

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 19 Iss 14 2011-04-15

Report Card "E"

Educators go digital

Patched Up

Two worlds collide

Crossroads

Tale of a tune

*Plus:
From Where I Sit,
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.



GREEN LIGHT

Christina M. Frey



Ripping Off the Band-Aid

“I’m no longer environmentally friendly,” wrote one *Globe and Mail* essayist last spring in a tongue-in-cheek piece. After trading in his household cleaners and toiletries for eco-friendly versions and “greening” his lifestyle, he discovered that his kitchen was filthy, he was uncomfortable, he stank, and his condo had an infestation of moths.

As a result, he has now thoroughly “de-greened,” he says.

Despite the obvious humour in the piece (we’ve all tried—and tossed—that all-natural deodorant that simply doesn’t work), it raised quite a bit of defensive ire in the accompanying reader comments. Everyone had an opinion, a solution, a patch. *Just do this. Get a different product. Toughen up.* And while part of me wants to join in the debate—didn’t he overreact just a little?—I can also sympathize with the author, because I’ve been there. His method of greening didn’t “work” for him, and it won’t for me, or you, or most of the essay’s commenters.

There’s a reason we have so many tribulations when we try to make eco-conscious decisions in our own lives.

It’s time to acknowledge that the age of patchwork environmentalism is over. All the sure-fire tricks, tips, and moralistic stances are simply stand-ins, Band-Aids which take the focus off the real problem. They don’t work, and I’ve finally figured out why.

The scientific discoveries and inventions of the 19th century ushered in a new era—one in which everything changed as the industrial-electronic age gradually established itself. Of course with all the modern conveniences came a price: pollution. Reduction of resources. Waste. And yet at the same time, millions of people across the globe were still lacking basic necessities.

So we came up with a patch: we’d reduce our energy consumption, just a little bit. Incandescent bulbs wasted energy, so we sent our light bulbs to the landfill and ran to make the planet-friendly purchase of fluorescent bulbs. A few years later, new research linked fluorescent bulbs to a phenomenon called “dirty electricity,” a form of electromagnetic pollution that appears to negatively affect our health. And of course fluorescent bulbs contain mercury, which can leach into the environment if the bulbs are not disposed of properly. So now all eyes are on the LED bulbs, which look promising. For now.

The fact is, in our attempt to live “greener,” we frequently trade one problem for another. A case in point is the San Francisco low-flow toilet debacle. After promoting low-flow toilets as environmentally sound—and the city has reduced



its water consumption significantly since its residents made the switch—officials discovered that the reduced water flowing through its sewage system created backup, odour, and bacteria. They’ve had to spend over \$100 million to update the system, and need to pour 8.5 million gallons of bleach “down city drains or into the drinking water supply every year.” Sounds like another environmental disaster waiting to happen.

“It’s very easy for our environmental awareness to slide into hypocrisy. After all, are we honestly living in harmony with the planet if we use artificial lighting or heating at all? Or are we looking for a way to reconcile one way of life with another—two completely opposite manners of existence?”

It’s becoming painfully obvious that every time we, with our “enlightened” worldview, see that we’ve messed something up, we try to fix it—and end up making everything worse. While many environmentally-friendly policies are beneficial and don’t have known drawbacks, the general problem is that they are merely patches.

We want to have our cake and eat it too. We want to live the life to which we’re accustomed, modern conveniences and all, and yet we still want to be (or appear) socially conscious.

It’s very easy for our environmental awareness to slide into hypocrisy. After all, are we honestly living in harmony with the planet if we use artificial lighting or heating at all? Or are we looking for a way to reconcile one way of life with another—two completely opposite manners of existence?

We don’t want to go back to an era of candlelight, horse-drawn transportation, and no communication among non-local friends and family. We enjoy the little conveniences, like microwaves, iPods, and Amazon.ca’s Super Saver Shipping.

Not to mention modern science, medicine, transportation, communication, and agriculture—all have enormous benefits that weren’t available to people long ago. But more ancient lifestyles also had benefits, and one significant one was a life lived more in harmony with nature, a planet less despoiled, an attitude of more respect for the people, animals, and plants that inhabited the globe.

We want the benefits of both worlds. And it’s time we acknowledged the fact that this, on its face, is impossible.

Because for all we decry the rape of the land by industry and big business, it’s people who sustain that industry and business. And while we urge more environmentally friendly solutions and methods, castigating those organizations for their pollution and energy waste, we so easily forget that it’s our own wants and desires that were the root of these problems.

Frequently, our little patches that seem socially responsible are too often foils for our own over-consumption. For instance, Kraft’s plan to distribute cookies with a low carbon footprint is laudable, but it’s ameliorating a situation that consumers helped create. Better for the environment? Make homemade cookies. Better still? Do without!



So what's the solution? Few are willing to turn back the clock to centuries before the industrial age. But there is hope. The first step in the right direction is to realize that we simply can't have it all.

And that leads to the second step. As one *San Francisco Chronicle* writer pointed out, our "recycling efforts and cleaner energy and water purifiers are really only stop-gap measures until people just plain learn to live with less."

By all means, continue to reuse and recycle. Seek more natural products. Support sustainable practices. But also develop an awareness of consumption. Reduce—and reduce—and reduce again. Think before buying. After all, truly healing the planet and its people will involve a lot bigger commitment than merely purchasing the next cool Band-Aid.

CLICK OF THE WRIST: Electronic Recycling

What's green and has lots of wires or circuits? The answer: your old electronics. Typically, we go through electronic devices and accessories at an unprecedented rate, and the cast-offs too frequently end up in the landfill. But recycling your unwanted electronics, accessories, and ink and toner cartridges is now easier than ever. This week's links highlight some of the programs available.

Recycle for Education

Here's an opportunity to keep used inkjet and toner cartridges out of the trash—and help local schools. Last year, Staples's Recycle for Education program collected enough cartridges to provide \$250 gift cards to over 2100 schools across the country (as well as a \$50,000 cash prize to the school submitting the winning essay in its Computer Lab Makeover Contest). Talk about making the planet a better place for the kids!

Recycle My Electronics

Seeking a good "home" for outdated computer monitors, old pagers, broken scanners, and the like? Ontario Electronic Stewardship (OES) has a province-wide collection program to ensure that these electronics don't end up in a landfill. The program is funded by money that was collected from electronics manufacturers and importers when the products were first made or brought into the province. If you're not an Ontario resident, be sure to check out the site's links to resources for other provinces.

Recycle Your Cell

You know you desperately want that upgrade. So what to do with your old smart phone? There are a multitude of organizations that will take your old cellphones and phone-related paraphernalia off your hands, but it's much simpler to visit RecycleMyCell.ca to find the closest drop-off spot. And if there's no convenient location near you, the organization—a project of the Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association—will send you a postage-paid mailer.





The Travelling Desert Blues Show, Part IV

(Read Parts I, II, and III of this series.)

"If you want to learn how to . . . make songs yourself, you take your guitar and you go to where a road crosses that way, where a crossroads is. Get there, be sure to get there just a little 'fore 12:00 that night so you'll know you'll be there. You have your guitar and be playing a piece there by yourself . . . A big black man will walk up there and take your guitar and he'll tune it. And then he'll play a piece and hand it back to you. That's the way I learned to play anything I want."

Tommy Johnson

Except for the lands along the Nile and a network of oases which developed into trade routes, the Sahara was never heavily populated. Unlike Mesopotamia, the Sahara doesn't hold bottomless layers of archaeological artifacts from various ages and civilizations. And unlike the American desert's Pueblo region, the Sahara's era of lush forests and gushing springs predated the earliest humans by millennia. By all accounts, the Sahara was sparsely settled and rarely travelled until around the third century A.D., when the fantastic usefulness of domesticated camels was discovered.

In general, the cultures of the people of this region have experienced only broad, slow changes. What you would have seen five or ten 10 centuries ago is about what you would see today: a highly specialized group of tribes slowly shifting back and forth between settled gardening and nomadic livestock production.

The proportion of nomads actually increased from the 10th century onward for a number of reasons. First, the nomads had such a healthy lifestyle that they tended to multiply a little faster than the villagers and peasants. Secondly, the nomads' freedom of movement sometimes granted them a superior economic position.

But the tribes who tilled the soil actually produced more money than did the travelling camel breeders. They were also seen as more amenable to governance. The nomad pastoralists who raised, grazed, bred, and sold livestock often found themselves under the suspicious gaze of officials, who considered them ungovernable, untaxable, and given to volatility. Thus the nomads who would avoid assimilation were of necessity protective of their traditional way of life and sought a degree of cultural stasis in the midst of myriad outside influences.

Among the nomadic tribes it was generally the men who dealt with the world outside the tent.



There was a perceived need to shelter and protect the women, believed to be the vulnerable members of the family or kin group, but also a desire to protect the patriarch's reputation from the potential for "unseemly" behaviour among his womenfolk.

We can thus assume that the men knew more about the changing world beyond the desert than did the women, or at least that they had a more first-hand view of it. By extension, the lot fell to the women to preserve and pass on the tribe's cultural values and practices.

West African folklore tells of a nomadic spirit, a trickster who stands at the crossroads between humanity and the gods, and who guards and guides the path of change.

What often happens in such patriarchal social structures is that a feminine subculture develops, one less influenced by innovations in neighbouring or visiting cultures and thus imbued with the power to evolve remarkable qualities in the course of time. European fairy tales and rhymes, for example, though most often spread by travelling tailors, were developed and disseminated by women in kitchens and nurseries.

In repressive societies, such feminine subcultures can become ribald, audacious, and rife with double entendre. This is often tolerated because it's assumed that it's all right if it's only women sharing this stuff. Obscene songs, for example, may even be seen as having a social purpose, acting as a kind of safety valve for the more libidinous aspects of the creative imagination or as a means of passing on sexual knowledge to young brides.

Of course in the hill country blues in Mississippi—an American musical tradition strongly influenced by desert music—ribaldry, double entendre, and an intensely atavistic view of erotic love are common features. Although it's tempting to assume that the men did it first and the women simply followed, we need to consider the possibility that the eroticism of the blues began in the cooking tents of the desert nomads of the Sahara.

This region was constantly traversed by different nomadic tribes as well as visited by tourists, explorers, and countless Muslim pilgrims crossing the desert on their way to Mecca. The nomadic tribes naturally would have been shaped, inspired, and altered by their contacts with other peoples. But the unique conditions of nomad life also imposed an attachment to old ways and a preservation of the primitive despite the maelstrom of conflicting cultural influences.

And thus the world of the Saharan nomad formed a kind of stasis region between the ancient and the modern: a "crossroads", if you will.

To be continued . . .





*From
Where
I Sit*

Hazel Anaka

When All You Have is Hope

When you are involved in public service and attending conferences, you are required to sit through speeches, presentations, and the opinions of panels of experts. Paradoxically, this is both one of the best and one of the worst things that could happen to a person. If the topic is boring and/or the delivery excruciating, the time seems interminable. Luckily, Roy is getting exposed to some good, well-delivered speeches.

One such speech was given by Frank O'Dea, best known as the co-founder of Second Cup. Roy was sufficiently impressed that he bought me a copy of O'Dea's 2007 memoir, *When All You Have is Hope*. The fact it was inscribed to me, thanking me for being a great support to Roy, was a bit puzzling. But puzzlement gave way to poignancy as I read about the lack of acceptance and closeness in O'Dea's own nuclear family life.

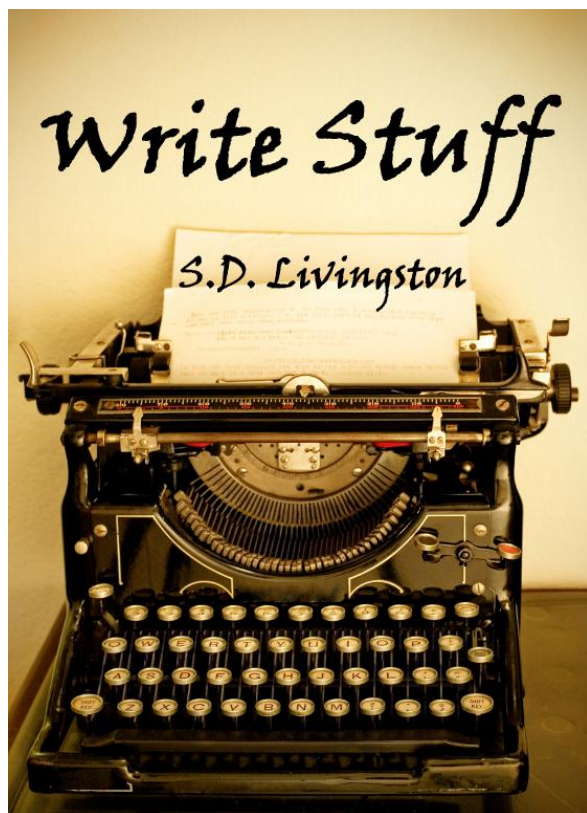
While O'Dea takes great pains not to lay blame on anyone or anything for the 13 years he spent in alcoholic oblivion and despair, I can't imagine growing up in a home with a cold, absent mother and a distant father who loved him but was incapable of showing it. The guilt and shame of being raped at age 13 by a much older woman was reinforced by the brutality of the subsequent rapes by a cop and two priests. In an ultimate act of hurtful betrayal, his father simply shook his head and left the room when Frank told him about the attack by the policeman. Eventually the family ran out of patience for Frank's destructive lifestyle and its negative effects, and he was asked to leave.

This was the 1960s. Alone, homeless and panhandling for a bottle of wine and a flophouse, Frank's life was tragic. The shame, oblivion, danger, and despair would continue until December 23, 1971. Though he never says so explicitly, I believe AA was his salvation. I believe he is simply honouring the promise of anonymity. He knew that "If I don't change, I will die like this."

The remainder of the book is spent detailing the successes he had after his decision to quit drinking. It is difficult to imagine or remember life before brewed coffee, baristas, and the whole culture of coffee shops. Almost by accident, Frank and partner Tom Culligan opened their first coffee kiosk, a mere 45 square metres, in an Ontario mall in August, 1975. The rest, as they say, is history.

Despite the book's being sprinkled with stories about politicians, the rich and famous, great wealth, philanthropy, good deeds, and an Order of Canada, there is no sense of Frank setting himself above anyone else. If anything, he acknowledges that in many ways, he's still the young man who suffered so.

I loved this book because of the look back into history, the story of triumph over defeat, and the message that Hope, Vision, and Action are all we really need, from where I sit.



E-Class is in Session

When it comes to reading, the lowly textbook doesn't get much love. Except for the occasional art history tome full of gorgeous images, textbooks tend to be the dull cousins in the literary family: reliable, but not much fun. Yet just like the bestselling paperbacks on your store shelves, textbooks aren't immune to the digital wave sweeping the publishing world—and those changes could alter everything from course tuition to the way you learn.

General opinion holds that academia has been slow to adopt digital books. But that tide is turning swiftly, as this *Citizen's Voice* [article](#) notes. According to Tom Stanton, director of communications at McGraw-Hill Education, the company plans a digital version of all its textbooks in the future.

They aren't the only ones embracing digital. The Toronto District School Board is [phasing out paper textbooks](#). The board is "looking at moving to digital textbooks by 2015 in order to cut costs and to provide better information." The State of California has similar plans, hoping to "develop

digital open-source textbooks for high school math and science classes where students can sign them out for free at public schools across the state."

But while digital might work fine for popular fiction and magazines, textbooks bring a different set of challenges.

For instance, ask students how they use their textbooks and you'll get a range of preferences more nuanced than stellar spectra. To highlight or not to highlight. To resell or keep forever (you never know when you'll want to look up French absolutism again). Yet the trend, especially in post-secondary texts, is to access books through a subscription. When the subscription expires, so does your access to the material—and, unless you've saved them separately, all your highlights and notations too.

Many digital texts also limit the number of times a student can print them, so it's not the perfect solution for disorganized students who are constantly misplacing course materials.

On the financial front, it might be tempting to assume that digital texts will mean lower tuition. After all, e-books don't carry the same production costs as paper, so schools are sure to pass the savings on to students. Right? Well, maybe. Chris Besse, a senior vice-president with Nelson, recently [explained](#) to the *Toronto Sun* that "only about 10% of the cost is actually paper, print and bind of the book. About 90% of the cost is developing the content, so there's not a lot of saving there."

Still, those are mere quibbles compared to the bigger question



about e-books and education: does digital reading change the way we learn? Are we simply changing the form of textbooks—or are those textbooks changing us?

Students read traditional paper textbooks in a fairly linear fashion. One chapter follows another, with material building on what came before. Digital textbooks offer a different learning experience. Hyperlinks can lead students from text to graphics and even to online material in a non-linear way. For younger students especially, the implications are enormous.

“Digital reading alters the way we decode and comprehend text and, potentially, short-circuits young readers’ ability to think deeply . . . this doesn’t bode well for the critical thinking required in higher education.”

Maryanne Wolf, the John DiBiaggio Professor in the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development at Tufts University, explained some of those concerns in a *New York Times* Room for Debate segment. Wolf reminds us of “what Proust called the heart of reading—when we go beyond the author’s wisdom and enter the beginning of our own.”

The full segment is a valuable read, but the essence is that digital reading alters the way we decode and comprehend text and, potentially, short-circuits young readers’ ability to read deeply. As Wolf puts it, “children’s nascent sense of probity and introspection are no match for a medium that creates a sense of urgency to get to the

next piece of stimulating information.”

That doesn’t bode well for the critical thinking required in higher education. It could also alter the course syllabi of the future. As today’s kindergarten students hit university, how radically will course content—and textbooks—need to evolve to meet their learning style?

For academic publishers, the digital medium could also mean a complete overhaul in the way textbooks and other materials are designed. It might even necessitate different versions of textbooks, with digital copies assembled differently than their linear-centric paper versions. Cost would surely be a factor, potentially driving prices even higher than in the text-only world.

The news isn’t all bad. Like any other technological shift, there are pros and cons. Digital textbooks are light, portable, and getting easier to access every day, whether on laptops, smart phones, tablets, or dedicated readers. Financial barriers are falling too. Some schools are paving the way by providing in-class e-readers to students, and the *American Library Association* reports that 85 per cent of libraries now provide free Wi-Fi.

Only time will tell whether digital textbooks offer the same advantages as their paper counterparts—and whether bulky student backpacks are consigned to the history books.



CHRONICLES OF CRUISCIN LAN

Wanda Waterman St. Louis

**DID YOU KNOW? The Einztein Social Learning Network**

Social networking is often scorned as a time-waster, but the Einztein Social Learning Network is a different matter. Whether you're looking to pick up basic Mandarin, refresh yourself on broadcast journalism norms, or supplement your accounting class, Einztein will help you pursue your formal and informal educational goals.

The resource, freely available online, offers a portal to "explore free online courses" from institutions like Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Michigan. The user-friendly platform also links to shorter resources, such as the BBC's news writing style reference guide.

Course topics range from natural resources governance to literature to calculus, and offerings are "delivered by any combination of text, audio, video and other media." Although the courses are diverse in subject and manner of delivery, all have been carefully chosen by Einztein's editorial department "based on their completeness and quality."

But the best is yet to come. Currently, Einztein is developing tools to expand the "social" aspect of its learning network. It hopes to roll out the updates soon.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: Veggies on Top

City development often means “progress,” sure, but it can also mean loss of green space. You can decry the cement and the lack of natural habitat. You can mourn the dearth of growing things. Or, if you’re Montreal’s Mohamed Hage, you can turn the grey into green—both vegetables *and* dollars.

As *The Globe and Mail* [reports](#), Hage has founded “what he calls the world’s first commercial rooftop greenhouse” in the middle of the city’s concrete jungle. The greenhouse, located on top of an office tower, is growing vegetables like tomatoes and cucumbers, and “aims to provide 1,000 families with weekly veggie baskets year-round.”

The idea takes the best of the local food movement—a movement which fosters awareness of the importance of eating foods produced locally—and makes it practical for city dwellers. Vegetables will be grown in the city, so they’ll be fresh, only picked “when ripe,” one

of the team members told reporters. Plus the minimal resources used (for example, little transportation) and the lack of pesticides make it an environmentally friendly option.

Although the space is limited, the yield is high since the “facility employs controlled-environment agriculture, which allows the operation to yield as much produce as a conventional farm 10 times its size.”

And despite the cost of the produce, the idea is catching on. After all, as Hage told reporters, “The best advantage that we can bring to the consumer is the fresh produce all year round.”

Around the World: Here Comes the Sun (Through My Window)

Few things are more welcome than the spring sunshine, especially after a winter that always feels as though it lasted far longer than it should have. Of course with the clearer skies come a host of cautions to ensure healthy skin despite our fun in the sun.

We know we need to apply sunscreen before heading outdoors. But, as *The New York Times* [reports](#), it’s also important to apply it before getting behind the wheel.

A recent study showed that “people who had spent the most time driving a car each week were more likely to develop skin cancers on the left sides of their bodies and faces.” And malignant melanoma tumours, the study found, were much more likely to occur on the left side rather than the right.

While front windshields are usually made of laminated glass that blocks UV light, “side windows are typically made of non-laminated glass, which filters out UVB light . . . but not UVA rays.” And don’t be fooled by your lack of sunburn: UVB rays, which are blocked, frequently cause the appearance of sunburn, so it’s difficult to see the harm being inflicted by the unfiltered UVA rays, “which penetrate the skin more deeply.”

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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