

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 19 Iss 16 2011-04-29

Brain of a Bully

Just a thought?

Funny Business

Craig takes on America

Read Aloud

Authors and actors

*Plus:
In Conversation With,
From Where I Sit,
and much more!*



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**The Voice
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www.voicemagazine.org

1213, 10011 109th
Street NW
Edmonton AB
T5J 3S8

800.788.9041 ext. 2905

Email
voice@voicemagazine.org

Publisher
AU Students' Union

Editor-In-Chief
Tamra Ross

Managing Editor
Christina M. Frey

Regular Contributors
Hazel Anaka
Katie D'Souza
S.D. Livingston
Wanda Waterman St.
Louis

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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.



EDITORIAL

Christina M. Frey



Judge Me Tender

Ever felt like you were living a lie? Washington, US teen Gaby Rodriguez did it for six months during her senior year at her small-town high school. And while most people lie to fit in or to hide an embarrassing secret, the straight-A student turned the concept on its head.

As *Good Morning America* reported, Gaby faked a pregnancy, enduring six months of whispers and stares in order to perform a social experiment. The truth was known by only a handful of people (including her mother, principal, and boyfriend—but not her friends or even all of her siblings). When Gaby presented her project, she made the big reveal: she wasn't pregnant, and her growing "baby bump" was a cleverly placed pillow. And then she showed the students a compilation of words, names, and attitudes that had filtered back to her over the duration of her "pregnancy."

What a great—and telling—experiment. We've heard before how cruel kids can be, and most of us can remember some time during elementary or high school when we were on the receiving end of the taunts and laughter. Nowadays, the ease of communication—think Facebook and smart phone video cameras—make it more of a problem than ever.

Bullying among kids and teens is a particularly hot-button issue right now, as the media has picked up on several tragic stories of youth suicides. But even under the radar, incessant teasing, labelling, and a host of cruel pranks continue to destroy hope in the tormented.

Pundits, parents, educators, and social commentators point fingers, attempting to assign blame for the spate of incredible nastiness that's appearing among kids, teens, and even college students. Yet, as they so often do, they usually miss the wider picture.

Yes, modern technology makes it easier and faster to humiliate victims. Yes, there are poor examples in the media. Yes, some kids really do get away with anything. But the problem is deeper, because the *attitudes* that destroy victims' lives aren't exclusive to a crowd of mean girls or pushy jocks. In fact, they're shared by many, many adults, even the most open-minded and outwardly tactful.

We just know how to hide it better.

It's ironic that in this so-called age of tolerance we make so many subtle character judgments that most of the time we don't even realize what we're doing. We think we're socially correct, but frequently anybody whose choices and values are different from our own is fair game for snap judgments and ill thoughts.

*Even the most
socially-minded
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We just know how
to hide it better.*

Celebrities whose big mouths and hurtful statements have gotten them into trouble are frowned upon by society. And rightly so, but at the same time, I can't help wondering whether we're being a bit hypocritical. After all, are we truly any better?

Have you ever looked at the shopping cart being pushed by an obese guy, and raised an eyebrow at the chips, pop, chicken wings, and other unhealthy fare? And then thought, *Geeze, no wonder he's so fat. Maybe he should lay off the doughnuts for a while.*

Or looked askance at the family with seven kids: *Irresponsible parents, haven't they ever heard of birth control?*

What about when a kid gets in trouble with the law? *Where are the mom or dad? Lousy parents, should be punished themselves if they can't they supervise their 13-year-old better.*

We do it every day, constantly, the mental filth filtering through our brains as fast as we interact with people. *What an incompetent moron! My boss is such a pompous windbag. That slowpoke is way too old to be driving.* Without knowing the whole story. Without understanding the person or the decision. With only our remote insight into the situation, we feel we know more, see more, are infinitely superior.

Let's not even get started on the political and ideological sphere. They say that politics brings out the worst in an individual, but I don't think it only applies to politicians. The fact is, political, religious, and ideological values are often very closely held and very personal to us. Anyone who disagrees, even indirectly and by virtue of supporting a different ideology, we perceive as a threat. It's increasingly apparent as the elections approach how easy it is to slip into venomous thoughts when our only disagreement with the holders is their beliefs or values.

So let's take a step back and examine our own bullying tendencies. Maybe that man is making unhealthy eating choices. Maybe those parents should have restricted their teen's media consumption. Maybe there was no valid reason for their choices. Maybe they messed up, made mistakes. Haven't we? The mark of a mature mind is to turn away from gossip—even when the nonverbal duality of our brains is the only negative conversation going on.



Most of us adults have outgrown the need to verbally taunt another's perceived inferiority. And fortunately, most of us will never go on drunken rants that betray our inner bully. But it doesn't mean that it's not there, and it doesn't mean that it's not damaging.

We are all connected. And even if we don't say something mean, or give a rude stare, or act aloof, mental bullying chips away little by little at the bonds which unite humankind—those bonds which some say separate us from animals. Our unkind thoughts destroy us a little inside each time. And the more we think of people as lesser, beneath us, the more we become just a little less human.

IN CONVERSATION WITH . . .

Wanda Waterman St. Louis

Amanda Martinez, Part II

Amanda Martinez is a Canadian singer-songwriter of jazz and Latin music. In 2010 she performed in Johannesburg, South Africa as part of the FIFA Fan Fests during the World Cup celebrations. She recently released her second album, *Amor*, produced by George Seara (who also has worked with Holly Cole, Herbie Hancock, and Sting). *Amor* reached number one on the iTunes World Music Chart in 2009 and was one of the Top 10 albums on the iTunes World Music Charts for 2010. (See the Voice review of her two albums [here](#)



and Part I of this interview [here](#).)

Amanda recently took the time to talk with Wanda Waterman St. Louis about what happens when you decide to give your all to the work you love.

Creative Conditions

I need to have a sense of calm around me. Especially when I'm writing—things have to be in their place because I need to know that I have a clear space and that I'm not worrying about other things that need to be taken care of.

Part of my brain is . . . worrying about following up and looking after the day-to-day business of what I do . . . then I feel like *OK, that's under control, I can now take myself away from the computer and just focus on the creative side*. So it's kind of ironic because I can't totally forget about the business, but you kind of have to when you're in the moment. I have to focus on what I'm doing creatively.

Recently when I was away, I found that a change in environment was really helpful. So I've been going once a month to New York, and I find that really energizes me and gives me a different perspective. In a familiar place, you tend not to even remember crossing the street because you do it so often. In a new space, I'm very much alive and in the moment.

"I've found that a change in environment [is] really helpful . . . that really energizes me and gives me a different perspective . . . In a new space, I'm very much alive and in the moment."

I find that when I'm in a different place, everything's new and you're kind of looking at life through different eyes. I feel more alive when I'm discovering a new city. So on the one hand I like to have my routine and tak[e] care of things so I have this space to create, and on the other hand I like to change my environment for fresh ideas, even for just a different way of looking at things.

In New York I'm also studying with someone who's always pushing me in a new direction: to work on my piano playing skills from a Latin standpoint, not classical.

I find that I have these serendipitous moments there where I meet people in the strangest ways, and it always leads me to a new opportunity for my music career. It's always an adventure.

A Sense of Trust

I know it sounds kind of hokey, but I do have a sense of trust in what the universe brings for us when we're willing to make a commitment to doing what we do. If I had never decided to give myself wholeheartedly to music I would never have had the opportunities I have today.

Only when I decided I was going to make it happen no matter what, did so many doors open for me that I could never have planned. I subscribe to following your heart and doing the work. Then if you put in your work . . . the outside forces or people [or] opportunities will come, as long as you're willing to go as far as you can on your own.

The resources and support will be there for you.



Above: Amanda Martinez. Photo: Marina Dempster.



DID YOU KNOW? Bilingual Chat

Learning a new language can be difficult, particularly if you're in a distance learning setting or picking it up on your own. Even the best self-study programs lack the immersion aspect and the opportunity to casually converse in that language, thus practicing speaking and listening fluency.

Bilingual Chat, a brand new initiative, is a social network created to fulfill that need. Accounts are free, and users can join forums, log into open chat rooms, and make one-on-one connections for additional conversational practice. You can also use a basic e-translator or set up instant messaging or video chats.

Not learning a language, but interested in international cultures? Bilingual Chat also allows you to "help others with their English, learn about foreign countries, and get some valuable travel advice."

Whether you're a student struggling through first-year German, a manager looking to upgrade her French skills, or a traveller seeking to learn the basics of Japanese language and culture, Bilingual Chat may help you further your linguistic goals.



From Where I Sit

Hazel Anaka

Nine Things We Should All Know by Now

Many people invest years of blood, sweat, and tears and thousands of dollars into earning a degree, a diploma, or a certificate. In a credential-crazed world, that's not just smart; it's often a matter of survival. No one would dispute the long-term payoff in terms of earning potential, quality of life, personal satisfaction, and career trajectory.

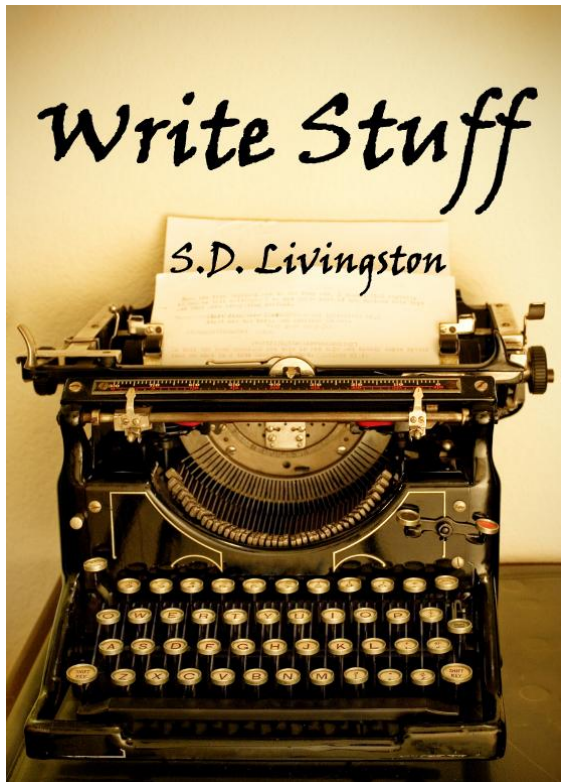
But many of us have gone on to earn an even more useful designation. It may not come with a parchment or cap and gown. It almost never includes convocation, speeches, or a big party. There are no acronyms to identify the program of study.

Indeed, quite often any sign of this accomplishment is invisible to others. Unfortunately, sometimes it's marked by a battered bank account, a broken heart, or a loss of face or friendship. The School of Hard Knocks doesn't issue paperwork. Instead, its students might hunker down to lick their wounds or go to some silent place to try to absorb the lesson. Because surely, the lesson is the message of this real life school.

So what should we all know by now? Read on for just some of what I've learned first-hand or by osmosis:

- 1) Don't chintz out on cheap paint. For a great, long-lasting finish that reflects the hours of effort, go with a brand name like Benjamin Moore.
- 2) It's not what you get paid per hour; it's what you're expected to do in that hour. What's the use of earning a big wage if it is soul-destroying work that is slowly eroding your health or sending you home an angry, frustrated mess each day? Don't hang in there for five years, three months, and two more weeks just for the pension. If it's hell and if you've long since stopped caring or contributing, get out now.
- 3) Wear sunscreen and don't smoke.
- 4) Vote. Better still, run for public office.
- 5) Surround yourself with beauty and don't assume it can only be found in your next must-have purchase. It may be no further than the bird feeder, the fresh green of unfurling buds, or the sweet skin of a baby.
- 6) Know in your gut that, in the end, it's family that matters. Invest time and love in nurturing those relationships first, because those closest, dearest people will choose your nursing home. (Kidding.)
- 7) Get thee to the nearest little kid and watch him learn, play, sleep, and grow. There is nothing more soul-nourishing, fun, and faith-building than being reminded of the miracle of little ones on the grow. Grady has added years to my life.
- 8) Sometimes, when nothing else works, remember that this, too, shall pass.
- 9) Never buy shoes that hurt.

If you can shortcut your learning curve by observation and focused listening, you really are a smart cookie, from where I sit.



Silent Treatment

It takes a strong will—or a contrary nature—not to get caught up in the gloom and doom surrounding the written word these days. Libraries are closing, publishers are struggling, and major booksellers are shuttering their stores (though not before some employees get the last laugh). Still, as new forces sweep away the old, there's one literary tradition that can't disappear soon enough for me: the author reading.

I know, I know. Author readings are a time-honoured part of the literary scene, a way for the solitary writer to break out of seclusion and rejoin the world. A way to connect, really *connect*, with her readers. But before you clutch your copy of *Mockingjay* and keel over, let me explain.

Writers need a lot of skills. They need a firm grasp of storytelling, good grammar, imagination, and an eye for detail and continuity. Not to mention the ability to tell “its” from “it’s” (you’d be surprised how rare that particular party trick’s getting).

A talented writer brings all those goods, and more, to the table, whether he spins popular sci-fi tales or esoteric works nominated for the Man Booker Prize. On paper, writers grab our attention and transport us to other worlds. Unfortunately, it’s a rare author indeed who can bring that skill to a live performance—and that’s exactly what a reading is.

If you think about it, we enjoy dozens of spoken performances every day. Radio DJs, TV shows, comedians: whether they’re giving a speech or a traffic update, good performers engage their audience. They work on things like breath and timing and cadence and pitch. The best ones master their craft the same way the best writers focus on plot and character. They quickly learn not to wear washed-out gray sweaters or shuffle through their notes while the audience fidgets.

But sitting hunched over the keyboard or scribbling away in the back of a coffee shop doesn’t leave much time for learning how to become a performer. It involves a completely different set of skills. Which is why, all too often, author readings turn into the equivalent of the dreaded PowerPoint presentation: dull beyond belief and guaranteed to have even the most ardent fan eyeing the clock and wondering how long before the coffee and cookies are trotted out.

It’s no accident that this *Onion* [article](#) rings so painfully true. “You just have to remind yourself that you’re not going to be able to pack the room with half a dozen fans every time,” notes the ever-hopeful (and entirely fictional) author.

When the magic happens, when that happy confluence of writing and performing occurs, it’s a joy. Witness this sample of Stephen Fry [reading](#) *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* (the tiny green sample button is



below the cover). Douglas Adams wrote the book, but Fry's a prolific scribbler in his own right, and his delivery here proves it's possible to do both well.

In general, I think the slow demise of author readings bodes just as well for writers as it does for readers. We don't expect playwrights to bring their own words to life on stage. They leave the performance of those words to the professionals—the actors. Who knows? Book readings might suddenly take a popular upswing if novelists did the same.

I can just see it now: Joanna Lumley reading *The Handmaid's Tale*. Now *that's* a performance I'd pay to see.

CLICK OF THE WRIST: Nessie

Nearly 80 years ago, legend came to life once more with the first modern “sighting” of the Loch Ness Monster, colloquially known as “Nessie.” Is the beast real? A centuries-old hoax? The product of our overactive imaginations (and our longing for a lost age)? Time will tell. In the meantime, these links offer a tour of the history, controversy, and legend.

Photo Hoax

What about that infamous 1934 photo of Nessie's head and neck stretching out of the water? It took over 60 years for the shot to be definitively revealed as a hoax. This article explains the motivation (believe it or not, revenge!) for the set-up.

Just the Facts

A 2003 expedition by BBC filmmakers swept the depths of Loch Ness with sonar, but didn't uncover anything even suggesting Nessie's existence. This BBC summary article concludes that the absence of any findings was proof that the legend was the product of our imaginations.

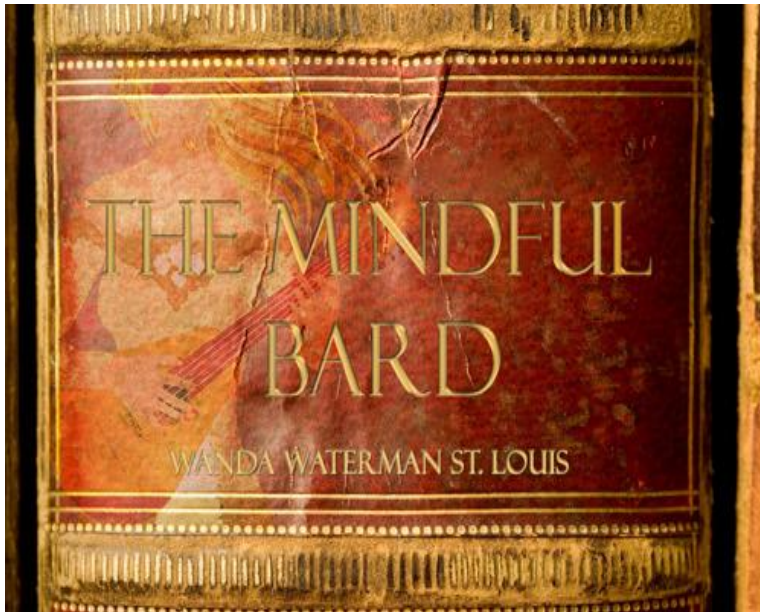
In Their Own Words

Science hasn't yet uncovered proof of Nessie's existence, but many people firmly believe in her presence in the lake—based on their own experience. From PBS NOVA, these audio interviews with alleged sighters—locals, some of whom have lived close to the lake for years—are intriguing and entertaining.

The Loch

Monster or no monster, Loch Ness is an extremely interesting place from a geographical perspective. How could an inland lake, created 10,000 years ago, even possibly harbour an ancient creature? This *National Geographic* video explains more.





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

DVD: *It's Kind of a Funny Story* (Focus Features 2010)

Genre: Drama, Comedy

The Movie about America That America Just Didn't Get

Craig is a suicidal teenager. He is crushed under absurdly unrealistic societal and familial expectations, and he isn't even given the resources with which to meet them. Worst of all, he doesn't yet know what he wants, which makes him a sitting duck for an environment

eager to dictate his desires and aspirations.

Suicidal teenagers and the conditions which create them are a recurring theme in history, the social sciences, and literature. Romeo and Juliet, for example, were a couple of high-strung kids who chose radical solutions to a problem which was in fact quite ordinary, but which to them seemed gargantuan.

This is what teenagers do. Teenagers are children who don't yet know how to keep their crazy new hormones from bouncing them off the walls of life. So in addition to driving too fast and experimenting with drugs and unprotected sex, they consider suicide with alacrity as common as it is grievous. An emergency room doctor who had seen her share of teenage suicide attempts once remarked to me that adolescents simply do not know what they're doing when they attempt suicide. They think they're just going to sleep for a while.

Research has shown that many of the martyrs of the Middle Ages were simply fervent young people who had nothing to live for, who had been humiliated, and who saw no respectable way out of their hell of earth except being burned at the stake for a profession of heresy. Now, as then, it is social conditions that are partly responsible for creating an individual's suicidal ideation.

At first we see Craig's depression as simply the symptom of his sick family. But it gets bigger. Eventually it's clear that the conditions leading to Craig's depression were constructed by the country he lives in, a country that mostly produces films designed to cater to the lowest common denominator.

"The attitudes portrayed in the film toward mental illness—responses ranging from horror to fascination to outright callous rejection—mirror America's myopia regarding its own decadence."

This film? As cinematic art, it's up there. The cinematography, casting, acting, and direction are superb, creating an aesthetic oasis within which to study the myriad symbolic touches that make *It's Kind of a Funny Story* a significant contribution to this year's movies (regardless of what the critics are saying now).

Take, for instance, Craig's ridiculous fantasies of future glory—boardroom and hall scenes in which he is lauded for his brilliance. These are scenes he plays over and over in his head as if they represent some self-induced anecdote for the soulless competitiveness of his society.

Or look at the name of Craig's high school—Executive Pre-Professional—a mythical bastion summing up the goals of both the American free market and the industrial-military complex combined.

There's even a telling comment on foreign policy. Craig has an Egyptian roommate, Muqtada, who just won't get out of bed, a metaphor for the paralysis with which US foreign policy has gripped some nations.

Even Craig's fantasies of future glory underline the flaws in his country. In one he's addressing a boardroom: "Not even Adam Smith could have foreseen the inequities of modern capitalism!"

These inequities are further spotlighted in the sour grapes of the have-nots who inhabit the psych ward, some of whom express a stern rejection of the values of consumerism even as they bemoan their lack of resources.

The attitudes portrayed in the film toward mental illness—responses ranging from horror to fascination to outright callous rejection—mirror America's myopia regarding its own decadence. Reagan's decision to abandon many mental patients to the streets was not a symptom of forward-thinking free market idealism. Rather, it showed a cultural decline similar to that described by Edith Wharton of ancient Greece during its decadent period, when human compassion was no longer considered essential to the good of the country.

What points the way out is the amazing virtuosity of the American imagination, a thing which has never been accounted for but which has wowed the world for decades. In the ward, Craig discovers that he's not a bad artist. Since part of his hero's journey seems to be to find some means of reconciliation with Muqtada, he wisely chooses music, an Egyptian song called "Habina," a paean in which the lover confesses "*Love us because we love you. I've been secretly in love with you for so long.*" It's the engendering power of creativity that points the way out of his sickness.

Another saving grace is the fact of living in a universe where somehow, maybe even miraculously, things sometimes work together for good in spite of us. As one psychotic patient in the ward repeats ad infinitum, "It'll come for ya!"

It's Kind of a Funny Story manifests eight of the Mindful Bard's criteria worth seeing: 1) it is authentic, original, and delightful; 2) it stimulates my mind; 3) it provides respite from a sick and cruel world, a respite enabling me to renew myself for a return to mindful artistic endeavour; 4) it is about attainment of the true self; 5) it inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation; 6) it displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering; 7) it makes me want to be a better artist; and 8) it gives me tools enabling me to respond with compassion and efficacy to the suffering around me.



INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: North Poll

Think you know Canada's North? If so, you may be in for a surprise. Although the North accounts for much of Canada's geographical area, and although modern technology has bridged the distance and remoteness that previously cut it off from the rest of Canada, misconceptions abound among southern Canadians.

As the CBC [reports](#), Yellowknife-based magazine *Up Here* recently conducted a poll to determine the extent of this knowledge—or lack of it. The results: sadly, many “Canadians are clueless when it comes to” understanding the vast northern expanse of the country.

For example, one “third of Canadians didn't know Nunavut was the newest territory,” with equal numbers unaware that “the word Inuit [had] replaced Eskimo.” Incredibly, “74 per cent of Canadians think that penguins might live in the Arctic.”

Why the knowledge gaps? It could be ignorance, but one Yellowknife resident has a different theory. Brent Reaney formerly lived in southern Ontario but has lived in both Nunavut and the NWT and now resides in Yellowknife. As he told reporters, “To understand this place, I think you do have to experience it, and only so many people have experienced it.”

Around the World: Wand of Darkness

Move over, Harry Potter: science is catching up, as new technological advances bring us closer than ever to the wizarding world. The latest research offers the possibility of an electric wand which extinguishes fire with only a flick of the wrist—no incantation required.

As *National Geographic's* Daily News site [reports](#), recent research has “has shown that electric fields can snuff out fires too.”

In experiments, the high-voltage wand put out 20-inch flames “almost instantly.” But there's science behind the magic: “the wand in the experiments essentially uses electricity to push the flame away from the burner, “detaching it from the fuel source, so it goes out.”

The technology is believed to be safe, with electrical frequencies, voltage, and current insufficient to “create health issues in a healthy person.”

Additionally, the wand systems would “reduc[e] water damage” to buildings and structures and, importantly, minimize the “environmental threats posed by fire retardants.”

In the future, scientists plan to investigate the possibility of “suppressing fires both farther away and wider in scope by experimenting with the shape of the electrode and altering the current, frequency, and voltage involved.”

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.



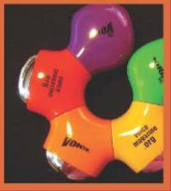



For any course that requires charts that cannot be easily created in Word or Excel, this should be a real time saver and make it easier to submit all portions of an assignment by email.

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.

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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

1213, 10011 109th Street NW, Edmonton, AB T5J 3S8 - Ph: 800.788.9041 ext. 2905 - Fax: 780.497.7003 attn: Voice Editor

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Editor-In-Chief Tamra Ross
Managing Editor Christina M. Frey

Regular Columnists Hazel Anaka, Katie D'Souza, S.D. Livingston, Wanda Waterman
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