

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

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Literacy Matters

The numbers on letters

Maghreb Jazz

Beautiful fusion

AU Profiles

Chandra Gattinger

Plus:

*Around eCampus, Sister Aurora,
Eras in Education, 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.



AU Profiles:

AU Profiles: Chandra Gattinger

Christina M. Frey



Four classes a week is a full load, but psychology student Chandra Gattinger manages to fit them into her 32-hour workweek. "It's [a] matter of finding a goal, and wanting to work towards it," she says. Here, Chandra, who works as a nurse's aide, explains why she's changing her career to psychology.

She also describes how she avoids procrastination, why course tutors are such a valuable resource, and what's absolutely necessary to her weekly schedule.

For the past six years, Chandra has been working in the nursing field as a Patient Care Assistant (PCA). "I love my work," she says, but she's eager for a career change: "I've realized that while there are a lot of benefits to being involved in nursing . . . there are many drawbacks, too."

For example, she notes that in addition to having odd working hours, her chances for injury are high. "I read a study once that

said PCAs are the top of the list for injury at work . . . [and] I've had many already," she says. "I was off for six weeks with a back injury last October."

But she isn't anxious to give up the interpersonal interaction that nursing brings. Although she initially considered obtaining her RN degree, she changed her plans when she learned that she'd need to quit working to attend school and clinical practice. "I would have [had] to take leaves of absence from my work, and because I work in a small place, that might not [have been] possible," she says.

That led her to investigate obtaining a degree in counselling; she's now in her second year of AU's Bachelor of Science in Psychology program.

"Beginning a career as a counsellor will allow me to still help people, and manage to live the lifestyle that I dream to have," says Chandra. It's an interest that has been fuelled by her nursing work, particularly in

palliative care. "While my job ends when my patient dies . . . I wonder often what happens to the family," she says. "I wonder . . . how could I help people in a situation like that."

She's unsure whether she'll specialize in grief counselling, though, and plans to see in what direction life takes her. "I know that I've always wanted to help people," she says. "I'm keeping my options open."

Distance learning with AU has been key to furthering her educational goals, as it has allowed her to continue working. "I can do the [class] work in my 'spare time' and still work 32 hours," she says.

What's her secret? The flexibility of both her job and her studies has allowed her to find a routine that works for her. To keep on track, she follows a strict schedule, working in the afternoon and evening, and reserving mornings for studying. It works well, although she admits "it takes discipline to follow it . . . [and] I don't always have that!"

Like most distance students, Chandra struggles with procrastination. "Sometimes motivation is the biggest challenge," she says. "I'm not a morning person . . . [and] because I don't need to be up for lectures, it can be easy to just . . . roll over in bed and forget about school!"

But having a goal keeps her motivated—as does keeping her eyes on the contract date. "I'm funded by Alberta student loans, so when my courses are due, four are due at the same time," she says. "That puts enough fear into me that I get my stuff done!"

In addition to its scheduling flexibility, Chandra finds independent study itself easier than traditional classroom-based learning. "There's no interruption from people who don't take school seriously," she says. Plus, she's able to take classes at her own pace, which is an advantage when she's doing a mix of difficult and easier courses. "If I am taking a course where my work offers me an advantage to the terminology used, then I can work more quickly, but if I am taking a history course . . . I can work slowly and not be rushed," she says.

Although she'd like to see more peer interaction (on the AUSU message boards, for example), Chandra works hard to ensure that distance study doesn't make her isolated. "I have a great support system with great friends," she says. "My co-workers are supportive too; they ask how school is going, and they celebrate my victories, and tease me when I am heartbroken about getting 'only a B+' in a course!"

Plus, she makes use of course tutors in order to give her classes a more personal component. "The tutors, more often than not, are wonderful," she says. "They are . . . happy to help you learn the material." She recalls the difference between a class where she struggled through the material with little tutor contact, and one where she asked for help. "It was so much easier!" she says.

Finally, Chandra also makes a point of scheduling in time for relaxation. "I am always off work on Sundays and Mondays, and those are days that I am free to do as I wish," she says. Although she'll sometimes choose to study on those days, she makes sure at least one of them is free so that she's able to visit friends, or just relax, recharge, and prevent burnout. "Downtime is necessary with a schedule like mine," she says. "I am a crazy woman!"

Christina M. Frey's got her schedule all worked out: everything comes before housework. When she's trying to avoid doing the dishes, she blogs about life at [The Twisting Kaleidoscope](#).

"The tutors, more often than not, are wonderful. They are . . . happy to help you learn the material."

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IN CONVERSATION WITH . . .

Wanda Waterman St. Louis



Jan Wouter Oostenrijk

Jan Wouter Oostenrijk is a Dutch guitar wizard who has contributed significantly to the current crossover between jazz and the music of the Maghreb region, a fusion he calls Maghreb Jazz. (Be sure to read the profile of Jan in Maghreb Voices, in this issue of The Voice.)

Recently he took the time to talk with Wanda Waterman St. Louis about the Maghreb, crossovers, and integration (ethnic and musical).

Musical Roots and Branches

I grew up in Groningen, one of the nicest cities in Holland, a town with an active music scene and a beautiful countryside.

I come from a very musical family, mainly classically oriented. My parents play music and both of my sisters are professional musicians (oboe and voice). At around the age of six I started studying the flute at school. Later on I took up classical guitar. Then I started to play in bands, which was a much more autodidactic and exploratory experience.

I was a sweet kid until I turned 13, when I became a pain-in-the-ass teenager. I exchanged classical guitar and flute for the electric guitar and wah-wah pedal and started playing in punk and new wave bands. After a few years of destructiveness and resistance I discovered, at around the age of 18, that it's all about working hard and smart if you want to achieve anything. I still believe that.

After my punk and new wave period I became more interested in improvisatory styles like jazz and blues. At 22 I began studying jazz guitar at conservatories, first in Groningen and then in Amsterdam.

The Maghreb Connection

Living and studying in Amsterdam allowed me to meet Moroccan immigrant musicians and to become connected with the world music scene (on YouTube you can find videos of this period under the name Railand Band).

I studied the North African Arab language for several years and also took lessons in Arab melody (maqam playing). But mostly I learned by performing, travelling, and trusting my own experiences. My favourite musical genre from the Maghreb is folkloric chaabi music. The rhythms are so hypnotic, danceable, and spicy, with quarter tones in the melodies.

I've travelled to the Maghreb region about 15 times, on visits varying in length from one week to two months. Usually it's Morocco. When we perform there people stay the whole day to watch us set up the stage and do the sound checks, waiting on the street and following every step.

Sometimes I feel we're a little spoiled in the Western world because there are so many cultural events offered every day. It seems as if people take music for granted. In Africa people are so warm, happy, and enthusiastic when you play.

Creative Obsessions

I like to be inspired and challenged. Inspiration can come from people, cultures, music, or languages. I absorb it all and make it my own. My creativity takes the form of playing with the ingredients and placing them in a new order or context.



I've had different obsessions every five years. As a kid it was Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* and science fiction novels and as a teenager The Cure (early) and Iggy Pop. As a jazz student my heroes were Wes Montgomery, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Joe Pass, Robben Ford, and Joe Zawinul.

In North African and Arab music I'm inspired by Cheb Khaled, Orchestre National de Barbes, Karim Ziad, Um Kalthoum, and Munir Bashir. I have many other favourites in the pop, rock, and blues world like AC/DC and B.B. King. I've explored nearly all musical styles and periods.

Forgetting the Clash

Social conscience is my main motivation in life, besides being a good guitar player. My music is all about how to absorb another culture without losing yourself. I like the idea that when you listen to my music you forget this whole idea of the clash of civilizations between the Arab world and the West. Like jazz it also overcomes racial issues.

I believe love and positive energy are bigger than everything else.

Lately I've been concentrating on developing a new crossover. I call it "Sharqi Blues." So I've been listening to a lot to Egyptian belly dance music. In the coming months I'll be working the demos and bringing out some new material.

ERAS IN EDUCATION

Jason Sullivan



Sunday School versus Weekday School: Parallel Church and State Developments in Post-Colonial Morocco

For most students who grew up in Canada during the last few decades, school meant reading, writing, and math with a dose of socialization on the side. Some students, myself included, also had a “bonus” morning of school as part of church on Sundays. There did not seem to be much middle ground as to our sentiments about Sunday school; we either enjoyed it or we loathed it. These polarized opinions on religious education are mirrored in Canadian society’s historical orientation in regard to schooling.

Combining church and schooling now seems as exotic as a trip to Timbuktu. Yet in Morocco, practically next door to Timbuktu, Mali, the education system performs just this combined act. The big difference growing up in Canada was that Sunday schools attempted to teach morals and values whereas weekday school focused more on skills and aptitudes, with moral education being incidental. Cruelty and violence was punished in school yet the curricula itself wasn’t based on learning to “love thy neighbour.” Presumably we students

learned our basic social skills and mores outside formal classrooms.

However, in countries where Church and State were historically linked, the education system served to combine religious and secular teachings. In Morocco, independence from a colonial power brought to light important questions about what and how pupils would be taught, and what the emphasis of their education would be. Morocco has a long tradition as an Islamic country and the arrival of colonial powers such as Portugal and France did not alter its heritage. Morocco gained independence from France in 1956 and shortly afterward a “Royal Commission for Education Reform laid down the basic [principles] of post-independence Moroccan education.”

One stated goal was to enact an “Arabization” of the curriculum, which up to that point was largely taught in French. Parallel to this colonial system were traditional Islamic religious schools known as “Jamaa,” which sought to remain independent of the new and more practically oriented system. This separation of French from Islamic schools is paralleled in the Canadian public-private school situation, although in Morocco Islam was more central to people’s lives than religion is to most Canadians.

Originally the French set up colonial schools that “primarily served the educational needs of the European minority.” This led some Moroccan families to demonstrate allegiance to their culture by sending their children to the Islamic schools. Education in Morocco was always about more than just learning the three R’s or learning about morality; it was about learning how to be a good Muslim, a definition that changed depending on each Moroccan’s point of view.

Traditionally Moroccan “girls stayed at home while the boys went to the school.” As a result of this cultural reality, literacy in Morocco today is at 65.7 per cent for men and only 39.6 per cent for women. Despite the

establishment of compulsory education in the early 1960s, “many children—particularly in rural areas—still do not attend school.” At the time of Morocco’s independence, only 17 per cent of students attended school compared to 85 per cent by 1985.

Today, a cultural tradition that favours men over women in terms of education has slowly eroded; a change that’s been accentuated by the passage in 2004 by King Mohammed VI of a family law known as “Moudawana.” This law granted rights to women who were raped or left destitute by their husbands. It also allowed for DNA testing to find out who a child’s father was and made it legal for women to initiate divorce. Ironically, new divorce laws actually led to fewer divorces overall because it became illegal for men to simply divorce their wives by an act of unilaterally “repudiating them.”

In Moroccan universities, sociologists today are allowed to study their own society more freely than in the past and “everyone now talks about women’s rights, even if jokingly.” Although the tone may be comedic, the fact that the issues are being discussed is nonetheless a sign of greater gender equality.

Perhaps at the root of the matter is whether education without a moral component produces better students.

Moroccan independence occurred in large part because of nationalists who were educated in a Western-European style. As in other countries of Africa and the Middle East, they were wary of allowing religious authority to wield too much power in the new state apparatus. This is paralleled in the history of Canada, where early educators sought to create a public education system that was not heavily imbued with denominational or sectarian tendencies. This secular approach has in Morocco produced a controversial and outspoken sociologist named Fatima Mernissi who today teaches at Université Mohammed V in the capital city of Rabat. In Mernissi’s view, the history of Islamic education has been a “dance of death between authority and individuality.”

Mernissi supports a historical branch of Islamic education known as the Mu’taliza who during the 9th and 10th centuries “placed reason on the same plane as revelation and borrowed liberally from extra-Islamic sources, especially Greek philosophy.” Although devout Muslims, they allowed for a greater breadth of philosophical input to their epistemology (ways of knowing the world). For Mernissi, a reconciliation between Western secular education and Islamic Koranic (religion-based) education lies in a combination of the two. This perspective is interesting as a counterpoint to public education in Canada, where Sunday school and weekday school remain formally ensconced in their separate corners. Of course, Morocco is a far more homogenous culture than Canada and thus requires less tolerance of divergent religious points of view.

As Morocco emerged from its status as a colonially occupied country, conflicts in education occurred between Western-style secularists and Islamic traditionalists. When Mernissi states that “The power of the modern West has been built by state propagation, through public schools, of that humanism that the Arab masses have never had the right to” she is speaking harsh words toward Islamic educators. In a way her critical perspective has produced the education system we have in the Western world today; it is hard for we of younger generations to imagine a time when prayer took place in school or when there were Bibles present in classrooms.

Yet, in parts of the world such as Morocco, it is for many people inconceivable that learning could take place separately from religious faith. In Morocco it is generally held that “God revealed his sacred law, the *shari’a*” and that all education or learning must take place with this divine truth in mind. Perhaps at the root of the matter is whether education without a moral component produces better students. For a culture such as Morocco’s, where religion and life have been so intrinsically linked, it is a challenging process for educators to find a harmonizing balance between Church and State.



*Dear
Barb*

Barbara Godin

Setting a Timeline Can Help with Difficult Decision

Dear Barb:

I've been dating a wonderful man, Paul, for almost a year. We get along great, but I'm wondering if we both want the same thing. We both have grown children. My children are on their own but Paul has a grown son still at home. This son is very dependent on Paul, even though he's in his mid-twenties. I feel this situation is presenting a roadblock to our relationship moving forward. Paul and I have discussed this and he assures me that things will work out, as he needs to help his son to become independent. I have my doubts about this happening any time in the near future.

My reasons for feeling this way are justified, in that Paul recently paid for his son to go to college and at that point we agreed that we could not make any plans for our future until he was finished school, which would have been 18 months. His son dropped out of school after the first semester and is just hanging around the house and spending time with his friends. He works part-time but otherwise doesn't contribute to the household. I'm beginning to wonder if this situation will ever be resolved. I don't want to find myself in this same position two years down the road. How long should I wait before calling it a day? I really do care for this man, but this is not the kind of relationship I want. Thanks.

Shirley

Hi, Shirley. I can sympathize with your situation. However, I'm wondering if there are other issues going on here. It seems a little odd that a man in his mid-twenties would not be motivated to move out on his own. It seems his father has provided an opportunity to his son, but the son messed up. How did Paul feel about this?

I can understand your frustration. Originally you agreed that you would not make any plans until this boy finished school, so you had established a timeline, but now you fear that this may be an ongoing situation. I think you need to ask yourself a couple of questions. First, is it possible Paul is enabling his son to stay at home, or do you believe he is doing everything possible to assist him to become independent? Secondly, do you believe Paul wants to eventually establish a life with you, or is he happy with the relationship as it is? Because his son is still at home at this age, perhaps Paul is content with this situation as he has allowed it to continue. Only you know the answers to these questions.

I would suggest you decide how much time to want to devote to this relationship. Since you have discussed this with Paul I don't feel you need to share your timeline with him. If you do, it will sound like an ultimatum and ultimatums are never a good way to resolve problems. When you reach the point in time that you have allowed yourself, you will know what to do. This is a difficult situation and I hope I was helpful.

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.



AU's People and Places

Sheldon Krasowski

Sheldon Krasowski is a Research Analyst in the Office of Institutional Studies at Athabasca University. He "follows a standard work week of 8:30 to 4:30 Monday to Friday" from his office at AU Central, Athabasca.

"Most research analyst positions have a wide scope and this is certainly true of my position," Krasowski says. "I respond to ad-hoc requests for information by AU administration, faculty and staff and am also responsible for regular

reports that are either monthly or quarterly and focus on enrolment and course starts. I also support the program review process by conducting surveys or focus groups, which gives me a chance to interact with AU students and alumni."

Krasowski began working at AU in the fall of 2003. "Initially I was a course editor and Subject Matter Expert" for the Centre for World Indigenous Knowledge and Research (CWIKR), "and then a course author where I wrote and tutored Indigenous Studies 377: Topics in Indigenous Governance," says Krasowski.

"I am originally from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan but while working for CWIKR I was able to travel to Athabasca and see the AU campus. I had previously worked at the University of Saskatchewan and First Nations University, but the AU campus is in a beautiful setting and I decided to apply to work there full-time," Krasowski explains. "In the fall of 2008 I applied for the research analyst position and started in December."

When asked about the importance of research analyst positions, Krasowski says that "many of the important decisions at AU are made by the president and senior administrators, but these decisions are informed by the reports and surveys that we conduct in the Office of Institutional Studies."

"One of the nice things about the research analyst position is that the constant juggling of projects keeps things fresh and interesting," Krasowski says. "If I get tired of working on a long report I can take a break and work on an information request or check survey results. On any given day I will be working on one or two projects and usually have some information requests as well. Completing projects is always a highlight and I enjoy the positive feedback from AU faculty and administrators."

One project currently underway is the conversion of the Undergraduate Course and Tutor Satisfaction Survey from its current paper form to an online form. "This is the process in which current AU students are asked to evaluate their course and tutor. The feedback provided by students is very important and is used for evaluations and course revisions," Krasowski notes. "Converting this process to an online survey will make the comments from students available to course coordinators and designers much faster than the paper surveys which had to be sent through the mail."

And Krasowski's interaction with students is not limited to seeking "feedback on their courses and programs through the surveys and focus groups conducted through our office:" he also gets to "meet students in a classroom setting" as a grouped study tutor for History 224 and 225. "My tutoring and experience with AU

courses is a great help when I conduct surveys or write reports as I have a sense of what AU students face in completing their degrees and individual courses," Krasowski says.

While Krasowski says that he enjoys "all the projects in the office," he also enjoys "the casual atmosphere at AU Central. Everyone (including the president) is very approachable and friendly and there is an absence of the stuffy pompous attitudes that dominate many post-secondary institutions."

Krasowski is less fond of the frigid Athabasca winters, however. "As it is now January, I can admit that the freezing cold weather does not appeal to me at all. In the summer I can bike to work along the Muskeg Lake Trails or go for a run at lunch time, but when it is -25 I miss all of the outdoor exercise.

"Though relatively small, the town of Athabasca is a great setting for outdoor activities," says Krasowski. "There is a fantastic cross-country ski trail a few metres from the university and there is also downhill skiing and snowshoeing nearby. In the summer there are great hiking trails and the town is also great for cycling. The Athabasca multiplex is adjacent to AU which has a hockey rink, indoor track, and fitness centre. With all these options I have been trying to keep active and hope to spend quite a few weekends skiing the trails."



DID YOU KNOW?



The Postsecondary Page from Statistics Canada

If you need statistics on just about any aspect of postsecondary education, this [Statistics Canada](#) page is the place to find them.

The info is divided into several sections: Postsecondary; Data, Research and Analysis; Support for Faculty; Support for Students; and Additional Publications.

There's a wealth of information here—everything from links to student awards to things like an educator listserv and historical stats.

The link to depository libraries offers "free access across Canada to many Statistics Canada publications and standard electronic products." There's also access to over 700 free StatsCan publications, along with information on how to cite Statistics Canada resources.

You'll also find something called E-Stat, an "online learning tool specially designed for use by the educational community" that lets you "generate dynamic tables, customize graphs and maps using Statistics Canada's Census of Population and socioeconomic data."



Jan Wouter Oostenrijk and the Curiously Interwoven Paths of Arab Music and Jazz

" . . . I discovered that mixing my jazz background with northern African music provided a great opportunity for new musical crossovers. I had already been inspired by innovative musicians like Joe Zawinul and Miles Davis. I also felt there was a social need for this new music because of the incredible amount of misunderstanding between the West and the Arab world."

Jan Wouter Oostenrijk, as said to Wanda Waterman St. Louis

There will always be music fans that will complain about the mixing of genres, quickly resigning musical

syncretism to the realm of lesser music, music of questionable quality insofar as it represents a collage of musical styles and languages.

Trouble is, you can't study the history of any serious musical genre, particularly the history of jazz, without coming up against the insurmountable fact of its mixed cultural origins.

Dutch guitarist Jan Wouter Oostenrijk is keenly aware of the creative stimulus afforded by musical crossovers. With degrees in both classical and jazz guitar (he's also studied flamenco music and Arabic melody) and with the support of an amazing band of conservatory-trained virtuosos and brilliant self-taught Moroccan immigrants to the Netherlands, Oostenrijk has been weaving northern African music into his jazz performances for years, creating a rich and spicy gumbo that remains steadfastly true to the jazz tradition.

It hasn't always been an easy fit:

"Incorporating Maghreb sounds into the musical context of jazz is a never-ending puzzle," says Jan. "It's like integration itself—finding ways to meet and seeing what works and what doesn't. It's like learning a new language."

He isn't the first jazz man to have been inspired by Maghreb music. African music is a well-known precursor to American jazz, and the great jazz composers and musicians, including Ellington, Gillespie, and Davis (versions of whose Arab-influenced tunes Jan has ingeniously included on *Maghreb Jazz Guitar*) often returned to this geographical fountainhead of their inspiration when their muses urged them to explore new directions.

Oostenrijk brings a different understanding to Maghreb music than did the older composers, one based on his personal experiences playing with Moroccan musicians in Holland. Especially notable in his music is the amazing range of contrapuntal rhythms on each track and the Middle Eastern modes that he works into his improvisations.

Jan also sings traditional Arabic songs in a rich, throaty, fervent voice. His own Arabic composition, "L Blaed I Musiqya," is an engaging and delightful tribute to the lands and the peoples that inspire his creative work.

It's always good to meet a genius who doesn't take himself too seriously. While I was interviewing Jan I asked him to list the different instruments played on *Maghreb Jazz Guitar*, those not specifically named on the CD jacket. He named the cracab (Gnawa castanets), the duff (Arab hand drum), the bendir (Arab hand drum with an inner snare), the tar (Middle East tambourine), and the darbuka (Egyptian tabla).



© eddywestveer.com

Left to Right: Marco van den Akker, Rachid Khelifi, Joost Swart, Mohamed Bouhanna, Sala Abdikader, Jan Wouter Oostenrijk

I asked him about the sintir (the Gnawan three-stringed lute) I had distinctly heard on a number of tracks. He kept insisting that there was no sintir on the CD, but offered no explanation as to what I might have heard.

Eventually I figured out that he had brilliantly synthesized the sound of the sintir on his guitar with an e-bow, a clever little gadget which in the right hands can ape a host of instruments. Including the sintir. When I called him on it in an email he sent back a little winky face icon. He'd had his fun.

Currently Oostenrijk is developing a new musical crossover he calls "Sharqi Blues," based on Egyptian belly dancing music. Look forward to some exciting new recordings (and performances) in the near future.

Maghreb Voices celebrates the art and culture of the people of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, in northern Africa. This column features profiles of artists, musicians, and writers who are 1) living within a Maghreb country, 2) originally from the Maghreb and are now using the culture of their homeland as inspiration in their art, and 3) come from outside the Maghreb but have based their art largely on the cultures of the Maghreb. Because French is the most common European language spoken in much of the region, many interviews will appear here in French. If you discover any books, compact disks, or films which came out in the last twelve months and which you think fit the above criteria, please drop a line to bard@voicemagazine.org. If I agree with your recommendation, I'll thank you online.

CLICK OF THE WRIST – Exotic Pets

In spite of the controversy, and very real danger, surrounding exotic animals as "pets," the numbers of people keeping wildlife at home seems to be growing. From jaguars to chimpanzees to alligators, we take a look at the thousands of wild animals being kept in—and sometimes released from—captivity.

Exotic Pets in America

Surprising though it may be, many US states have no rules on how (or even if) wild animals can be kept in residential areas. Which means your new neighbours could just as easily keep a tiger in the backyard as a terrier. British photographer David White took a trip across the pond to document some of the 18.2 million wild animals that Americans privately own.

Attacks by Exotic Pets

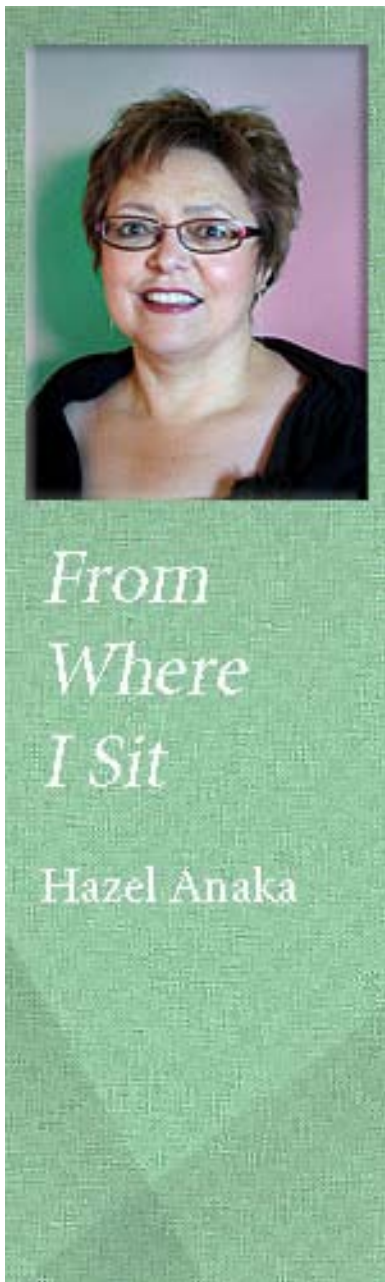
This *Daily Green* article looks at several examples of exotic "pets" that have killed or maimed people (caution: contains graphic videos). Some of the animals had been bred in captivity and hand-reared by their owners from birth. But the Darwin Award definitely goes to the Oregon man who decided to keep a rattlesnake he found—and then put its head in his mouth. Yep.

Diseases from Exotic Pets

Exotic pets aren't just lions and bears; things like birds and reptiles fall into the category too. They probably won't chew someone's leg off but there are certain dangers that pet owners should still be aware of—like a little something called Psittacosis, which can cause heart infections and even death in humans. This *Star Exponent* article offers a good basic primer for those thinking of buying an exotic animal.

Pythons Invade Florida Everglades

We've all heard the stories about pet snakes and crocodiles being flushed down toilets and living in the New York sewers. That may be an urban legend, but the discarded pet pythons invading Florida's wetlands are definitely real. In fact, real enough to kill six-foot alligators, along with deer and other large mammals. The problem doesn't stop in Florida, either. Officials are now worried that the snakes are spreading to states like Georgia and the Carolinas.



Literacy Matters

January 27 is National Family Literacy Day. Started in 1999 by ABC Canada and Honda Canada, its goal is to make literacy a priority. This year's theme is Sing for Literacy. In Hamilton, Ontario, a Snuggle Up and Read pyjama party has been planned. It will see pyjama-clad readers visit libraries, schools, and agencies.

A quick look at the ABC Canada Literacy Foundation calendar of events shows most large communities are planning events that encourage at least 15 minutes of reading per day.

I happened to catch an interview with legendary children's book author Robert Munsch this morning on Canada AM. Host Seamus O'Regan commented that despite the technology (television, iPods, computers, and more) bombarding kids, they are still reading. Munsch's explanation, which makes perfect sense to me, is that reading may be the only way kids can get the undivided attention of their parents. Sad but true. I know I sure didn't read as much to my kids as I should have and I'm a book lover!

Years ago at a prayer service, I remember a son giving his 90-something-year-old father's eulogy. He confessed his father's illiteracy and associated shame. My own dad, who would be nearly 100 had he lived, left school after grade six because of farm family responsibilities. Luckily he could read. For that generation, whether you were literate or not was largely luck of the draw and evidence of a family's wealth. That I understand.

What I don't understand is why it's still happening. If we take people with medical or learning difficulties such as dyslexia out of the equation there are still far too many people who can't read. The cost to society and the individual is immense. The shame is significant.

In Alberta, 42 per cent of adults have trouble reading or writing. An astonishing 82,450 Albertans can't read or write. The number lacking the skills to read common everyday written materials is 489,000. Twenty-seven percent of high school graduates have literacy skills too low for entry-level

jobs. Those are graduates. What about the ones who drop out? The stats I saw don't break out whether or not we're talking about English only. Are immigrants reading in their native language?

Equally distressing is the number of people who can read but choose not to. I've heard people boast about not having read a book since high school. Wow.

I find myself back on the board of my local public library, and increasing usage is one of our challenges. Some families seem to gravitate to the movie DVDs and give the books a pass. Not enough people hold memberships. Not enough people are taking advantage of the place. With our 60th anniversary this year we hope to change that. We owe it to the 68 residents who petitioned council in 1949.

But there is help. Most Community Adult Learning Councils or similar agencies offer adult literacy programs. We can patronize our local libraries. We can support authors and the publishing industry. We can read to kids and grandkids. We can seek out large print and audio books. Literacy matters, from where I sit.

Sister Aurora

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



Why didn't I TELL HIM OFF?? Listen to you! You're sitting there blaming me, like I did it to myself!

Like it could never happen to someone as WORTHY as Princess Jodi!

If it looks like a victim...

...and thinks like a victim...

...and acts like a victim—

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.

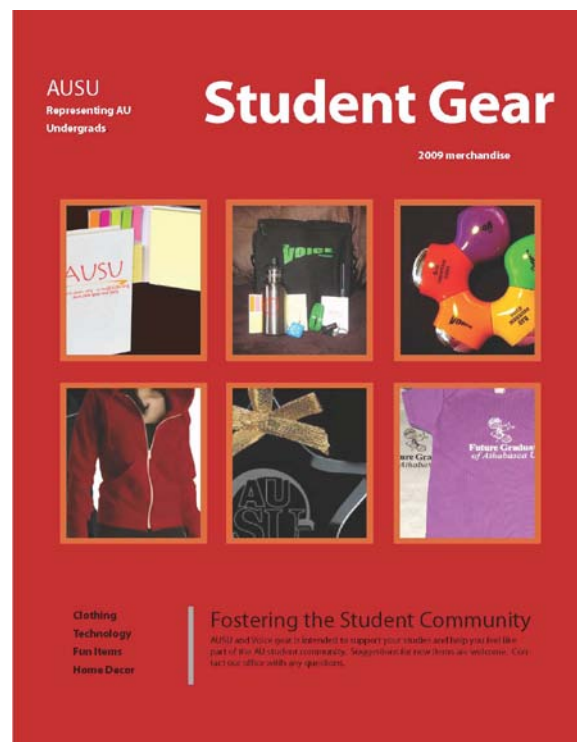
AUSU Scheduling Meeting with Tutors' Union

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.

Editor's note: In response to public concern on this issue, Minister Horner has clarified in interviews that only tuition for certain programs would be open to review and possible increase.



INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: Calgary to track 911 cellphone calls

With growing numbers of people ditching their land lines for cellphones, tracking the locations of 911 callers has become a pressing issue. But soon, Calgary's emergency operators will have the ability to "trace cellphone calls within a few metres of the caller's actual location."

As the [CBC](#) reports, about 200,000 emergency-service calls are placed from cellphones each year in Calgary. Currently, 911 operators can only track callers to the closest cell tower. That could be several kilometres away from the caller, making it nearly impossible to find them—especially since many callers are unable to give a precise location.

Beginning next week, though, changes to the system will "measure the distance between the cellphone and a number of towers, then calculate a global positioning system location."

The changes come in response to Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) demands to improve

tracking technology of the 911 system. The new system will also allow moving callers to be tracked.

Steve Dongworth, manager of public safety communications, told reporters that the updates mean 911 cellphone calls can now be pinpointed "to within about three to six metres" from their origin.

In Foreign News: Indian students in Australia face exploitation

Indian students studying in Australia have long been the target of violent attacks, and the Indian government is now speaking out against another form of abuse those students face: exploitation by "dodgy colleges and greedy employers."

The Age reports that, in the midst of heated disagreement over whether the physical attacks are racially motivated, the Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs is also trying to highlight the broader problems faced by Indian students in Australia.

The Minister pointed out that Australian police have the time and energy to arrest students for infractions such as working more than the 20 hours a week allowed, yet have done little to stop exploitive practices by colleges and employers.

The problems include employers who pay less than the legal minimum wage, as well as "bogus training colleges that effectively [act] as visa factories." Both the Australian and Indian governments are aware of the abusive practices, but it appears that little is being done to help students.

Senior government officials in Australia have been concerned for some time that the country's "education, immigration and employment systems" are undermined by the depth of the problem, and it's believed that organized crime plays a role in the "complex networks" between businesses, colleges, and immigration agents.

CLASSIFIEDS

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

THE VOICE

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