a general class. He aced everything and even surpassed his age group so the principal had to intervene and stick him in academic even though his teacher insisted Reuben must have been cheating.



Now Reuben sits in lecture rooms surrounded by beefy jocks and sorority sluts and knows in his heart that they would have thrown rocks at him and called him "ree-tard". Or worse.



His memories make it hard for Reuben to be sociable. They're how he got to be where he is today.





*Dear
Barb*

Barbara Godin

Same-Sex Wedding Brings Opportunity for Discussion

Dear Barb:

A very good friend is getting married and she is gay. Janice and I have been very close confidantes for years, but our relationship has not extended beyond work. Therefore my husband and children have not spent a lot of time with Janice and my children do not know she is gay. My family have been invited to the wedding, including my children. My sons are aged eight and nine and I'm not sure I should bring them to the wedding.

Janice says to bring them as it will be fun. She has no idea I have never told them about her lifestyle. My husband and I have talked to our boys about marriage and family and that it takes place between a man and a woman. I know if we bring them to the wedding there will be lots of questions. If I don't bring them Janice will be hurt. What should I do?

Kara

Hi, Kara, thanks for the interesting question. Being gay is a part of our society. It is not hidden away as in the past. Gay marriages are legal in many parts of the world and we need to include them when preparing

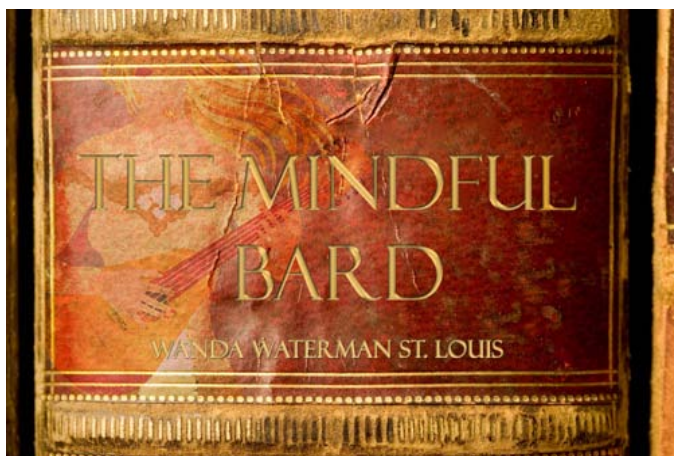
our children for life. As we talk to our children about the facts of life, we need to include gay lifestyles as well. The more openly we discuss issues with our children, the less prejudice and intolerance they will exhibit toward others.

I would definitely bring your children to the wedding, but prior to it, you and your husband need to explain to them that this is a marriage between two people who love each other but are of the same sex. The main value you want to relay to your children is that marriage takes place between two people who love each other. At their young ages I don't feel you need to go into any further detail, unless they ask more questions.

Generally, if a child is astute enough to ask a question they are prepared for the answer. So depending on your children, further questions may be a possibility. Your nine year old may be more inquisitive than the eight year old, or vice versa. How much you disclose to your children will be a personal preference, based on your relationship with your children. Some families openly discuss everything, while others pick and choose topics with which they feel comfortable.

I believe this will be a good experience for your children and one that will better prepare them for life. Hope this helps, Kara.

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.



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

CD: BettySoo, *Heat Sin Water Skin*

Label: Waterloo Records

Release date: 2009

Austin's Thoroughly Grounded Heartbreak Queen

"If it's a still, small voice, how does it end the darkness?"

If it's a still, small voice, how does it make flee the night?

Well, that still, small voice makes tremble the darkness.

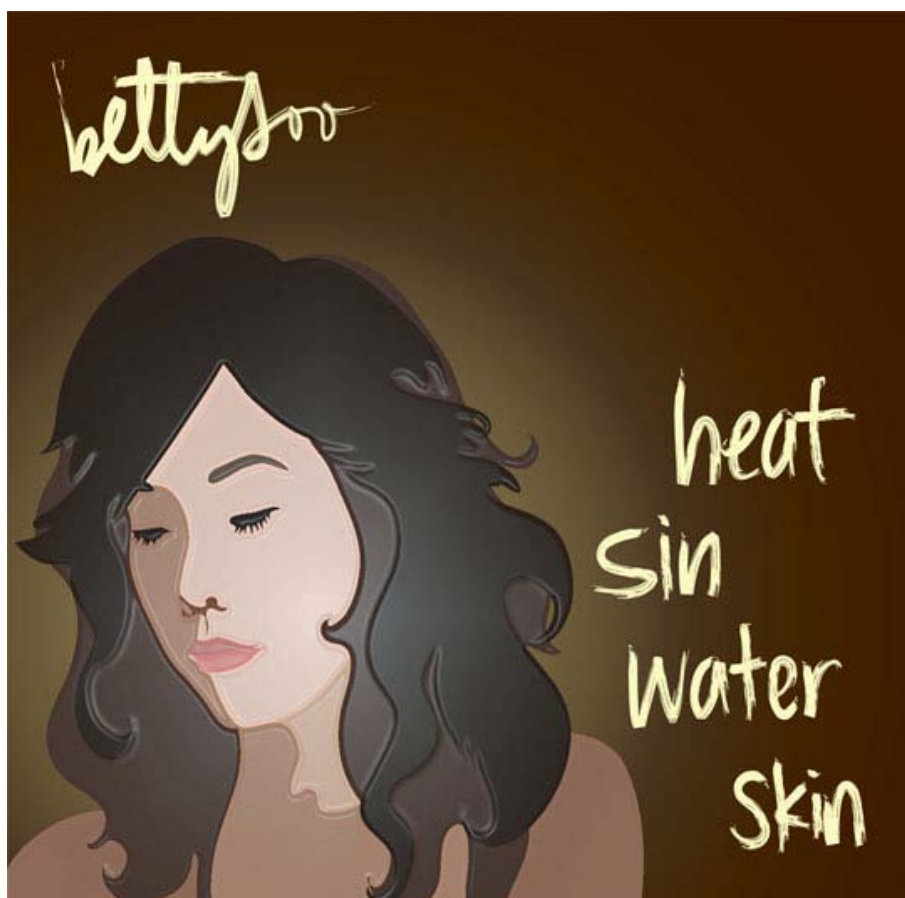
That still, small voice is Life."

BettySoo "Still Small Voice," *Heat Sin Water Skin*

When BettySoo was heading for her high school reunion she remembered how she'd felt at *not* having been picked as most *anything*—not most beautiful, not most likely to succeed, nothing.

And then she realized that out of more than five hundred students only six had been picked for these awards and that not being picked actually made her normal. But she couldn't dismiss the pain and rejection she had felt, and so she wrote the song "Never the Pretty Girl." I doubt there is a girl alive who, having survived adolescence, cannot relate to the sense of personal exile expressed in this song.

BettySoo is a singer-songwriter with elements of blues, gospel, and an overall country flavour in her music. A background in English studies and a propensity to guzzle serious literature has granted her skill with word craft; her song lyrics are deceptively simple, and her voice is the perfect vehicle for drawing out their shades of meaning.



BettySoo's exquisite voice and heartfelt presentation of these fine songs brought this CD into the higher ranks of recent folk recordings,

but the contributions of famed producer Gurf Morlix is inestimable. His sensitive instrumentation, keen ear, and personal ease are as evident here as they were on Sam Baker and Lucinda Williams's recordings.

BettySoo's version of Hank Williams's "Lonesome Whistle" is truer to the words of the song than any cover I've ever heard. (Listen to the guitar solo.) And "What We've Got" is a poignant celebration of *eros* (romantic love) mixed with *storge* (domestic bliss), a combination strongly recommended by the late C.S. Lewis.

What disappointed me in careers of singers like Alanis Morissette, Joni Mitchell, Janis Joplin, et al., is that sense of doomed karma, the seemingly inescapable fate of always going mad for the noncommittal guy, the heartbreaker. BettySoo, in contrast, just seems so, well, emotionally *healthy*.

The presence that comes to the fore in these songs is that of a young woman who is not afraid to be vulnerable, or to be honest about what she feels, or to live and love freely and generously and yet always with a view to embracing the deepest goods.

Heat Sin Water Skin manifests five of The Mindful Bard's criteria for music well worth a listen: 1) it is authentic, original, and delightful; 2) it displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering; 3) it inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation; 4) it is about attainment of true self; and 5) it provides respite from a sick and cruel world, a respite enabling me to renew myself for a return to mindful artistic endeavour.

BettySoo was recommended to The Mindful Bard by Jela Web of West Sussex, England.

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 OF THE WRIST – Festival Fun

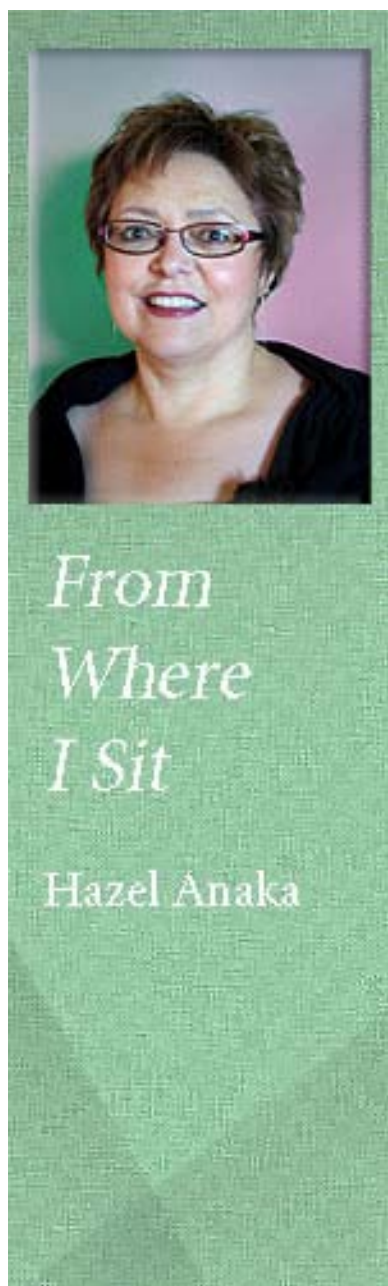
Outdoor music festivals are as much a part of summer as sunburns and long weekends. From Woodstock to Glastonbury and beyond, here's a look at the mud, music, and fun of the summer music festival.

Glastonbury 2009 - This UK festival began in 1970 (the first event took place the day after Jimi Hendrix died) and just keeps getting bigger and better. Along with acts such as Bruce Springsteen, Kasabian, and Dizzee Rascal, Glastonbury 2009 featured more than 700 metres of urinals (now *that's* a lot of friends to have at a party).

Woodstock - On August 15, 1969, it was hard to imagine that a three-day music festival on a New York dairy farm would become such a cultural watershed—but the event known as Woodstock has become legend. This short video is a good primer for those who think Jefferson Airplane was a transportation company.

Grafenegg Music Festival - If "orchestral concerts and recitals by international ensembles and soloists" are more your cup of tea, why not check out the Grafenegg Music Festival in Austria? There's nothing quite like sipping fine wine while listening to Tchaikovsky on the grounds of a famous castle.

Monterey Pop Festival - It was the summer of love, 1967, and well before Woodstock become a household name, acts like Simon and Garfunkel, The Who, and Janis Joplin came together at a festival in Monterey (this clip is a performance by The Mamas and the Papas).



Refuse to Choose

Has a book ever spoken to you? Have you been convinced the author knows you alone and has written something so profound and accurate and timely the little hairs stand up on the back of your neck?

Well, it happened to me in the silence of my retreat at Hilary's condo. I had a suitcase full of books to either read or re-read as my mood dictated. I was reading Barbara Sher's 1994 *I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was* before I left home. The book promised to help me decide what I really want and how to get it. That's a pretty tall order by anyone's standards.

For me the lightning bolt of insight came in chapter six, "I Want Too Many Things; I'm All Over the Map." There in black and white was validation I was not alone; I was not crazy or a dilettante or a jack of all trades master of none. I am in fact a Scanner, a modern-day Renaissance woman.

Scanners, according to Sher (who coined the name), are "genetically wired to be interested in many things and that's exactly what you've been trying to do. Because your behaviour is unfamiliar—even unsettling—to the people around you, you've been taught that you're doing something wrong and you must try to change. But what you have been told is a mistake—you've been misdiagnosed. You are a different creature altogether." Is the hallelujah chorus just in my head or do you hear it too?

Scanners love to learn about anything and everything and believe life is too short to see and do it all. To observers we appear to lack discipline and follow-through. In reality, we linger only as long as we need to to have our needs met. We don't want to spend our entire lives specializing in any one discipline. We don't have a nice neat career trajectory. We are misunderstood and undervalued.

Sher says we "have extraordinarily special and valuable skills" but "don't realize that being a scanner is a very respectable profession . . . that scanning is a talent, the key to a very good life." The author herself is a

Scanner.

During my retreat I discovered a follow-up book entitled *Refuse to Choose*, written in response to the overwhelming feedback to the earlier book. Within an hour I had a copy in my hot little hand. A whole two hundred and seventy pages explaining the inexplicable through anecdotes, exercises, tools, and a further breakdown of Scanners into 11 different sub-groups. I was in heaven. I read non-stop, marking passages, adding flags and Post-its.

I couldn't believe my good fortune. Until then I suspected there was something wrong with me because I'm not like most people I know. I've told people I have a "checkered past" or "a bit of a dog's breakfast" for a resume. Now I know why. Thank you, Barbara Sher. You have made it okay to *Refuse to Choose*, from where I sit.

AUSU THIS MONTH



Annual AGM Held

As you probably already know from the AGM Report put out by the *Voice*, AUSU held its annual general meeting on March 23, 2009.

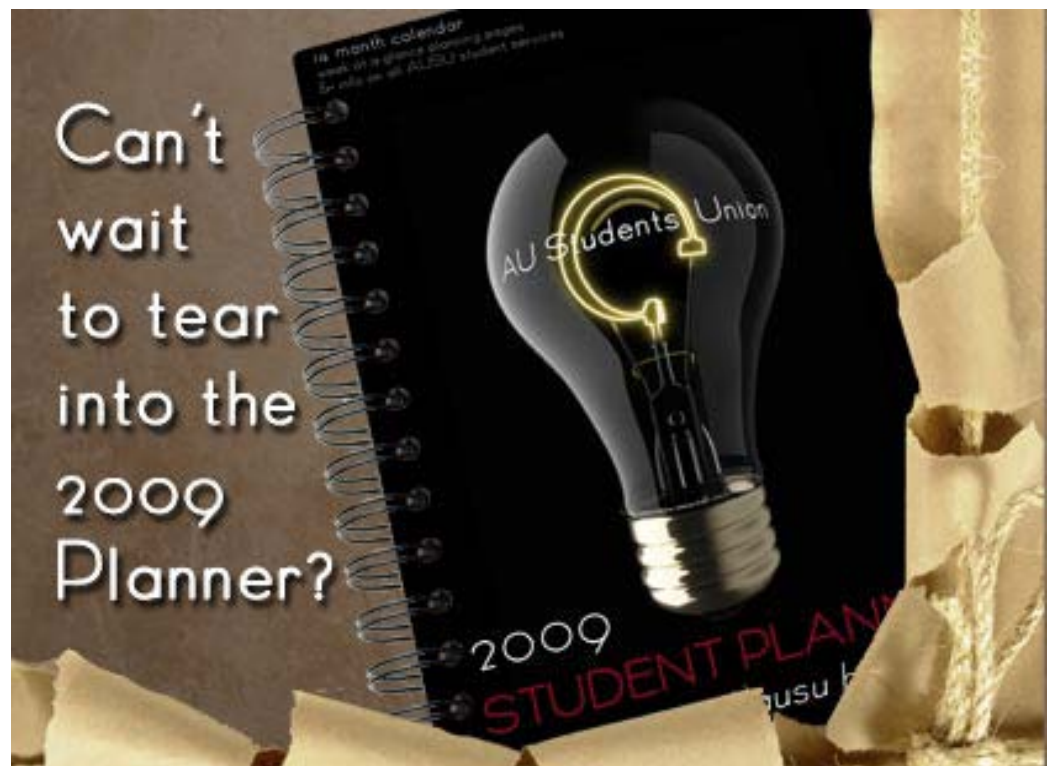
In that meeting a number of important revisions to the definitions of AUSU membership occurred, to make sure that the Councillors you elect are able to represent you during General Meetings and so that if you're a student in an AU collaborative undergrad program, you'll still be counted as an AUSU member even during a term that doesn't have any AUSU courses scheduled.

Also, our fees were changed from being \$8, \$16, or \$24 per course depending on the number of credits, to being a flat \$3 per credit, an increase of a dollar per course for most students. With this extra money, AUSU should be able to begin moving forward with a lot of desired programs that have been held up due to our staffing not being as big as our ambitions.

Also at the AGM, some good discussion was held with respect to email accounts, an issue we know a lot of you are concerned about, and we'll keep working with the university to see if a reasonable solution can be found among all of the priority issues AU needs to deal with.

Media Committee Started

Council has approved the terms of reference for the new media committee. This group, including your *Voice* editor, will be working hard to deliver new multimedia content to you on a regular basis. Our hope is to bring forward a more engaging, interactive AUSU, one that can help you get everything you want out of your education.



AU Fees Increasing

On March 27, the AUGC approved the new fees that will come into effect in September 2009. The bottom line is you'll be paying an additional \$29 per 3-credit course, including the increase to the AUSU fees. This includes an \$18 increase to base tuition and a \$10 increase to the Learning Resources fee. AUSU has noted

concerns with the university continuing to increase fees by the maximum allowable by Alberta legislation, but has agreed that lower quality service is not a viable alternative.

More concerning is the increase to the Learning Resources fee. AUSU will continue to press for details on how this fee relates to the prices the university has to pay for your textbooks and online materials.

au.world Closes

AUSU has noted the closing of the au.world publication with sadness, and has brought this to the governing council of AU. In its place, AU has begun a new magazine called *AU Open* which, rather than being strictly student focussed, contains a mix of stories for alumni, investors, and students. We have strong hopes that AU will increase the focus of this new magazine to be at least as relevant to current students as the old au.world was.

2009 AUSU Handbook/Planners

Members are snapping up our 2009 AUSU Handbook/Planner. Now in full colour, it has more course tracking pages, brief guides to the citation styles you'll need for your essays at AU, and of course, all the important AU dates and addresses that you need to know. You can order your own copy by going to <http://www.ausu.org/handbook/index.php>



SmartDraw Program Continues

If you haven't yet, you might want to download a copy of SmartDraw. AUSU has purchased a licence agreement to supply the award-winning SmartDraw software to all AUSU members (current undergraduate students). To access this deal and find out more, visit the front page of our website.

SmartDraw allows you to create a wide range of graphics for your assignments and submit them electronically in a Word file. You can also place your graphics in Excel or PowerPoint files, or export them as TIF, GIF, or JPEG files to make a web graphic or even a logo.

Just a few of the graphics you can make include Venn diagrams, genetics charts, graphs, organizational and flow charts, and Gantt charts.

For any course that requires charts that cannot be easily created in Word or Excel, this should be a real time saver and make it easier to submit all portions of an assignment by email.

Remember, though, that you should always check with your tutor to find out if there is a specific format he or she prefers. Your tutor does not have to have SmartDraw to view these graphics, however. Installations under this program are good for one year. The package includes both the Standard and Health Care editions of SmartDraw.

Merchandise Still for Sale

We still have some locks and memory keys available for sale. Both of these were designed with ease of mailing in mind, which means they're small enough to be easily stored pretty much anywhere.

The wristband USB key is a unique way to carry around your assignments, online materials, and even emails while you're on the go.

With a 1 gigabyte capacity, it can even handle a good chunk of your music collection, and the design means you no longer have to worry about losing it.

The *Voice* memory key has less capacity (512 MB) but the dark, flip-top design is classy enough to accompany you anywhere.

In addition, we have recently purchased some steel water bottles. With all the concerns about BPA in clear plastic, the decision was made to go stainless steel. Cheaper and more environmentally friendly than purchasing plastic bottles of water, fill up your AUSU bottle to keep thirst away no matter where you're travelling.

AUSU Lock Loan Program

Still running, and still popular, the lock loan program can allow you to rest easy knowing your valuables are safe if you're taking an exam at the Calgary or Edmonton campus. The locks can be set to any combination, and are loaned to people without any deposit, but we ask that you please remember to reset them to 0-0-0 before returning them so that we can continue this program.

Employment Site is Here!

Many of you will already have seen the link to our new employment site on the front page, and while there are not a lot of employers in evidence yet, it's a great opportunity to get your resume, skills, and talents in there.

The Personnel Department is busily working on finding employers who could use your unique abilities as a distance education student.

Be sure yours are available to get the early opportunities!



INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: New scholarship launched for children of fallen soldiers

A new scholarship program has been launched in Canada, one that's designed to help the children of fallen soldiers attend university. Known as Project Hero, the scholarship will be offered at four universities in Ontario, Calgary, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

The scholarship will apply to those pursuing undergraduate degrees, and whose parents were killed while on active Canadian military missions.

As the [CBC](#) reports, the four universities offering the scholarship so far are the University of Ottawa, the University of Windsor, the University of Calgary, and Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Ann Tierney, vice-provost (students) at U of C, explained in a statement to reporters that the scholarship "is an expression of support for Canadian Forces soldiers and their families, and a way of honouring those who pay the ultimate price for serving their country."

The program was launched by retired general Rick Hillier, former chief of defence staff and now chancellor of Memorial University in Newfoundland. Scheduled to begin September 1, the scholarship will cover the cost of "undergraduate tuition for four years, as well as on-campus residence fees for the first year."

While the Department of National Defence provides loans for post-secondary studies, Project Hero "is the first free tuition program in Canada."

In Foreign News: School snack program improves attendance

Sometimes the simplest ideas are the most effective, as education officials in Angola are proving. According to the [Angola Press Agency](#), a snack program at primary schools "has already benefited 1.3 million students" and is contributing to lower levels of dropouts and failure.

In an address to the 4th National Forum on Children, the Angolan minister of education, António Burity da Silva, reported that the government-sponsored program has shown positive results across the 16 provinces it covers. The cost for the program may sound high at an estimated \$90 million USD per year, but the "daily average of the snack cost per student" is just 29 cents. Helping students to concentrate better in class has been seen to improve attendance and, in the long run, will lower the social costs of school failure.

From 2009 to 2011, the Ministry of Education plans to implement other social-support programs. Along with expanding the snack program to all schools, a generalized health care scheme will be put into effect as well an expansion of committees to combat drug use.

CLASSIFIEDS

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

THE VOICE

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