

THE VOICE MAGAZINE

Volume 17 Issue 48
December 18, 2009

Film Classics

Christmas with heart

It's Complicated

Setting the standard

Dear Santa

Old-fashioned magic

Plus:

*Around eCampus, From Where I Sit,
Sister Aurora, and much more...*



CONTENTS

WELCOME TO THE VOICE PDF

The Voice interactive Table of Contents allows you to click a story title to jump to an article. Clicking the bottom-right corner of any page returns you here. Some ads and graphics are also links.

Features

Saturday Night at the (Old) Movies: A Merry Christmas with Heart	3
Dear Santa	6
AU Tech: Facebook	8

Articles

On Film: It's Complicated	9
In Conversation With: Garage á Trois.....	11
Eras in Education: O Tannenbaum	13
AU Options: RELS 204 - Introduction to World Religions.....	15

Columns

The Mindful Bard.....	17
From Where I Sit	19
Sister Aurora.....	20
Around eCampus	21
AUSU Update	22

News and Events

Did You Know?: Academic Earth.....	5
Happy Holidays from The Voice!	7
Click of the Wrist	16

From the Readers

Letters to the Editor	2
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Magazine**

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The Voice is published
every Friday in HTML
and PDF format

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Special thanks to
Athabasca University's
The Insider for its
frequent contributions

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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.



Correction

Re: "Student Service Awards: AUSU Recognizes Outstanding Contributions" by Bethany Tynes, v17 i47 (2009-12-11)

In last week's issue, *The Voice* misspelled the last name of Tyler Nagel, one of the winners of the AUSU Student Service Award.

The award is "designed to recognize members who have made outstanding contributions to their community," including "members who volunteer their time to AUSU, AU or to any other community or organization."

Our apologies to Tyler for the error, and *The Voice* would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the three award winners again!

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE (OLD) MOVIES

Christina M. Frey



A Merry Christmas with Heart

"He who has not Christmas in his heart will never find it under a tree."

Roy L. Smith

It's hard to sum up the Christmas season better than that. The holiday turns on what we make of it; our attitudes and actions are key to creating that special Christmas atmosphere. It all comes down to what's in the heart. And that's the theme of the final part of the Saturday Night at the (Old) Movies Christmas series: uplifting classics that warm the heart and soul. Some are well-known, others more obscure, but all are full of Christmas spirit.

My favourite Christmas film—and indeed, the top of the list for many film buffs—is 1946's *It's a Wonderful Life*. Banker George Bailey once had ambitious dreams, but they've long since been buried in the realities of everyday life. One Christmas Eve, facing prison for a crime he didn't commit, he attempts suicide. He's convinced that his life has been nothing but a string of

failures. Just in time, he's rescued by an angel with a mission: to show him the difference he's made in the lives of others. George finally realizes that his life truly has been wonderful, and this heartwarming movie wraps with a rousing Christmas chorus.

Trivia: The film's softly falling snow has an interesting history. Prior to this movie, crushed cornflakes were used to simulate the effect. However, when actors walked on this "snow" the crunching sound was so loud that their voices had to be dubbed over afterwards. To avoid this problem, the studio pioneered a new "fake snow" technology that involved firefighting foam, soap, and water pushed through a wind machine. The special effects department actually received an award for developing the new snow.

A much more suave angel plays guide in 1947's *The Bishop's Wife*. Bishop Henry Brougham is unhappy. He's become obsessed with building a new cathedral—so obsessed that he's put family and friends on hold and is even willing to ignore his own better judgment in order to placate a wealthy patron. After calling on Heaven for help, the Bishop receives it, but not in the form he wants or expects. The angel—played by Cary Grant—sets about bringing happiness into the lives of everyone involved in the cathedral project. But there's a catch: the angel begins to fall for the Bishop's lonely wife. It's a sweet and warm-hearted, but often overlooked, Christmas classic.

Trivia: Originally, Cary Grant was intended to play the role of the bishop, but since he wanted to take the angel's part instead his role was switched with the angel's.

In a lighter vein, the Christmas comedy *It Happened on Fifth Avenue* (1947) begins with a hobo taking up winter quarters in a wealthy industrialist's home. The millionaire family is spending the winter in the south,

so the man makes himself comfortable. Then he gets company. First a homeless young veteran, then a finishing-school runaway (who doesn't reveal that she's actually the daughter of the home's owner), then three families, and finally the industrialist himself (incognito, of course) and his divorced wife all join the "family." By New Year's Day the house is empty again, but everyone leaves much happier and more fulfilled.

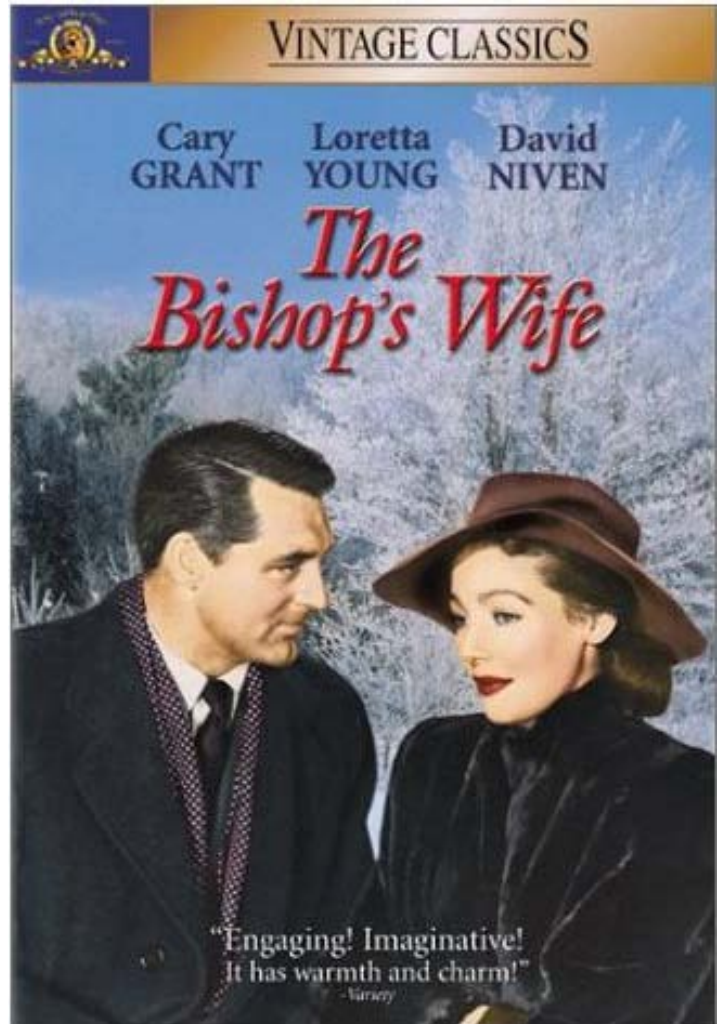
Trivia: Alan Hale, Jr., who plays former GI Whitey in this film, later took the role of the Skipper in the *Gilligan's Island* TV series.

Another lighthearted offering, Irving Berlin's Christmas musical *Holiday Inn* (1942) centres on the members of a successful musical act, Jim and Ted. Jim, tired of the entertainment world, plans to retire to a quiet New England farm with co-star Lila. At the last minute, however, Lila stays on with Ted. Alone on the farm, Jim conceives the idea for the Holiday Inn, an inn open only during holidays, and hires aspiring performer Linda to help with the inn's entertainment.

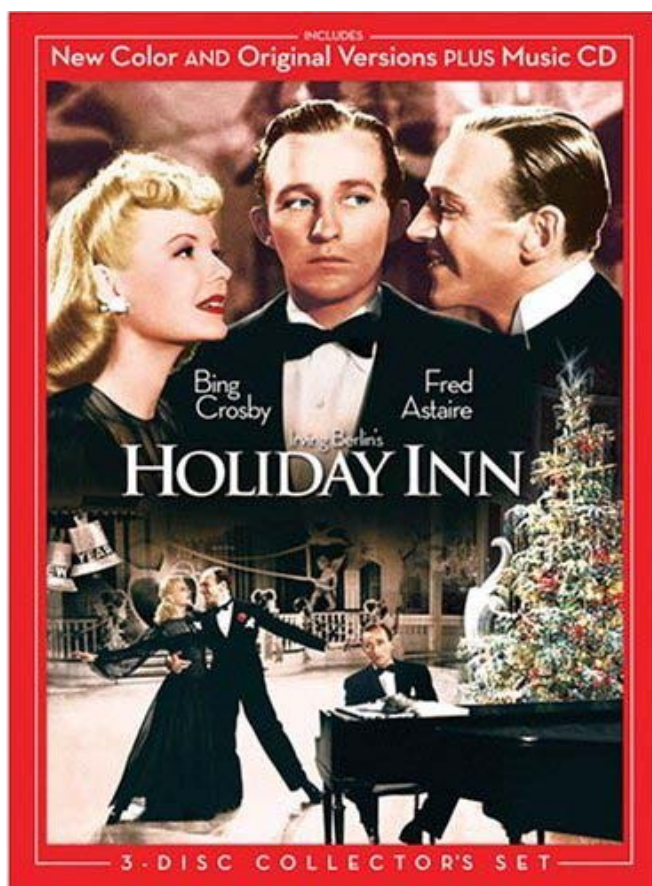
All goes well until Ted arrives. Lila has since left him, and Ted thinks Linda will be the perfect new addition to his act. Jim's determined to keep Linda with him and the hotel going. Ted's determined to hire Linda; and both Linda and Lila, who's returned, are determined to get to Hollywood. Although the film includes songs for all the major holidays, its beginning and closing during the Christmas season, together with its launch of the popular songs "White Christmas" and "Happy Holidays," make it an enjoyable holiday movie.

Trivia: You might have noticed that during the November calendar segment, the Thanksgiving turkey can't seem to decide whether to land on the third or fourth Thursday of the month. In 1939 and 1940, President Roosevelt switched the US Thanksgiving holiday from the fourth Thursday in November to the preceding week, in order to lengthen the Christmas shopping season (and hopefully boost the economy.) Public outcry caused the holiday to be fixed by law as the fourth Thursday in November.

There's no singing, but 1947's *Miracle on 34th Street* is another holiday staple. Disillusioned divorcee Doris Walker and her daughter Susan don't believe in fairy tales or make-believe, but their beliefs are stood on end when they meet Kris. A last-minute replacement for the role of Santa Claus in a Thanksgiving parade, Kris makes an excellent Saint Nick. He's charming and authentic in every way, but something's wrong: he won't admit that he isn't *actually* Santa Claus. His insistence on his identity leads jealous individuals to question his mental competence, and just before Christmas Kris is brought to court to determine if commitment to an asylum is required. Is Kris really Santa Claus? If nothing else, he seems to have the power to work miracles . . .



Trivia: If you thought this film would have been a holiday release, you'd be mistaken. Because studio executives believed that a summer release meant more moviegoers, the film actually came out in May. It also was not advertised as a Christmas film; in fact, this was kept quite secret, and its promotional trailers focused on endorsements of the movie rather than previews of the storyline. Pre-release posters, too, hid Kringle's image in the background. Strange beginnings for a movie that's become a Christmas classic!



Last, but not least, is perennial holiday favourite *A Christmas Carol*. There have been countless adaptations of the classic story of miserly Scrooge, visited by the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future. However, my personal favourite is the 1938 version, *A Christmas Carol*. Because it leaves out a few key plot devices, although it's largely faithful to the book, this film is often frowned upon by purists. It's also not as dark as Dickens intended. However, that's not necessarily a bad thing. The 1938 version is spirited and full of optimism, and is very watchable for all ages. (If you still prefer a closer adaptation, see 1951's *A Christmas Carol*.)

Trivia: Mr. and Mrs. Crachit were played by a real-life couple, Gene and Kathleen Lockhart, and one of their daughters played a Crachit daughter onscreen. Gene is

also recognizable as the flustered judge in *Miracle on 34th Street*.

Christmas is just around the corner! In the frenzied week ahead, take some downtime to set the mood with a heartwarming holiday classic. Happy watching—and may the spirit of Christmas last in your hearts forever!

DID YOU KNOW?



Academic Earth

Sometimes, a different explanation is all it takes to make a difficult concept stick or bring a dry subject to life. If you're looking for a little academic inspiration—or just love learning—you may want to check out [Academic Earth](#).

The site offers free video lectures from leading universities, including Berkeley, Princeton, MIT, Yale, and Harvard, and its goal is to build “a user-friendly educational ecosystem that will give internet users around the world the ability to easily find, interact with, and learn from full video courses and lectures from the world's leading scholars.”

You'll find lectures on everything from Architecture and Astronomy to Psychology and Religious Studies, with plenty of subjects in between, and you can even search for lectures by individual professors.

DEAR SANTA . . .

A.K. Flynn



Dear Santa,

Recently, at a children's Christmas party while I was dressed rather elf-like, I came to a realization regarding Christmas, a realization I am none too pleased with, and feel I need to air my grievances to you, the representative of Christmas. (Yes, I am aware Christmas is really Jesus' holiday but, as He has not provided the world at large with his mailing address, I am sure you will be well equipped to handle my concern in His stead).

Christmas was *made* for children—a fact I have

come to find discriminatory and illogical.

Why save the best, most magical day of the year for children when they are the least likely creatures imaginable to appreciate a day of complete and joyous peace, not having had to participate in the frenetic buildup to said magical day? How can they possibly appreciate the peace of Christmas morning when they have not had to elbow their way through shopping malls during the Christmas sales?

Even your elves have surely known a hard day's work leading up to Christmas, Santa, and they are *magical* elves.

Like your elves (at least, how they are portrayed in the movies), we adults must slave through the necessary prep work to make for a festive season. We must purchase and wrap the gifts, we must do the cooking and baking, we must do the cleaning and decorating. Christmas isn't all too Christmasy when you're on the plus side of 12.

I am putting my foot down, Santa. I will take no more blatant neglect. Have you forgotten that you are more than just the patron saint of children? You are also the patron saint of lawsuits lost unjustly. (Really? That's just ridiculous.) And most importantly, Saint Nicholas of Myra, you are also the patron saint of unmarried women—that'd be yours truly, mister—and I think this year you should send some attention my way.

Before you even start to object: yes, I know it's been nearly 20 years since I last wrote to you, nearly 20 years since I last believed in your very existence, so I'm probably not your first choice of someone to do a favour for. But I am appealing to you on behalf of all adults, not solely myself, so please at least consider what I am about to propose (although, if you'd like to throw a little extra special something my way, I certainly wouldn't object).

How about this year we have an old-fashioned, magical Christmas? You know, like how it is in the Christmas specials, with your elves making the gifts and you delivering them, already wrapped, while everyone is asleep.

I think this is an excellent idea. Not only will it do wonders for the overall morale of humankind but, in an economy as tight as it is right now, I'm sure your elves would appreciate the job security that manufacturing toys for billions would provide.



I understand that you are about two thousand years old and you may not be as spry or as jolly as you once were. And I'm sure with global warming devastating the North Pole you have bigger concerns than delivering presents, but think of all the good attention you could receive by giving the world one truly magical Christmas! (By the way, can't you do something about global warming? Yes, I may be confusing you with God right now, but I still feel it's a valid question—you are a saint after all. I imagine the saints are a bit like the X-Men, what with all their unique abilities. You do have special powers, right? Knowing when we are sleeping and when we are awake alludes to some form of telepathy.)

I can picture the headlines now: "Even with home in peril, Santa delivers." Plus, no one would let Santa go homeless. If you just step up and confirm your existence once and for all, money couldn't be thrown fast enough at global warming research groups to ensure the homes of you and the elves were safe for another few thousand years.

If none of the above appeals to you, could you at least consider advocating a role reversal as to who is responsible for the Christmas chores?

Every year adults go out of their way to give children magical Christmases so it is only fair that, once in a while, the children should step up and treat the adults. If you and your elves are unwilling to provide the world with a traditionally magical Christmas, could you possibly mandate that children are responsible for the gift buying and whatnot?

To their credit, kids do have to suffer through endless cheek pinching from elderly relatives and countless photos during the Christmas season (often while wearing highly embarrassing holiday-themed knitwear). So I don't see how a few days of shopping, wrapping, decorating, and cooking can be any more scarring than that.

I look forward to hearing your feedback, Santa. While I'm sure that my ideas may not appeal to you at first, given time and further conversation I'm sure we can work something out.

Merry Christmas, Alana



HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM *THE VOICE*!

As we wrap up our final issue of 2009, we'd like to thank all our wonderful readers—and writers—for another great year here at *The Voice*.

As always, we'll showcase the best fiction, reviews, and commentary in our annual *Best Of* issue, which will be available January 8, 2010. Our first regular issue of the New Year will be published January 15.

Wishing you a peaceful and joyous holiday season, and may 2010 bring health and happiness!

AU TECH

Bethany Tynes



Facebook

Most students are aware to some degree of the social networking site Facebook. Michael Shouldice, a Senior Recruitment Officer with Athabasca University, has been with AU since 2006 and explains the possibilities Athabasca University sees in the use of this site.

"Facebook was created back in 2003," Shouldice notes. "When I started my original position with AU's Information Centre, I monitored the various Facebook groups that students had created about AU, its programs and courses."

These student-created groups are broad in scope, and range

from a general "Athabasca University" group, to program-specific groups such as the "AU Psychology" group, and common-interest groups such as the "Athabasca University Student Moms Club."

In February of last year, however, Shouldice explains that "Facebook created 'fanpages' specifically for organizations, which allows for various people at the university to administer the account (i.e.: recruitment officers, the Registrar, advisors) and communicate directly to 'fans.' In my capacity as a recruitment officer, I thought this would be a valuable tool to reach AU students where they already are—online and on Facebook."

Facebook is now, therefore, the home of an AU fanpage. Through this page, AU can "share news, events and allow students a place to meet, since they rarely would get that chance studying in a distance delivery model."

"There is great potential for AU students using Facebook," Shouldice says. "While there are a lot of student groups on Facebook, the AU fanpage is a place where they can get information that comes directly from an AU source." The AU fanpage on Facebook "also has a 'tab' for AskAU," says Shouldice, "our FAQ system that uses natural language search technology to permit users real-time access to answers to their questions about AU."

"I would really like to see the fanpage develop and grow," Shouldice continues. "According to research from the Academia Group, fanpages need to have about a thousand fans to reach critical mass and really benefit both the fans and the organization." The Athabasca University group on Facebook has already exceeded this threshold, but does not have the benefit of an active, engaging administrator or official input from the university.

Shouldice believes that this Facebook fanpage could offer students numerous benefits. "Besides having access to AU administrators and information in a place they are already spending time, they also have access to students who are in all likelihood living the same experiences they are while trying to balance work, life, and studying," he says. "I think AU students already feel a great sense of pride in their school and a certain sense of community. As the fanpage grows this sense of community should grow stronger as should the ties students feel with AU."

Shouldice says that he would "love to see students conversing on the fanpage about what they love about AU and the challenges they experience and see their peers' responses. AU is about reducing barriers to education—community is one of them. This Facebook fanpage helps to address that by offering a community space where students can speak and listen."

ON FILM

John Buhler



It's Complicated

Upon hearing the title, you already know that it's going to be a film about relationships. But unlike the typical romantic comedy that most people are used to seeing, this one does not feature perky starlets or muscled young hotties. Reflecting North America's shifting demographics, the film's love triangle involves 50-something divorcees played by Meryl Streep, Alec Baldwin, and Steve Martin.

Streep, a consummate actor perhaps best known for dramatic roles like *Sophie's Choice* and *Silkwood*, provides a hilarious performance that rivals the talents of her co-stars and veteran comedians Baldwin and Martin. As Jane Adler, she runs a hugely successful bakery/restaurant. With her stylish home and French pastry chef training, she's something of a defrosted Martha Stewart, having not only more warmth and charm but a better wardrobe and no criminal record.

At the beginning of the film, Jane's youngest child is leaving home. The empty nest makes the dedicated mother lonely, but as we later realize, it gives her the opportunity to pursue her own wants, including the expansion of her home, which seems rather odd given that her children have all left. If nothing else, it

signals that she is open to changes in her life.

Baldwin, also an award-winning actor, best known for his role in the television series *30 Rock*, plays Jane's ex-husband Jake, a selfish and smooth-talking lawyer who can rationalize anything. He left Jane for a younger woman, but realizes—as the saying goes—the grass is not always greener on the other side. One wonders if his infamous real-life parenting and divorce battles helped him to flesh out the Jake Adler character.

While still married to Jane, Jake had an affair with his now second wife Agness (yes, that is how the film's website spells it), played by Lake Bell. The younger woman seems to have little to offer, apart from a younger body. Unlike Jane she doesn't cook, and in contrast to Jane's wonderful parenting she has an out-of-control five-year-old. The rather sullen Agness is portrayed as little more than a sexual object whose only goal is to become pregnant by her greying husband, a regular patient at a local fertility clinic.

Martin, as architect Adam Schafer, is still struggling with his own divorce and still wounded by the revelation of his ex-wife's affair with his best friend. He helps Jane plan the renovations to her home, and finds himself attracted to her. He has read all 47 emails that she sent to the architectural firm and thoughtfully incorporated her desires into the plans. Ironically, it is Martin, the comic genius, who gets the fewest funny

lines. In contrast to the suave and confident Jake, Adam is a quiet and restrained character but Martin is still able to channel the “wild and crazy guy” of his younger years to great comic effect.

Though not specifically listed in the credits, food and drink play central roles in the film. Wine, in particular, is a ubiquitous presence, perhaps meant to remind us that fine wine and women improve with age. And of course, there are obvious links between food, sensuality, and sexuality. Jane provides for the men’s appetites and even unlocks her bakery late at night, offering Adam anything on the menu or, if he prefers, anything not on the menu. Not known for picking up on hints, even I got that one.

The story takes off when Jane and Jake’s son graduates from college, the pair end up having dinner alone together, consume large volumes of wine, and one thing leads to another. The former spouses become lovers, and Jane becomes her ex-husband’s mistress.

Does Jake find sex with Jane so much better simply because their own children have already left home, relieving him of any parental responsibility, and there is no pressure to make this lover pregnant? No doubt these factors alone provide something of an aphrodisiac.

Jane is not really comfortable in her new role as mistress, at least at first, though Jake seems to believe that an affair with his ex-wife is the ideal situation. He could not be more wrong. It is of course inevitable that the affair will be uncovered, but the awkward arrangement provides many hilarious situations that truly made the audience laugh out loud.

Overall, the film provides a refreshing and positive view of older women. Jane is independent, sexy, and desirable. This is frankly the film’s most endearing aspect, but it does come with a downside.

Just as Martha Stewart sets the standards for homemaking impossibly high (who really has time to build the perfect place setting around the linen that she dyed herself, and spend all day shaving ice for the evening’s dessert?) *It’s Complicated* sets the standard for older women impossibly high.

Jane is not only a successful entrepreneur, a gourmet chef and baker, a wonderful homemaker, and the perfect single parent to her three grown children. She still has enough energy left over to provide her lover with fantastic sex. In short, the film appears to suggest that in order to be attractive, the older woman has to be superhuman. Indeed, one can argue that the superwoman role is the nemesis of women of any age, especially those pursuing careers outside the home while handling the bulk of childrearing and homemaking responsibilities.

After seeing this film, set in sunny and affluent Santa Barbara, I headed back into the arctic temperatures of an Edmonton night and pondered the fantasy that had just played on the screen. *It’s Complicated* was a very funny film, filled with absurd situations that kept the audience laughing. That it shows an older woman as being desirable and sexual is clearly a good thing. But at the same time it seems to have traded Hollywood’s emphasis on youth for other attributes that are beyond the reach of most women.



IN CONVERSATION WITH . . .

Wanda Waterman St. Louis



Garage á Trois

*Garage á Trois is a dynamic and highly innovative jazz/rock quartet comprising the amazing Skerik, Mike Dillon, Marco Benevento, and Stanton Moore. Together they create groundbreaking, electrifying, genre-crossing instrumental music. (See the [Voice review](#) of their recent release, *Power Patriot*.)*

Recently, sax player Skerik took the time to talk with Wanda Waterman St. Louis about instrumental music, the importance of imaginative song titles, and why nobody wins with illegal downloads.

Is This Jazz, or What?

I am a rock musician first and foremost, but it's a great opportunity working with Marco, Mike, and Stanton. It's great working with such creative people. My musical background was nothing special. I just kept playing sax after everyone else quit. I think they were mostly intimidated by the prospect of living the gritty life of a musician. I still hear people say, "I'm a musician but I'm getting an engineering degree as a backup plan." I tell them, "That's not a backup plan—that's you planning to fail!"

Those Quirky Song Titles and Album Appellations

A song title is almost like a mini-haiku; you've got this short little phrase in which to express your thought. Miles Davis really showed that in his albums; all the tracks were instrumental so any verbal statements had to be made in his song titles, which were very imaginative.

The name *Power Patriot* was inspired by some of the craziness happening here in the United States now. Certain white supremacist groups are really gathering steam.

Past Lives

I lived with the bass player Aubrey Oaki for a while near Brixton, England. The pianist Bheki Mseleku would stay there and we would sometimes play together all night learning tunes. Bheki had just come out of retirement and would later record with Joe Henderson, Elvin Jones, Charlie Haden, etc. He was brilliant, and it was an honour to be able to spend so much time with him.

All the South African musicians that came through the house could play at least three or four instruments very well. Piano, bass, and saxophone seemed to be the minimum. It was humbling.

The great guitarist Leif Totusek introduced me to all these musicians and more during my stay in London. Leif also made it possible for me to play with soukous guitarist Mose Se Sengo (a.k.a. "Fan Fan") from Zaire. His band Somo Somo was made up of African and English musicians. It was incredible. I also played with Remmy Ongala, Mamadi Kamara, and many other African musicians while in London.

On the Musical Free Lunch

If people realized how much time, work, and money goes into the production of one CD they'd make more of an effort to pay something for it.

If you like listening to recorded music and you download music off of bit torrents, rip, etc., without paying for it, then you are directly preventing music from being recorded again. You are putting recording studios, graphic artists, musicians, etc., out of work.

I realize that we are in a “digital transition period” where things are crazy and will eventually get figured out, but in the meantime it’s hell for us musicians. Since musicians do not have a collective voice that has any real power, big companies like Apple, IBM, and Dell have used music to sell their software and hardware without any collective objection from musicians.



Without iTunes and iPods Apple wouldn’t be half the company it is today; recorded music made that happen. Yet take a tour of all the personal hard drives in the world and check to see how much of the recorded music in those drives was actually paid for.

Everyone likes to beat up on the major labels. Fine, they had it coming—they were taken over by lawyers and ran themselves into the ground. But they are just part of the “victim pie.” Small independent musicians and labels are trying to blow your minds with great music! Please support them, actively! We can’t do it without you. It’s all based on trust now, like the unmanned fruit stand on the highway with the sign that says “honour system—please pay here.” I’m saying this as a fan first and a musician second.



O Tannenbaum: Sacrifice to the Selfish Collective or Representation of Shared Humanity?

The palpable excitement of winter holidays has warmed the hearts of students for many generations. Here in North America the majority of pupils have participated in Christmas traditions with varying degrees of religiosity.

Surpassed only by the ubiquitous Santa Claus, the Christmas tree is one of the most emblematic symbols of winter break. Throughout the first three weeks of December, students return home each day to a festive house and decorated tree and know that a break from classes is imminent. As it turns out, the history of the Christmas tree is tied to the history of Germanic missionaries to North America known as Moravians. Countervailing the Christian sentiment of these early German pioneers is another, seemingly Grinch-like German philosopher: Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900).

The first Christmas tree on record in the New World was erected for school-age children in a colony of German missionaries in Pennsylvania known as Moravians. Their town was known as Bethlehem. Instead of an actual fir or pine, the "tree" consisted of "wooden pyramids covered with evergreen branches" onto which candles were affixed. The sight of this tradition imported

from the fatherland must have added a sense of authenticity to the festivities.

In fact, long before its Christmas connection, a decorated evergreen was "used as a symbol of hope and joy" and as "a reminder that the darkness and cold of winter would end and spring would return." In North America, Christmas trees were not common until "the early 1900s."

Had Friedrich Nietzsche been, say, a ninth-grade teacher during the holiday season he might have expressed some rather dour perspectives on Christmas trees and the holiday itself. He might have noted that the tree is itself decapitated and doomed to slowly die of dehydration, symbolic perhaps of the sacrifice of outstanding creative individuals to the herd-like mentalities of mediocre commoners. Perhaps he might also describe how true morality emerges not out of individuals meeting "the demands imposed upon them" by society, but out of transcending the "sickness" of conformity by which Christmas demands all participants express joy, joviality, and goodwill.

Later hailed as a "prophet of the postmodern," Mr. Nietzsche would have had a hard time buying into the idea of Christmas spirit. Instead of gifts being emblematic of caring and sharing, he would state that "there are no moral phenomena, only moral interpretations of phenomena." To him, Christmas presents would be assertions of power over others: the power to dispose of surplus money and thereby draw attention to one's own affluence.

Nietzsche notes that moralizers tend to "get rid of all unbelievers," such as those who do not enjoy being marinated in Christmas carols in order to enforce a status quo. Rather than making society a better place, Nietzsche might say that collective meaning-making involved in group holidays reduces individual

responsibility for meaning itself. In the end, "the so-called good man is a tyrant," albeit one with an inviting Christmas display on his lawn.

From a Nietzschean perspective loyal followers of holiday traditions are in fact acting only to further their status and prestige. The seeming altruism of gift-giving serves as a mask for the true basis of life: the desire to attain power. Just as chiefs of Pacific Coast Haida tribes sought to overwhelm their neighbours with lavish gifts at potlatches, so too does the act of gift-giving serve to create inequalities. The "power relation between debtor and creditor gives rise to a feeling of guilt and personal obligation on the part of the debtor." In essence, people buy the loyalty of family and friends by incorporating them into an economic exchange of gift-giving.



Under the auspices of a magical Christmas morning, the power of those with the ability to give is forged. This is particularly true when we consider that the mythical Santa serves as a stand-in who masks the true relation between giver and receiver. Children become unwitting debtors to their parents by receiving gifts. They must repay their debt with the only power they possess: the power to make their parents lives as miserable or as blissful as possible.

In his philosophy of the "*Übermensch*" (Overman) Nietzsche describes his vision for what a person freed from social constraints might act like. Possibly Nietzsche's Overman would embody the true Christmas spirit. Rather than follow codes of conduct endemic to the holidays, whether it be Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Ramadan or Christmas, the Overman "knows how to train the will to power that drives humans in the direction of self-control, self-cultivation, self-direction, the result of which is an abundance of joy and peace." The Overman embodies a "stylish, graceful movement through the world, leaving its glorious mark, rejoicing as it goes."

Nietzsche's Overman is what the holidays are meant to be about: expressions of love and caring for family and friends by acts and words, rather than by granting of material gifts. Most importantly of all for Nietzsche's critique of Christmas would be that only after the end of belief in a mystical holiday, with a tree sacrificed for the sake of merry-makers, can humans take "responsibility for themselves and their way in the world."

If all this sounds dark and depressing and one-sided that's because it is. However, there is a happy ending!

As with Ebenezer Scrooge and the Grinch, Friedrich Nietzsche also realized that he had failed to see the reality of human altruistic tendencies. Later in his life, as his mental health deteriorated due to syphilis, he was on a street in Turin and saw a horse being whipped by its master. In horror he threw his arms around the animal's soft mane and strong neck and sobbed uncontrollably. With this act, the other side of cynical Nietzsche was expressed. Despite concluding that people's will to power lay behind all supposedly selfless acts, Nietzsche still had a conception of the human emotions of compassion and caring. How could he not?

It seems to me that as young students the most important thing we learned about the holidays in school was not that we were about to have a couple of weeks off school and a bunch of presents. What we really learned was that despite various differences and difficulties, there remained the potential for real caring, real love, and authentic compassion. Happy Holidays to everyone and may the spirit of the season allow us all to better share our common humanity!

AU OPTIONS

Bethany Tynes



RELS 204 - Introduction to World Religions

While AU doesn't offer a broad range of religious studies classes, both students and staff agree that the one introductory class offered, RELS 204: Introduction to World Religions, is a course that merits the consideration of all students, regardless of their program or personal beliefs.

Gary Drainville, a University of Manitoba student currently nearing completion of his Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, recently finished RELS 204. "Religion (other than

Christianity) has always intrigued me, but I only ever knew a little about Judaism, Buddhism, etc.," Drainville says. "Sometimes ignorance can create all sorts of stereotypes."

Understanding the beliefs of others rather than relying on often-inaccurate stereotypes is particularly necessary for Drainville in his chosen career. He has spent the last "21 years in the Canadian Forces," and plans on "at least 10 more years" in the service. While taking RELS 204 through AU, Drainville was "deployed overseas to the Middle East in support of the war on terrorism onboard HMCS Charlottetown."

"One of the most interesting aspects of my RELS 204 course was the ability to sometimes connect what I was reading while travelling in the Middle East," says Drainville. "I visited mosques and was able to speak with locals in places such as Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, Israel, and Dubai."

Drainville says that aside from this applicability, his favourite parts of the class were "the two assignments where passages from various sacred texts were given," and he "had to identify where they were from and give an interpretation." He also greatly appreciated the support he received from his tutor, saying that he "felt completely connected and understood by the tutor."

Dr. Renee Brodie currently tutors RELS 204, and says that "given our multicultural society and the frequency that religion is misrepresented in the media, Religion 204 offers students a chance to learn about dimensions of religion that may otherwise not make it to headline news."

"It's a wonderful look into one of the most influential elements of the human journey; this is perhaps the greatest strength of the course," Dr. Brodie says. "The only weakness, if it can even be called that, is that there's a lot of material to read over and absorb, since the course covers seven world religions. It's a challenge, but one that you walk away from with a greater understanding of our world. Religion doesn't exist in a bubble, so it's fun to learn how it has influenced history, politics, and culture in ways that you may not have realized before."

"Religion helps students by creating an awareness of others' beliefs, practices and observances, thereby making students more sensitive to their needs. This is particularly relevant for those who choose careers in

nursing, social work, or education, for instance,” says Dr. Brodie. “An added benefit is that as we learn about ‘the other,’ we learn about ourselves, since we are all ‘the other’ to someone else.”

In “a course of this nature,” Dr. Brodie says, “it’s important to use your tutor as a resource, but many students feel either intimidated or that it’s a waste of time to contact them. If I could change anything in the course, I’d make sure that every student knew that their tutor is there to help them whenever he or she needed help.”

Dr. Brodie also notes that RELS 204 has a website “that isn’t mentioned in the material provided in the course pack,” and that this website is “filled with useful information” and “really provides students with some of the expectations for the assignments and papers.”

“There are few guarantees in life,” Dr. Brodie concludes, “but I guarantee that if you take this course, you’ll walk away with a greater appreciation of the religious diversity that exists and a better sense of the complexities of religious belief. It’s worth your time.”

CLICK OF THE WRIST – Santa Claus

Just like Santa, we’ve got a little something for young and old alike this week. Kids will enjoy the official NORAD Santa tracker, which keeps tabs on St. Nick from the moment his sleigh lifts off. And if you’ve ever stood in an hour-long lineup with overheated, cranky kids just to get that one special photo . . . well, you may appreciate the other links.

Official Santa Tracker

Who better to find out where Santa’s sleigh is than NORAD? They use “four high-tech systems to track Santa—radar, satellites, Santa Cams and fighter jets.” Of course, it also helps that “Rudolph’s bright red nose gives off an infrared signature,” allowing satellites to locate Rudolph and Santa.

Real Bearded Santas

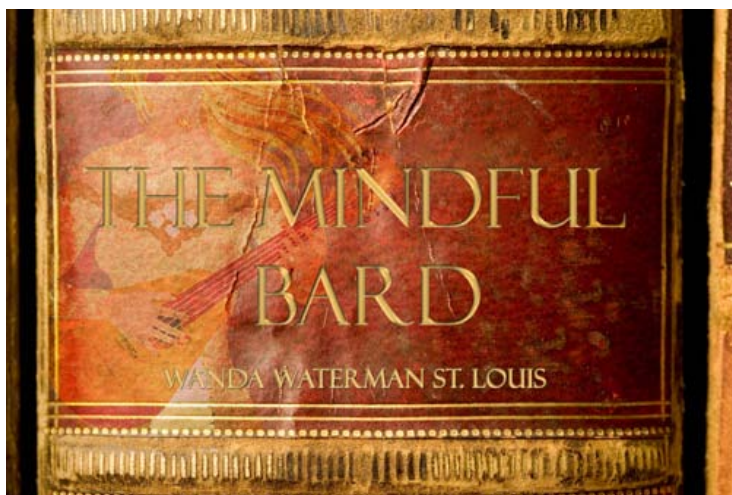
Yes, Virginia, there really is an Amalgamated Order of Real Bearded Santas. These jolly red-suited helpers aren’t the *real* Santa, of course, but they do their best to help him out while he’s busy getting ready for Christmas morning. And when they’re not busy with holiday duties, they “continue to work throughout the year, giving to charities” in various communities.

Scary Santa

Yes, we *know* it’s not funny that some little kids don’t warm to Santa the first time they meet the jolly old elf. And we know that at least some of these tots will be embarrassed by those photos when they get to be teenagers. But still . . .

Santa Photo Contest

So what could be worse than some websites posting photos of unhappy children on Santa’s knee? How about when the kids’ own dads submit those photos for a contest? This collection only contains three photos but they’re all classics. And the kids are bound to feel better knowing that their dads won some cool prizes.



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

DVD: *Watchmen*

Theatrical Release: March 2009

DVD Release: July 2009

Starring: Malin Akerman, Billy Crudup, Matthew Goode, Jackie Earle Haley, Jeffrey Dean Morgan, Patrick Wilson, Carla Gugino, Stephen McHattie

Director: Zack Snyder

Screenwriters: David Hayter, Alex Tse

Composer: Tyler Bates

Warner Brothers

The Razing of the Clockwork Universe and the Epiphany of Its Impassive God

"For the Lord of Hosts has a day of doom waiting for all that is proud and lofty, for all that is high and lifted up . . .

Have no more to do with man, for what is he worth? He is no more than the breath of his nostrils."

Isaiah 2:12,22

"A myth is a theorem about the nature of reality, expressed not in algebraic symbols or inanimate abstractions but in animate narrative form."

Robert Bringhurst, in *Everywhere Being is Dancing*

The Watchmen are a fraternity of superheroes. A member of this pantheon, The Comedian, is murdered. The Comedian bears a close resemblance to trickster gods Loki and Raven, as well as to the clown in Fellini's *La Strada*—infuriating yet somehow holding the keys to the shadowy portals of life itself. His assassination is due in part to the fact that he knows too much.

The *Rotten Tomatoes* consensus is that the flick was true to Alan Moore's graphic novel but that those who haven't read that book might have trouble getting through the narrative maze it presents.



I agree and disagree. The plot is dense, and it's easy to miss key information. But this story and these characters—not so much in themselves as representatives of certain archetypes—are so tight with the overarching backstory of American superheroes that anyone with a smattering of culture, pop or other, should be able to find a healthy dollop of intellectual satisfaction in watching this. As I did, several times.

Rorschach undertakes to investigate and avenge the death of The Comedian. Rorschach is a deeply disturbed and violent man who aptly wears the imagery of his unconscious on his mask, or, as he calls it, his face, or his true self. (It is quite something to see the matching ink blots moving around on his white mask in response to the machinations of his psyche.) Jackie Earle Haley is spectacular in this role, clearly communicating an awesome power, a cryptic righteous wrath, and a painful awareness of his contemptible status in the eyes of the world.

The alternate America that the story unravels is not so different from the America we've known, but that tends to be the way with myths; this is the way things would be if the gods walked among us, in other words.

Dr. Manhattan has brought Laurie Jupiter (Silk Spectre II) to Mars to give her a chance to talk him out of allowing the world to be destroyed. They are surveying the majestic, arid beauty of the barren planet, standing before a massive spiralling gold contraption that looks like a cross between a gyroscope and the inner workings of a Swiss watch. Dr. Manhattan argues that life has added nothing to the universe and will not be missed following the pending cataclysm.

In a moment of deep psychic interchange Dr. Manhattan and Laurie Jupiter receive a simultaneous revelation that jars her to her soul but which suddenly convinces Dr. Manhattan that life is marvellous, that he loves it, and that it is worth saving after all. As the most powerful being in this universe achieves enlightenment, Laurie Jupiter smashes the great clockwork edifice and weeps as it falls in shards around her.

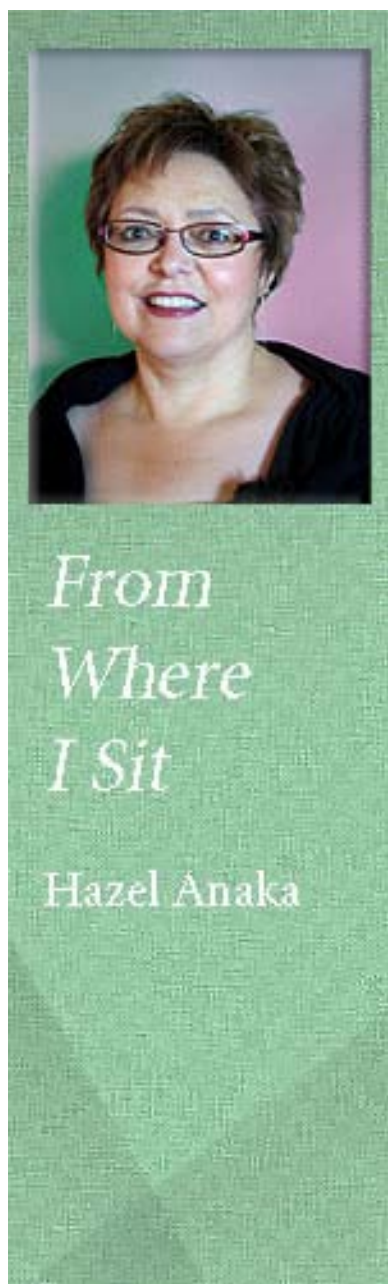
The alternate America that the story unravels is not so different from the America we've known, but that tends to be the way with myths; *this is the way things would be if the gods walked among us*, in other words. Much like America seen from the imagination of an introverted adolescent comics buff.

This is the story of the drawn-out historical heartbreak, both real and mythological, that changed the course of the superhero, both true and figurative, from a simple battle of good against evil to a rich and bloody tapestry of unconscious urges and the disturbing awareness that, in Walt Kelly's words, *we have met the enemy and he is us*.

Who cares if the film lacks structure? If you learn anything from *Watchmen*, it's that structure is highly overrated.

Watchmen manifests seven of The Mindful Bard's criteria for films well worth seeing: 1) it is authentic, original, and delightful; 2) it confronts existing injustices; 3) it displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering; 4) it inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation; 5) it is about attainment of the true self; 6) it stimulates my mind; and 7) it poses and admirably responds to questions having a direct bearing on my view of existence.

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.



2010 Awaits

Reflecting on 2009 as it winds down seems the most natural thing in the world. And while it wasn't a spectacular one there is much to be grateful for; we are enjoying an embarrassment of blessings. Indulge me as I say thank you.

Thank you to loyal readers who take the time to say something I've written has touched you or provoked thought or made you laugh. It's incredibly easy, in the solitude of my office, to forget that the minute I hit send it allows you, dear reader, to be privy to my life and thoughts. I am humbled by the opportunity.

Thank you to those friends who through emails and visits have given me what I most needed in a year of challenges: unconditional support and love. You get me. I am touched by your knowing, your reassurance, and your belief that life's blessings come in circuitous, unexpected ways.

Thank you for the opportunity to see, up close and personal, nostalgia and simplicity even in the 21st century. We attended a 60th anniversary celebration for the Zawale Rural Electrification Association in a small community hall. Hearing about the accomplishments of visionary farmers in 1949 makes me wonder if we could or would rally around a common cause today. The people connected to this hall capture the best of community: volunteerism, friendship, and fun. The musical entertainment by five precocious kids reminds me that the simplest things create the warmest memories. It was a treat to talk to people I haven't seen in a long time and meet some new ones.

Thanks to Hilary, Roy and I had the chance to work our butts off helping her company pull off a huge job at the beautiful new Edmonton Expo Centre. I'm awed by the army of people—janitors, caterers, rigging and lighting techs, client service reps—that make a party happen. Kudos to all involved in creating a night of glitz.

Thank you to family. Sherry and Jim work really hard yet so often are the ones initiating impromptu get-togethers. At the last one a game of canasta for eight broke out (and yes, the girls shellacked the boys).

Thank you to Greg and Carrie for giving us Grady; Jeff and Andrea for giving us Danika. Two babies will rekindle the magic of Christmas eroded by the passage of time and the onset of adult worries and cynicism. Thank you to Hilary for being the selfless catalyst who awes us with her energy, passion, and generous spirit. Thank you to my mom and George for steadfast support year in and year out. Thank you to Roy for an enduring love; you are my rock.

Finally, heartfelt sympathy to all who suffered this year. Losses come in all shapes and sizes and are not limited to death. For those battling declining health, unemployment, family breakup, or loss of dreams know that this too shall pass and blessings come in the most unexpected ways.

Merry Christmas. The gift that is 2010 awaits us, from where I sit.

Sister Aurora

There's a rainbow dancing in the sky tonight, and I think I'm gonna go outside . . .

23

Okay, yeah, so I KNOW it could have been me! He might have threatened me at gunpoint or something. It gave me nightmares.

RR!
I'm
so
mad
at
her!

Ssh! She's
coming back!

Well?

Get this--
Glenn doesn't
want to come
because only
girls and geeks
make a big deal
out of
Aurora
Borealis.

Way to go Glenn. Now
you're DEFINITELY
out of the will.



AU's People and Places

Thomas Oates

Students who have written weekday exams at the Edmonton Learning Centre will no doubt remember the friendly face of Thomas Oates. Oates is an Examination Assistant with AU and works out of the Peace Hills Trust Tower. In this role, he schedules and invigilates exams for AU students in and around the Edmonton area.

Oates first heard of AU while still an undergraduate student at Memorial University

in Newfoundland, "almost 20 years ago." At the time, Oates "needed a course to fulfill a requirement" for his degree. Since then, he has "done distance education courses from other institutions as well," including "University of Waterloo, Humber College, George Brown College, Memorial University, [and] University of London (UK)."

But "from all the other institutions" Oates has dealt with, "AU was the only institution who made regular contact with the student. It was quite impressive."

Three years ago, Oates began working with the university as an Information/Examination Assistant, and gained the full-time Examination Assistant position when it became available two-and-a-half years ago.

Oates is generally in the office from Monday through Friday and explains that in an average day, he spends half his time invigilating exams, and the other half taking students' exam requests and inquiries, and ensuring that he has the correct exams and materials that go with them. His favourite part of the job is "interacting with the students and helping them out one-on-one when they come here into the office."

In his spare time, Oates likes to read mystery novels by Agatha Christie, Ian Rankin, Sir John Mortimer, and M.C. Beaton. "Right now," Oates says, "I'm reading *Le Bal* by Irène Némirovsky. I'm also studying towards a master's degree here with AU. I also do volunteer work with the YWCA."

In the future, Oates hopes to travel back to Heidelberg, Germany. "I was there 10 years ago for two months studying the language and travelling around the area," Oates explains. "The language requirements were the last credits for my degree, and when the opportunity came up to study in Germany for a month, I couldn't resist." While in Germany, Oates stayed in Max Weber House, part of the University of Heidelberg named for the "father of sociology."

Oates also enjoys collecting quotations, particularly by Winston Churchill. Three of his favourite quotes are "attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference," "difficulties mastered are opportunities won," and "never, never, never give up." Particularly applicable words coming from the man who supervises apprehensive students as they nervously write their final exams!

AUSU UPDATE



New 2010 AUSU Handbook/Planners

The new AUSU Handbook/Planners are in the final stages of creation, and should be available within the next couple of months. We had great response on it being full colour, so we'll be doing that once more. Also, numerous suggestions for improvements have been heard and we're fitting in what we can while still keeping the book at a convenient, compact size.

Watch the AUSU front page for the pre-order form, which should be up in early December!

SmartDraw Program Renewal

Some of you who took advantage of our program to provide SmartDraw software to members have been getting notifications that your software license will soon be expiring. Fortunately, AUSU will be continuing this program, so if you haven't already, go to the AUSU home page to download the newest version.

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.

Think AUSU for Christmas

If you haven't already, take a look at our [merchandise catalogue](#) on the front page. Show your AUSU colors on your tree with one of our glass ornaments, and the hoodies and baby jumpers are great gifts for those important people who are supporting your pursuit of your degree.

We also have a selection of other items, such as *Voice* mugs and USB hubs, when you want to show where you get your student-focused news from.

Lock Loan Program Cancellation

Not everything is good news. And unfortunately, due to continued loss of loaner locks that was well beyond our expectations, AUSU has determined that it simply cannot continue to loan locks out to students at the Edmonton and Calgary Exam Centres. However, the locks are still available for purchase, and their popularity attests to their use and convenience. Used locks are being sold for \$2, new ones for \$4. Contact ausu@ausu.org for details.

The locks themselves are small and allow you to set your own three-digit combination, good not only for lockers at exam centres but also for the gym or anywhere that lets you use your own lock to guard your stuff.

AUSU Council Down to Eight

AUSU will be starting the New Year with only eight council members. Heather Fraser was removed from Council as a result of repeated absence from Council meetings. It is always a hard decision for Council when we have to remove someone the members have elected, but without full participation it gets more difficult for Council to move forward. Council does hope, however, that this gives her more time for her many other endeavours, and wishes her the best.

Election Policy Changes

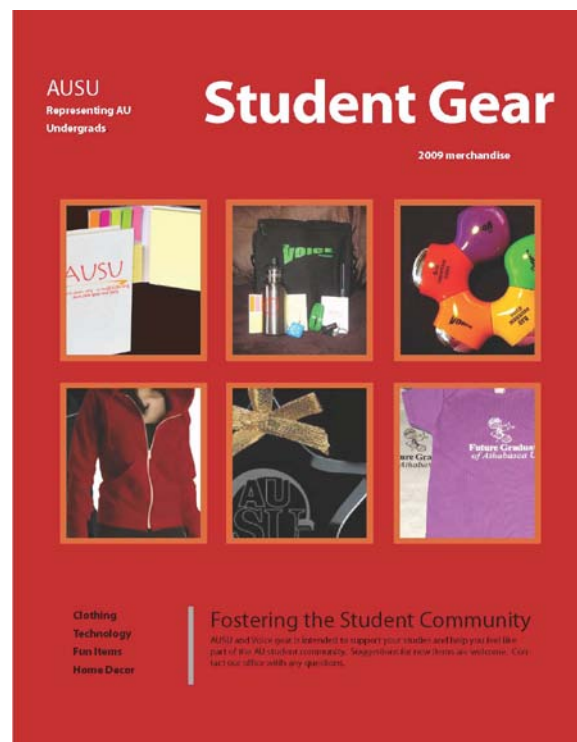
AUSU has made some adjustments to the timeline of the elections. Last year we had a number of complaints that the election period was just too long. People lost interest between when it started and when the voting period rolled around. The new policy shortens the timelines for nomination and campaigning considerably, although we have left intact the four-day voting period to be sure that all members have an opportunity to make their voices heard. Full details on the changes will be released on the AUSU website shortly, and Council has set the date of this upcoming election to March 7, 2010. Voting will be until March 11, 2010, with more details as to how you can participate to be available shortly on the AUSU website.

AUSU Scheduling Meeting with Tutors' Union

By far the most common complaint we hear from members is that some tutors take far too long to respond and that there is too little communication between certain tutors and students. With more studies emerging that show the likelihood of students completing a distance-based course can be directly related to the amount of contact they have with their instructor, AUSU views these complaints as particularly grievous. To attempt to address this, AUSU is seeking a meeting with the tutors' union to try to discuss some ways that the Students' Union and Tutors' Union can work together to ensure that both tutors and students get the support they need to make sure students get the contact they need to get them through their courses.

AUSU Thanks Minister Horner—With Odd Results

AUSU took the opportunity earlier last month to write a letter to Alberta Advanced Education Minister Doug Horner to thank him for holding firm to the regulated limits on undergraduate tuition, even though the government is under increasing budgetary pressure. Unfortunately, shortly after the letter was sent, Minister Horner announced that they were considering changing the regulation to allow significant increases to tuition beyond the regulated amounts.



CLASSIFIEDS

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

THE VOICE

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Publisher Athabasca University Students' Union
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Jason Sullivan, Bethany Tynes, Wanda Waterman St. Louis

www.voicemagazine.org

The Voice is published every Friday in html and pdf format

Contact *The Voice* at voice@voicemagazine.org

To receive a weekly email announcing each issue, see the 'subscribe' link on *The Voice* front page. *The Voice* does not share its subscriber list.
Special thanks to Athabasca University's *The Insider* for its contributions