

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 18 Iss 49 2010-12-10

Beyond the Stone

The secret of immortality

The iPhone Diaries

There's an app for that

Fearless Serendipity

Sounds of strength and beauty

*Plus: Gregor's Bed, Cruiscin Lan,
Click of the Wrist, 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.



IN REVIEW

Christina M. Frey



To Be Immortal: *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*

Who wants to live forever?

Throughout the centuries, the human race has hungered after immortality, all the while struggling to make sense of its various manifestations. Many thousands of years BC, Gilgamesh set out on an epic quest to learn the secret of immortality. Yet his searching was fruitless; he returned home with nothing more than the knowledge that the

secret of life was reserved for the gods, while the physicality of the human race was destined to die.

Despite our technological advances, pillars of philosophy, and libraries full of the rational—and irrational—thinkers, we’ve never gotten much further than the ancient hero.

Most religious practices throughout history have encouraged spiritual immortality over physical, focusing on the soul, the inner self, and the afterlife. We’re encouraged by self-help gurus everywhere to view life as finite and to focus on our spiritual and moral legacy. Yet despite the sages’ advice, it’s that physiological immortality—of our bodies, our physical reality—that has always been the most sought-after form.

It’s also been the most elusive. From the sorcerer’s stone to cryogenics to modern-day anti-aging surgeries and procedures, we have always pursued and created means to delay aging because we fear our end. And thus we continue to seek immortality.

But despite our human obsession with eternal youth, we very rarely take the myth, mystery, and aura out of the concept. Sometimes taking a look at the question of immortality in a less esoteric manner—through the lens of science, of culture, of law, and of ethics—can be at once shocking, mind-blowing, and healing.

This was brought home to me recently by a fascinating reading of the story of Henrietta Lacks: *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, by Rebecca Skloot (Crown Publishers 2010).

Henrietta was an indigent black woman who died of cervical cancer in the 1950s. Before her death, her doctors at Johns Hopkins Hospital removed some of her cancerous cells for research purposes. They didn’t obtain her permission first. In the lab, the cells multiplied rapidly even as Henrietta herself faded; they grew and divided, eventually creating the long line of so-called HeLa cells that researchers still use today. The result: amazing scientific advancements. Privacy invaded. Fortunes made. A mother lost, a family torn apart, children unable to afford health insurance. Millions of lives saved.

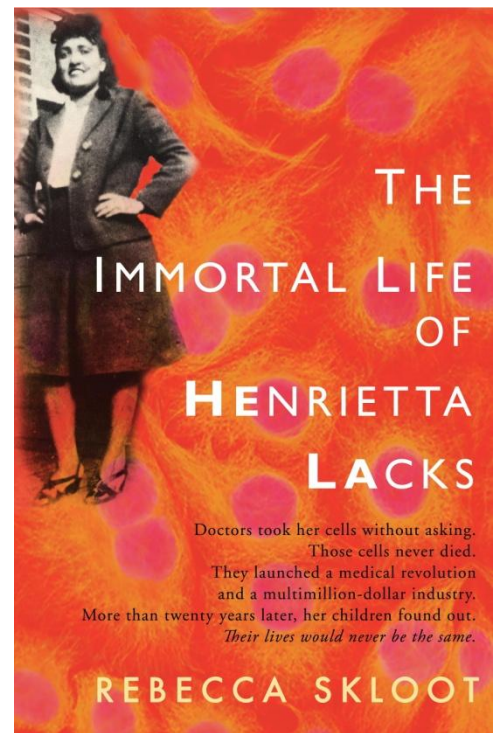
Sound complicated and confusing? It should. Because the way Skloot tells it, the story of Henrietta and her immortal legacy is more just the story of one woman. It’s her story, skilfully woven with the story of Skloot’s own pursuit of the truth, the reality of the family Henrietta left behind, the socio-economic



prejudices and eugenic thought of the time, and the amazing history of modern cellular biology and genetics and medical healing. Yet the book's not a mishmash of unrelated anecdotes. Everything moves together in harmony, giving the sense that Henrietta is the driving force behind all five stories. In a way, the book's structure parallels the question of Henrietta's own immortality.

Although it's an illuminating work on a niche of science history and cultural ethics, it is by no means merely for scholars, scientists, or lawyers. Rather, it's one that should be on the to-read list of every thinking adult in this modern age.

It comes down to the effect on the reader. When ethicists or attorneys lay out their interpretations of the morality of fuzzy ethical questions, there's always an "angle." Reading multiple reasoned arguments is a good way for us rational beings to muddle out an issue. At the same time, though, it's easy for us to gloss over the questions themselves in our haste to either agree with the written views or dismiss them wholesale.



Skloot doesn't take sides. Intriguingly, nor does she merely lay out the case and ask us to draw our own conclusions. Rather, she tells the story in a manner that suggests serious questions about life, ethics, and morality, questions we can't help raising on our own while turning the pages. I can't count the number of times I put the book down to ponder an ethical question that popped up during my reading.

Because the questions come from within ourselves, we readers end up taking a certain ownership of them: we have that inner drive to keep exploring the ethical and moral situations, even if we can't reach full conclusions. And, the book, more gripping than most fiction, lures us back for more.

Can immortality be truly measured in the physical world? At what point does life end?

In an extensive afterword, Skloot outlines some of the modern debate over medical and genetic ethics, but by then, our brains are already in high gear and ready to take it on.

Beyond a doubt, it's uncomfortable to face deep thoughts about mortality, science, and ethics. Yet I think that in our deepest self, we do desire to know the secrets of living forever, and we're intrigued by the clash of that innate human desire and our sense of morality and culture.

Which brings us back to the age-old question of immortality. Can immortality truly be measured in the physical world? At what point does life end? Is it the stopping of one organ—or the ending of a DNA line? When does it begin? Who defines life, and how to avoid eugenic practices?

What level of ownership rights to our tiniest components do we possess? Years down the line? What kind of control can or should we have over how our cells are used? How do we balance rights and scientific progress without severely hampering scientific discovery? For example, a decade ago, scientists researched the effects of avian flu using cells taken from a soldier who died during the Spanish flu pandemic in 1918. The cells were used for a purpose scientists of the early 1910s couldn't even imagine. On the other hand, how do

we encourage technological progress, particularly with the end result of aiding human health, without crossing that blurry line into ethical compromise and violation of the human person?

These are only a few of the big questions raised by *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. Both a light and a deep read, compassionate yet detached, eliciting laughs, tears, and a lot of head scratching, it's a book that raises controversial debates both within and without. And that's a good thing: because in our search for immortality, even a question is an answer.

CLICK OF THE WRIST: O Christmas Tree!

Despite controversy over their use, brightly lit and colourfully decorated evergreen trees have remained a classic icon of the holiday season for centuries. In fact, this December, the Christmas tree celebrates the 500th anniversary of its first recorded appearance. In honour of this milestone, this week's links get up close and personal with those pines, spruce trees, firs, and other conifers whose shape and scent are now seasonal symbols in many modern cultures.

1510

Five hundred years ago, the history of the Christmas tree began—officially. However, the concept of a decorated tree goes back several centuries earlier. This brief timeline, from the National Christmas Tree Association (an education and advocacy organization for “Christmas Tree Professionals,” including growers), sheds a little light on the symbol's colourful history.

O Tannenbaum

Although the first recorded decorated Christmas tree was created in Latvia, many of our modern tree-decorating customs hail from Germany. So, of course, does the carol “O Tannenbaum,” or in the English translation, “O Christmas Tree.” Versions of the song range from full chorus to joking parodies, but this particular rendition on jazz piano is gentle and peaceful—perfect for relaxing with a mug of cocoa.

Forest for the Trees

Not all conifers are alike in their natural state. This brief, “field guide”-style overview of popular Christmas tree types is provided by a Maryland nursery. It's worth taking along with you if you're buying a farm-grown tree to decorate for your home or office this year.

By Design

Themed trees and other unusual schemes are the latest trend in tree decorating. But many of the trees displayed in this blog post take innovation to another level. From opulent, jewel-encrusted extravaganzas to creative expressions using recycled materials, all of these holiday trees deserve a second look.





Intriguing New Trends in Music

Th.e n.d: *Metaphors*

Mixgalaxy Records 2010

The Space in Which Trial Becomes Attainment

"We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time."

T.S. Eliot

Th.e n.d (the name is inspired partly by the Doors's unforgettable hymn to despair) is one guy who grew up in a small village in East Germany, just 30 miles from Berlin (early enough to witness the last days of the Berlin Wall). He learned guitar and piano on his own at an early age and also mastered the use of studio software instruments.

Hungry for creative stimulus, he was drawn to the city like a moth to a flame. "I recognized early that Berlin is an unbelievably exciting city for arts and artists and I tried to get to Berlin as often as possible when I was a teenager," he explains. "In my opinion, Berlin is one of the most interesting cities for young people in Europe. The city allows you to be who you want, and you can find nearly every kind of arts and interesting people here."

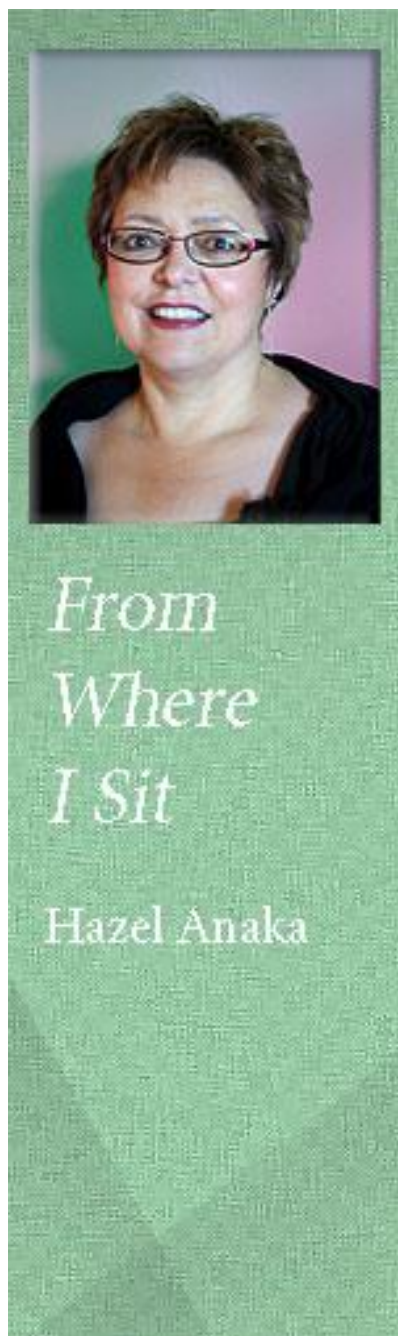
Forays into Berlin eventually led to a long-standing career as a deejay in the city's techno scene and also fostered the development of his artistic vision.

Metaphors is truly a product of the electronic revolution, but at the same time departs from it on the level of aesthetic sophistication. There's a mind-altering atmosphere in the album, with a lot of piano providing melodious interplay as well as some thrilling chords. And you can easily find musical allusions to, among other things, Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, one of Th.e n.d.'s favourite pieces.

One of my demands for instrumental music is that, due to the absence of lyrical verbiage, the track titles have to be brilliant, and these are no disappointment. "Chromatic Sins" and "Knecht the Catcher" are my personal faves.

Once again, Th.e n.d has grown beyond his techno roots to create a work with depth and substance; these are human, affirming sound structures destined to sweeten and enrich your solitude.





There's an App for That

November 26 was a red-letter day. Roy and I broke down and each bought iPhone 4s. For the first time ever, we're happenin', cutting edge, in-the-know kind of people. We're "with it," for heaven's sake. (Sadly, if that were really true, I'd say we were "sick" or something other than "with it." What *do* the cool kids say?)

We didn't camp out on a sidewalk awaiting the release of some new gadget. But neither did we dally so long that the appeal of the trendy thing was damn near over. We did have to sign on the dotted line for two three-year contracts with Telus in order to be able to buy the phones for a bargain-basement price of \$159 each, plus the protective cases and the car charger. \$470 later, we were outta there.

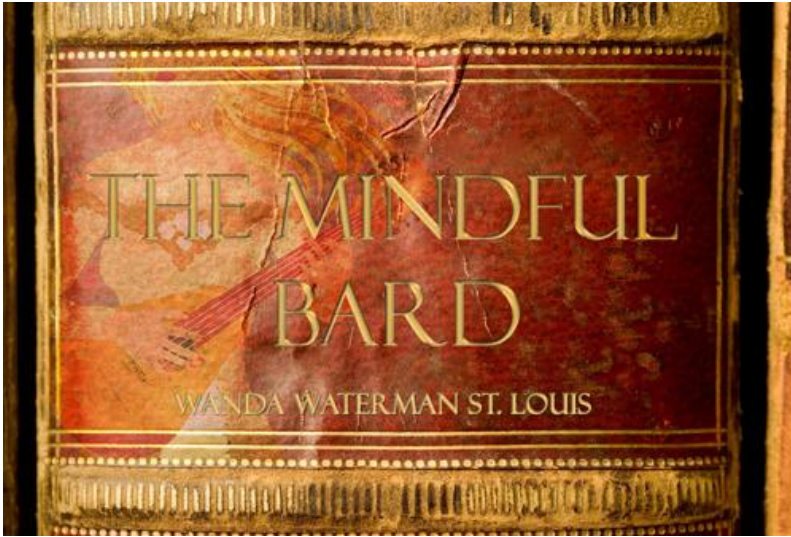
This is our first Apple product, and I have to say I'm happy with it. It seems incredibly user-friendly. I was able to set up my contact list by myself without needing prompting or hand-holding. Setting up my personal email was another story. I was caught in an endless loop of talking to tech support guys from my provider and Telus. Waving a flag of surrender, I decided it was easier to open my third Gmail account rather than try to make my own address work. I've gotten and sent emails. Placed and received phone calls. I've even texted. I may never have to talk to anyone again!

Just this evening, we downloaded some apps that the kids have raved about: a unit converter, a flashlight, a level, Yellow Pages, and Words with Friends. I've got three Scrabble games, including one with a random player, going as I work on this column. FYI, "wos" and "os" are not real words, Kayy26. I guess I could have written a snotty speech bubble note to her (?), but what would be the point? Cheating is so passé. I intend to bring my Scrabble Deluxe board game to Greg and Carrie's on Christmas Day so we can have a real game with tiles and timers, letter holders, and a dictionary to arbitrate disputed words. There's nothing like some hard core

competition to solidify family ties and give people something to talk about for years.

Roy is making a lot of noise getting used to Shazam, a \$6 app that can identify the title and artist of any song it hears playing. NuTsie Top 100s by Year plays the top 100 songs for every year since 1947. For a guy who loves music, this is heaven.

I saw an \$18 magazine that rates over 650 iPhone apps, so we've just scratched the surface in discovering the phones' potential. I just hope we can stay strong and avoid having them take over our lives. I can see it now . . . first to go is cooking, then sleep, then personal hygiene. Though if we just call, email, or text, and avoid face time, no one will know, from where I sit.



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

大絃嘈嘈如急雨: *The bold strings rattled like splatters of sudden rain,*

小絃切切如私語: *The fine strings hummed like lovers' whispers.*

嘈嘈切切錯雜彈: *Chattering and pattering, pattering and chattering,*

大珠小珠落玉盤: *As pearls, large and small, on a jade plate fall.*

Bai Juyi, "Pipa Xing" ("Pipa Play")

Album: Gao Hong, *Quiet Forest, Flowing Stream* (Innova Records 2010)

The Sound of Fearless Serendipity

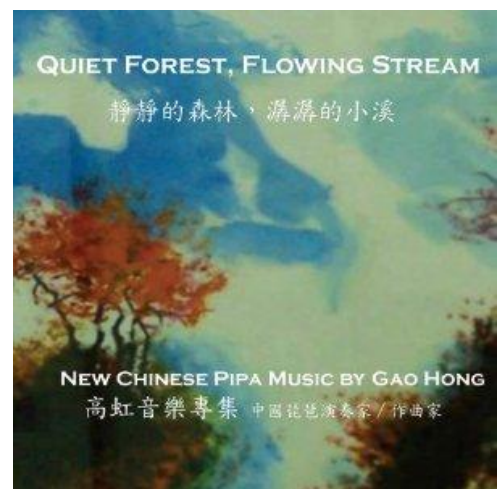
Hong both plays and composes for the Chinese pipa, a stringed instrument that has existed in China since the third century BC. The pipa looks somewhat like an elongated lute and produces what many westerners would consider to be the characteristically Chinese musical sound.

Quiet Forest, Flowing Stream is Hong's first album featuring her own compositions. This virtuoso composed nearly every piece on the album, and her music seethes with passion and virility even as it typifies artistic delicacy and restraint.

The instrumentation is superb. Far from becoming a reckless mishmash of varied ethnicities, the instruments complement, balance, and enhance one other. The first composition, "Butterfly," is an ecstatic interplay of cello, voice, veena, tabla, and pipa. The title track is a blissfully enchanting duet between the pipa and the sitar (played by Joseph Schad).

"Courage" and "Celebration" are both Hong's tributes to her daughter Alida, the survivor of a long and painful struggle with leukemia. But these are far from the sentimental rhapsodies one might expect in response to this subject. Manic voices and driving, aggressive percussion signify a strength and determination that's jarringly beautiful.

Quiet Forest, Flowing Stream manifests six of The Mindful Bard's criteria for music well worth a listen: 1) it is authentic, original, and delightful; 2) it makes me want to be a better artist; 3) it gives me tools which help me be a better artist; 4) it displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering; 5) it inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation; and 6) it provides respite from a sick and cruel world, a respite enabling me to renew myself for a return to mindful artistic endeavour.



CHRONICLES OF CRUISCIN LAN

Wanda Waterman St. Louis



DID YOU KNOW?



AU's New Web-Based Transfer Credit Search Page

Curious as to how your past coursework might transfer for AU credit? Want to find out whether courses at other universities are equivalent to AU courses, or transferable as AU program requirements?

You'll want to check out AU's new web-based Transfer Credit Search application, which allows "students to search transfer credit decisions at Athabasca University by both course and program."

The user-friendly, online application can be used in three ways: to check how courses you've taken at another institution would transfer to AU, to check the transferability of programs you've taken at another institution, and to "search for AU course equivalents at other institutions."

For further information, see the Transfer Credit Search [help page](#). Or, to access the application and start searching, click [here](#).

INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: Toasty Texting

Let's face it: we're a nation of addicts, addicted to our portable technology. When we want to check our smart phone's email app or send a text, nothing can stop us—not courtesy, not safe driving practices, not the law. Not even, apparently, the winter's chill.

As the *Toronto Star* [reports](#), a London, Ontario man has come up with a new invention: Twittens, a glove uniquely suited to both texting and staying warm.

Last winter, Lincoln McCardle was “growing tired of struggling to use his iPod while wearing winter gloves.” But fingerless gloves are a bit of a fashion statement and don't appeal to everyone—plus, they're cold! With a friend, McCardle developed the concept of gloves with a “removable hood on the index finger . . . [and] on the thumb, too.”

Now his so-called Twittens, fleece gloves which allow for easy texting, Tweeting, and iPod manipulating, are available for purchase, with

interest growing rapidly. Impacto, the company manufacturing the product, “plans to make more sizes and colours for next season” if the Twittens sell well.

They've already got the thumbs-up from McCardle himself. As he told reporters, he “[wears] them all the time,” adding that he's “convinced this was exactly what [he] wanted to begin with.”

Around the World: *Jaws* II (or III, or IV, or V)

Shark attacks beach, inducing panic. Shark attacks again and again. Authorities are in denial. A brave crew must go out and confront the killer head-on. It's the plot for classic thriller *Jaws*, and it's become so ingrained in the cultural psyche that just about every shark sighting inspires a reference to the film. But in reality, it's just a movie—right?

Or maybe not. As *The Daily Telegraph* [reports](#), a series of shark attacks at a beachfront resort on the Red Sea has “even the experts . . . drawing parallels with . . . Steven Spielberg's 1975 thriller.”

The shark began by viciously attacking a beachgoer. But although it's very unusual for a shark to attack more than one individual, it then mauled two more—and returned the next day for a fourth. After the beach reopened, the shark once again returned, this time killing a fifth victim.

Because of the ferocity and frequency of the attacks, even “experts have been left at a loss to explain them.” But some have noticed uncanny similarities to the plot line of *Jaws*.

It's not just the nature of the attacks that have given rise to the allusions. The erroneous belief that the shark had been caught and the unwillingness of officials, who “fear[ed] . . . further bad publicity,” to keep the beaches closed closely “mirror . . . the plot” of the film.

To date, though, the real culprit appears to be still at large. To catch it, they might need a bigger boat.

AUSU UPDATE



Convocation 2010

AUSU wishes to congratulate this year's graduates, whether attending Convocation in person or by distance. We wish you the best of luck in your future pursuits. You are an inspiration to all AU students!

AUSU Executive Election

AUSU has recently held its internal election for the Executive. We wish to congratulate Barbara Rielly (President), Bethany Tynes (Vice President External and Student Affairs) and Sarah Kertcher (Vice President Finance and Administration) on their election and thank those that ran for their willingness to serve.

Internal elections are being held to determine committee membership and we expect that all will be in place shortly. Our new Council is taking its bearings and has already begun to set the direction for this term.

Student Issues

AUSU recently completed a compilation of reported student issues covering a two year period; all issues were recorded in such a way as to ensure that student information remains protected and private. This effort confirmed what we long suspected; that tutor problems were the single biggest issue faced by our students (56 of 120 complaints).

Outdated course materials and errors in texts continue to be reported as well as were exam issues, slowness of the transfer process, and the scantiness of information in School of Business FAQs. Over that two year period there was a decrease in the number of complaints about student financing, exam request problems, difficulty registering in more than six courses, and materials shortages for courses. Kudos to AU for improving in those areas. Now if we could only get the Tutors' Union to the table . . .

New 2010 AUSU Handbook/Planners – Arrived!

Finally! People have already started receiving the new planners in the mail, and we're currently shipping them out as fast as the orders come in. Full of useful information about AUSU, writing styles, course grading, great finds online for your studies that you may not have known about, as well as having places to write down your phone numbers, keep track of your assignments, and, oh yeah, a year's worth of calendar to plan out your schedule too. We'll give one free to each AUSU member just for the asking.

Remember, though, we only print a limited number of these each year, so when they're gone, they're gone.

Let 'em Know who Represents for You!

AUSU logo mugs, hoodies, USB keys, and much more are all available for sale from our office. Also, used locks can be purchased at half price! Check out our merchandise catalog on our front page. You should

check out our hoodies in particular—made in Canada and 100% bamboo, we're offering them for just barely over our cost, and they're both durable and comfortable.

And if you have new little ones in your family, or know somebody who does, check out our baby onesies. Made by American Apparel, these onesies are high quality and let folks know your kids are growing up to great things as a "Future Graduate of Athabasca U"

AUSU Scheduling Meeting with Tutors' Union – Not really an Update

Some things resist change. We're still waiting for a response from the Tutor's Union as to when we might be able to meet with them to discuss ways that AUSU and the Tutor's Union can work together to ensure that students are getting the contact they need. Unfortunately, they haven't yet replied, so we're stepping up our campaign to get in touch with them. If you want to help, the next time you're talking to your tutor, ask them if they know when the Tutor's Union will meet with AUSU so that the groups can work together on common issues.

Our statistics we've been collecting from the forums and your calls show that issues with tutors - specifically the amount of time taken for marking assignments and exams are your number one concern. Help us help you.

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.



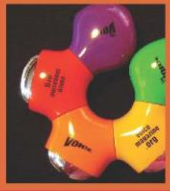



For any course that requires charts that cannot be easily created in Word or Excel, this should be a real time saver and make it easier to submit all portions of an assignment by email.

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.

AUSU
Representing AU
Undergrads

Student Gear

2009 merchandise

Clothing
Technology
Fun Items
Home Decor

Fostering the Student Community

AUSU and Voice gear is intended to support your studies and help you feel like part of the AU student community. Suggestions for new items are welcome. Contact our office with any questions.

CLASSIFIEDS

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

THE VOICE

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