

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 23 Issue 25 2015-06-19

Minds we Meet

Interviewing Natalie

Insolvency, Incompetency

And Other Indiscretions

My Bookshelf, My E-Reader

Which Will Last?

Plus:

Convocation Inspiration

The Ultimate Upload

and much more!



CONTENTS

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

Features

| | |
|--|---|
| Minds We Meet: <i>Interviewing Natalie Allport</i> | 4 |
| Insolvency, Incompetence, and Other Indiscretions..... | 7 |

Articles

| | |
|--|----|
| Editorial: <i>On the Bubble</i> | 3 |
| Why My Bookshelf will Outlive my E-Reader..... | 10 |
| There Is No Impossible For Us..... | 13 |
| A Remarkable Woman..... | 15 |
| Convocation Inspiration | 22 |

Columns

| | |
|--|----|
| Primal Numbers: <i>The Ultimate Upload</i> | 12 |
| Music Review: <i>Fever</i> | 17 |
| Maghreb Voices: <i>The Magical Mezwed Tour</i> | 18 |
| The Mindful Bard: <i>Relics</i> | 19 |
| The Study Dude: <i>The Writer's Diet</i> | 23 |
| From Where I Sit: <i>Some Action Verbs</i> | 25 |
| Dear Barb: <i>They're Not Me</i> | 26 |

News and Events

| | |
|---------------------|----|
| Student Sizzle..... | 21 |
| AUSU Update..... | 28 |

Comic

| | |
|--|----|
| Chazz Bravado: <i>Body Image</i> | 27 |
|--|----|

***The Voice
Magazine***

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The Voice is published
every Friday in HTML and
PDF format.

For weekly email
reminders as each issue is
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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

On The Bubble

Karl Low



I was going to write an article discussing the report, recently accepted by the AU Board of Governors, that explains how AU is in danger of being insolvent in only two years, but Bethany Tynes sent in an article this week that did a much better job of looking at the issue than I was doing. In it she takes a look at the recent history and how the issues the report brings forward are not new, and raises questions as to whether the conclusions the report comes to are ones that will truly address the problem AU is having.

The university has been quick to put out releases trying to quell the fears of students that they might not be able to finish their degrees, and I tend to land on the University's side on this matter. Having to close a university that's accredited in both the United States and Canada would be a major blow to the prestige of any government, and especially to an NDP government as they typically portray themselves as those who prioritize education and health-care for the people over business. So the chance of Athabasca University having to close operations under the new Alberta NDP government seems extremely unlikely. Something will be figured out.

But this doesn't mean that there's nothing to worry about. How this has played out in the past, and how it is continuing to play out, so far, is that AU seeks further "cost efficiencies", that is, ways that it can get away with spending less on the service it is providing. Unfortunately for AU, they are doing this in an environment where there is growing competition for distance education. So while I don't see a near, or even far, future, where a student will be unable to take their degree from Athabasca, I'm, more and more, seeing a future where students simply don't want to. And that would be huge shame to me. If for nothing else than it would end the AU tradition of Convocation that quite a few students, whether actually at the ceremony or just watching from home, have enjoyed and taken inspiration from. So much so, that this week we have two articles on the recent convocation ceremonies, and one more on deck for next week. Obviously, convocation is something that has inspired writers for *The Voice Magazine*, so I'm hoping that their stories will inspire you.

If not, we also have a new article from Barbara Godin, where she takes us to The Inn in Windsor, and introduces us to a remarkable woman, who has shaped the lives of many disadvantaged youth in the area. We also take a look at how you soon might be able to upload your brain to the internet, and the inevitable downside that comes along with being able to download the internet into your brain.

But first, we have our feature article with potential Olympian, Natalie Allport. Natalie is a student who's taking full advantage of AU to get her business degree while getting on with the business of slopestyle snowboarding. We also need more students who are willing to be interviewed and share their stories with their fellow AU students. Those who do will get some nifty new Voice Swag, and will be among the first to see what the new Voice logo will look like when we do our full update later on this year.

Until then, enjoy the read!

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karl". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the letter 'l'.

MINDS WE MEET



Natalie Allport is an AU student living in Ottawa. She is a competitive Slopestyle Snowboarder with her eyes on the 2018 Olympics. You can check out her website at www.natalieallport.ca. Natalie is in AU's Business Management program.

There was still snow on the slopes in April when Natalie was interviewed via e-mail by The Voice Magazine about school, snowboarding, and warm summer nights.

Whereabouts do you live? And where are you from originally?

I live in Ottawa, Canada and was raised here although I was born on the west coast, in Vancouver.

For those of us who live far from the slopes, please describe what Slopestyle Snowboarding is.

Slopestyle snowboarding is a new Olympic sport that made its debut at the 2014 Olympics. It involves doing your best tricks on a course of jumps and rail/sliding obstacles. It's a judged sport, where you are judged based on difficulty, style, execution, amplitude, and creativity.

How did you get into snowboarding?

I was always an athlete in a multitude of sports, mainly hockey, but looking to try out a new sport I traded in my rental skis for a board one day at a local mountain. I was awful at first, but I think that's why I enjoyed it so much—it was a challenge.

Describe what your training regimen entails.

A typical day in the season involves on-snow training—working on jump and rail tricks, a couple hours in the gym afterward, followed by mobility and recovery.

Is the 2018 Olympics your ultimate snowboarding goal, or do you have aspirations after that?

I'm still trying to figure that all out! 2018 is still a long way away.

How do you balance training, studies, and work?

It definitely is hard, sometimes, but creating a schedule well in advance is key. Before the season begins I usually have a good idea of what my training and competing schedule will be, and then I can create a schedule for completing my studies and work around that guideline. Lots of things come up like hospital trips, emergencies,

and last minute training activities, which can throw off the schedule, but I'm lucky in that I've learnt how to get work done fairly quickly when I need to.

Which program are you in at AU? Describe the path that led you there.

I'm in the Business Management program at AU. I actually went to college first, and then transferred my courses over a year ago. I decided to go to college before university because I knew they would be more lenient with my competition schedule. However, when I discovered Athabasca U I realized I could get a university-level education and actually complete more courses while competing than I was previously doing at college. The plan either way was to go to university afterward, so this made the process that much faster.

What do you do like to do in your leisure time?

I like cooking and watching movies! By cooking, I mean eating.

What happens after you finish your education?

After I finish my education I hope I will have the means and direction to be able to pursue a path in entrepreneurship. Since I was a little kid I've always had a pretty good idea of what I want to do in business, but I'm still figuring out the specifics.

Who in your life had the greatest influence on your desire to learn?

I think my dad probably had the greatest influence from a business perspective. He recognized my interest in business from a young age and created family projects and businesses for us to work on so that I could learn about business and would take an interest in pursuing it.

What famous person, past or present, would you like to have lunch with, and why?

That's a tough one! I would nerd out over having lunch with Oprah or Warren Buffet as I'm sure they could teach me so much about business and would have some great connections! On the other hand I have a slight obsession with Lana Del Rey so I would love to talk with her.

Describe your experience with online learning so far.

It's been good! Online school has taught me a lot about time management and has allowed me to study while I also compete. You really have to be self-motivated, which mostly I am, however, like everyone, I have my days where I really can't bring myself to focus, especially after a long day on the mountain.

Have you had a time when you wavered about your education?

There have been many times when I've wondered if I could handle managing my education and training. In fact, I took one winter off from my studies. I think there are days when everyone wavers about all the big things in their lives but ultimately you decide what's important and what's worth your time and I'm glad I decided education was one of those things!

What's your most memorable AU course so far, and why?

Actually so far I've been taking my least favourite subjects to get them out of the way before I take subjects that are more in my direction of interest. I'm excited to take some elective courses—they'll be more fun.

Describe the proudest moment (or greatest accomplishment) in your life.

I think athletically it was probably winning my first contest, which, unknowingly, kick-started this crazy journey I've had with snowboarding. Personally, though, no one single moment really stands out, but lately I've been

proud of the big and small decisions I've made on a daily basis which leave me with a feeling of accomplishment for what I've done so far in my life.

Have you given up anything to go to AU? Was it worth it?

I've given up a lot of free time. When training on the mountain and in the gym there is not much time for anything else. Some nights it's a real rush to cook dinner and have time to work on school. I think it's definitely worth it though as I'm able to work toward what I want to do and to keep learning while also pursuing sport.

If you were the new president of AU, what would be your first project?

Making the school better known to athletes like myself! I wish I had known about AU right out of high school when I first began my snowboard career. I think it would be great for AU to partner with national sports organizations and teams to encourage more athletes to pursue education.

Describe your favourite sound.

The ocean is hard to beat, but I think a warm summer night at my cottage with crickets and frogs is a great sound.

If you were trapped on a tropical island, what 3 things would you bring?

Sunscreen, water, and a surfboard (it could double as a life raft.)

Describe one thing that distinguishes you from most other people.

It sounds funny, but probably my crazy belief that nothing is impossible. I think a lot of people are held back by the thought that they can't do something or they simply weren't meant to be something, but I strongly believe that if you set your mind to something you can accomplish it no matter what it is. It doesn't matter what your circumstances are, if you want to be a pro athlete, you can do it. A Fortune 500 CEO, you can do it. It all depends on how much you want to work for it and how far you are willing to go.

What is the most valuable lesson you have learned in life?

The most valuable lesson I have learned is that you need to make decisions for yourself. You can't make decisions based on what others think you want, or what others think you should do. If you want to do something, go for it.

What do you think about e-texts?

I think they're great! I love a good hardcover novel, but carrying around a textbook in my already overweight snowboard travel bag is not very convenient.

How do you find communications with your course tutors?

I find they actually reach out to me more often than I reach out to them, which is great because I always know they will be there when I need them.

Where has life taken you so far?

I've been very lucky to have many amazing experiences through both snowboarding and sport and through personal travels. I've been to Junior World Championships twice, once in Spain and once in Turkey, and both made for unforgettable trips. I've been to some cute mountain towns and some not so great places as well. I went to New York City last fall and totally fell in love with the city.

What (non-AU) book are you reading now?

I've been reading *Start With Why* by Simon Sinek for a while now. I keep stopping it, starting other books, and then coming back to it.

One final snowboard question: What's the last thought in your head before you launch yourself down the slope?

"Take a deep breath, have fun, you got this." I try to repeat that in my head every time I drop in.



Insolvency, Incompetence, and Other Indiscretions **On the Report from the Presidential Task force on Sustainability**

Bethany Tynes



I remember when the hiring freeze first started. The funding model wasn't sufficient for AU to support all of its students. Positions started to be left vacant. And then came the massive provincial budget cuts. Layoffs, buyouts, and the elimination of vacant positions. Less staff at the university to assist students. Remaining staff beginning to burn out as they tried to help students succeed despite the voids in staffing support. Then more budget cuts.

It's a grim picture, and for the past few years has caused rumours about Athabasca University's demise to circle like vultures. University officials like then-Board Chair Barry Walker assured the media in 2012 that

AU was "in a very sound financial position," but as AUSU president at the time, I noted that these comments did not reflect the reality we were seeing. University assets have continued to be depleted, and executive salaries have skyrocketed. Faculty and staff email lists saw the circulation of graphics like the one on the next page illustrating facts from some of the university's financial statements.

Recently, the Alberta Government asked the university to produce a long-term sustainability plan. Interim President Peter MacKinnon chaired a task force to develop this report, which was presented to, and unanimously accepted, by the Board of Governors at their May meeting.

The Task Force report is 45 pages long, and on page 4, declares that "based on our most reliable assumptions, we project the likelihood of insolvency in 2016/2017." Later, the report reiterates "the status quo is not an option. Without major remediation, our university faces the prospect of insolvency within two years." Not that anyone should be alarmed right up front, but, you know, if nothing changes, the university will be broke and go under in two years.

"Position vacancies, workforce depletion, and other austerity measures," introduced by the university over the past few years may have helped to "produce a surplus in an annual operating budget, but they are not

contributors to financial stability over a period of years." So eliminating 113 positions in 2013 might not have helped contribute to the long-term health of the university? How shocking.

"Our present circumstances and condition did not coalesce overnight," the report continues, offering several factors which might have contributed to the current state of the university: "changes in enrollment demographics, operation funding, tuition policy..." and the list goes on. One of the key difficulties the report notes in depth, however, is funding: "from supporting about 80 percent of the operating budget 30 years ago, the government grant supports about 30 percent of our operating expenses today." Another key difficulty noted by the report is staff salaries: "the sustainability of Athabasca University has been compromised by terms and conditions of employment" negotiated with AU faculty and staff.

The report does not at any point mention, however, the management of the university or its funds: one might think that this could be relevant, particularly given the university's history of making illegal donations to political parties, and the previous motion made by faculty and staff unions to express their concern about the university's leadership, and the highly inaccurate assurances made by the Board Chair that the university was in "a very sound financial position."

In any case, however, the report lays out four main options for the university moving forward. They are as follows:

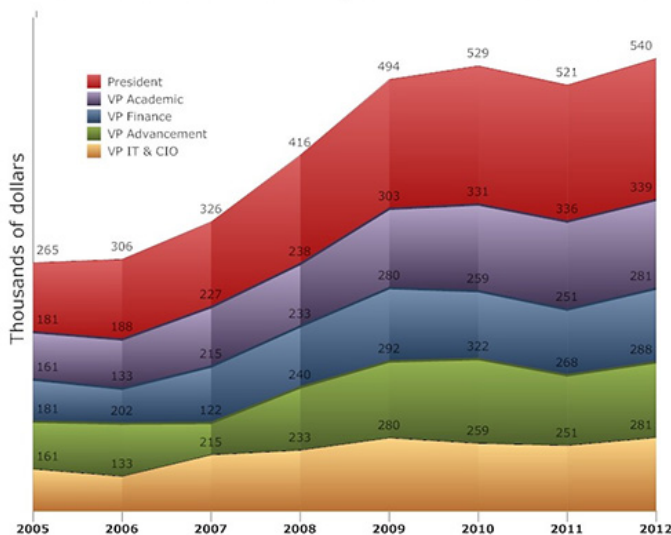
1) "A refocusing of the university" to "serve Albertans first"

Yes, the first major option put forward by the report is to limit access to AU courses by out of province students. In fairness to the university, this does have some very straightforward financial logic behind it: AU does not receive any government funding assistance for students who do not physically reside in Alberta. The report very bluntly notes that "AU has not benefitted" from out of province students, so "one option might be for us to serve only, or primarily, students physically resident in Alberta." Students, ask not what your university can do to educate you, but what you can do to bring more dollars into the university.

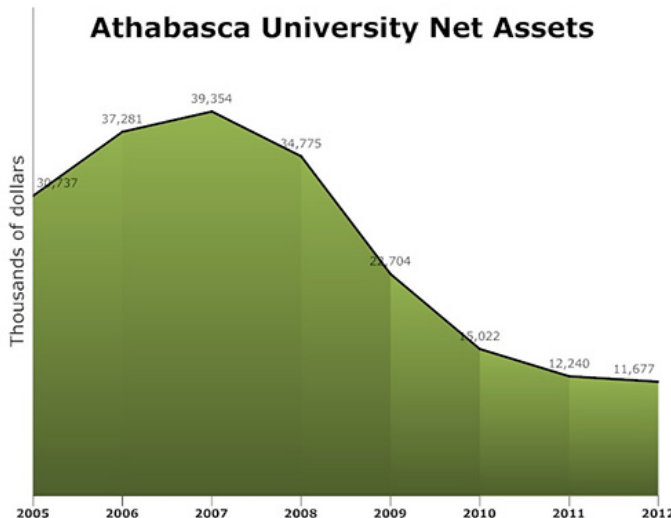
However, the report also outlines a number of reasons why this option would have negative consequences for the university: without out of province students, "we could not maintain current levels of programs." There would be "fewer faculty, tutors, professional and support staff, with negative consequences for students and the student experience."

2) "An emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness in course delivery and business practices"

Athabasca University Executive Salaries



Athabasca University Net Assets



All figures taken from AU Annual Reports, found at <http://www.athabascau.ca/aboutau/strategic.php>

Ensuring that the university is being efficient seems like a very good, straightforward idea. But after years of trimming spending at the university, it seems like it would take some very significant changes to create enough additional efficiency to move the university from insolvency in two years to a healthy financial state. The report suggests that "each teaching program" be evaluated "from the standpoint of costs."

Apparently the cheapest programs to run are those that the university will strive to save, regardless of whether or not they are necessarily the best academically? I can only assume that this is another sign that the university administration has not given up on the idea of rolling a so-called "call centre" model across the holdout Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, despite concerns raised by students and academics about this change.

3) Federation with another Campus Alberta Institution

A merger has also been long-rumoured. The report suggests that "terms and conditions" of a merger would have to be "negotiated between the two institutions and with the Government of Alberta," but comments that because "geographical proximity is desirable," an Edmonton institution would be "an obvious possibility."

While it is alarming to think of AU being subsumed into another university, this could be among the least-bad options put forward in the report, if key aspects of AU's course and program delivery could be maintained through negotiations. AU students currently have unparalleled flexibility in start dates and program completion timelines, as well as the option to extend courses when life intervenes in their study schedules. These options need to be protected. AU's open admissions policy would also have to be retained. And most importantly, I would hope that AU students would always continue to receive personal academic assistance from qualified scholars (our tutors and faculty).

4) Affiliations with other institutions and organizations in Campus Alberta and beyond

This option is a delightful diversion from the rest of the report, noting that if AU could effectively fill gaps within Alberta and Canada's online learning framework, "it could attract important affiliations with organizations such as Google, Mozilla, and Microsoft." Because if we pray hard enough, the Great Google Gods will not only help us with research, they'll also fund our university. I want to believe this dream. But you know that saying about things being too good to be true? It seems like this could be one of them.

The Presidential Task Force report notes that the above options will be evaluated according to four assessment criteria: "strategic (e.g. fit with mission); financial (operating and capital costs); compatibility with stakeholder expectations, and efficacy of implementation (time and likelihood of success)."

Interim Board Chair Marg Mrazek told Convocation attendees that AU would "be working very closely with government to further look at the options set out in this report," as the "options that are set out in the report need to be acted upon now if long-term sustainability is to be achieved."

In response to the report, AU's three employee unions have issued a joint press release stating that "the government needs to examine the financial management and decisions made in recent years." President MacKinnon, meanwhile, has offered assurances to the media that despite talk of insolvency, "Athabasca University is not going to close down."

MacKinnon also issued a release of his own citing inaccuracies in the union pressers and noting his disappointment with the timing of the release, saying "the unions chose to divert the spotlight away from our students on the very day set aside to mark their success." ***

The report is, on the whole, a dark document forged from dark times at Athabasca University. It is not entirely without merit, though. Part of the report's conclusion notes that "Alberta needs Athabasca University ... We can help our province by persevering in our present mission and growing our potential to offer post-secondary opportunities to those who might otherwise be obliged to forego them."

AU was created by the Province of Alberta to help provide exceptional quality post-secondary education to all people, regardless of their respective (social, cultural, economic, educational, and what-have-you) backgrounds. This is a mission that, despite chronic government underfunding and questionable management, AU continues to achieve. Alberta's new NDP government (led by former AU tutor Rachel Notley) would do well to consider the benefits that AU provides to Alberta, and fund the university accordingly.

*** As an AU student and alumna, I have been privileged to receive excellent support from AU's academic community. Faculty, tutors, and support staff at Athabasca University consistently demonstrated concern for my well-being as a student. They helped me reach my goals, and they celebrated my successes with me. If these academics and staff feel that an issue is important enough to voice at convocation, I am interested in hearing their concerns. I do not feel that this diminishes my achievements as a graduate.

I was, however, moderately revolted by the plea for cash included in interim board chair Margaret Mrazek's opening remarks to graduands at Convocation: "I would like to encourage you to give back to your university... We will be tapping on your shoulders in the future and asking you to work with us to ensure that others have the same opportunity that you have had." Dr. MacKinnon's release recognizes that some grads "overcome incredible obstacles to walk across the stage and receive their degrees." Is it, then, truly necessary to turn around and ask these same grads to hand over more cash?

Bethany Tynes completed her MA in Integrated Studies through AU, and is a Canadian politics junkie



Why My Bookshelf will Outlive my E-Reader

Barbara Lehtiniemi



One of the best gifts I ever received was a Kobo Touch e-reader. I'm a book nut: I'm frequently reading, and I often have multiple books on the go at once. The e-reader makes it possible to read more often and in more locations than I can with traditional books. Previously, even a short weekend away meant packing an assortment of books, adding weight and taking space. Now, one slim e-reader—about the size of a *Reader's Digest* magazine and weighing less than a pound—provides me with all the reading I need on my travels.

The e-reader has been easy to incorporate into my reading life. Not only does it travel well, but

it fits in my purse. I take it with me most places to make sure I can put unexpected slack time to good use. But I still read hard-copy books and expect that I always will (including textbooks, which I will *only* read in hard copy.) While e-books have some advantages, they also have a downside. Here's a look at what I like and dislike about using an e-reader.

The upside of e-readers:

- Portability. My Kobo e-reader is my library-to-go. Right now I've got 200 books loaded that can go anywhere at any time. A battery charge lasts two weeks or more, so one book-sized e-reader covers all my vacation reading needs.
- Convenience. A five-minute bank line-up or a 30-minute wait for an appointment instantly turns into valuable reading time.
- Definitions at my fingertips. Whenever I come across a word I don't recognize or only have a vague sense of its meaning, I just touch it and a short dictionary definition pops up. This is so addicting, I sometimes try to do this with real books.
- Free books available. Project Gutenberg and other online outlets provide access to thousands of free books. Many classics are now in the public domain and can be legally downloaded for free. Additionally, I can borrow books from my local public library, although their selection is limited.

The downside of e-readers:

- Poor graphics. Any book with illustrations, charts, or any other graphic doesn't translate appealingly to my Kobo Touch (although this may not be the case with other e-reader types.) I select only those e-books with no graphics or limited ones. Definitely I would never try to read an e-text on my Kobo!
- Awkward navigation. With a real book, I often flip to other pages to refer to the table of contents, the bibliography, or the author bio. This can be done on an e-reader, too, but the process is cumbersome. I feel restricted to reading each page in the order presented.
- Inhibits sharing. I'm not even sure if it's legal to share a purchased e-book, but I do know it's impossible to share with someone who doesn't have an e-reader. None of the three people I regularly loan books to, or borrow books from, have a Kobo, so any e-book I buy or borrow is for my use only.
- Increasing prices. When you consider what goes into the manufacture and shipping of paper books, you'd think that the equivalent e-books would be significantly cheaper. E-books were inexpensive for a time, but now I often find that the e-book is priced higher than the paper book. (Take note, AU, this will happen to e-texts, too!) I always compare, and usually limit my e-book uploads to free or heavily discounted titles.

Do I love my e-reader? Absolutely! Do I see it as a replacement for paper books? Never! Despite using an e-reader for almost three years, I still read most books in their traditional format. My Kobo e-reader is generally reserved for reading on the go, which means lighter reading such as fiction and books with snack-sized chapters.

I can't imagine e-books ever overtaking paper books. Part of the appeal of books is their physical presence; not just the feel of the book in hand, but the ability to pass it into another's hands and make or reinforce a human connection. The environmentalist in me understands that e-books have a smaller footprint than paper books, but I counter that by speculating that the hundreds of books lining our walls provide a degree of insulation and reduce our energy consumption.

My bookshelves will outlive my e-reader. When I die, my books will find new homes on other shelves. My e-reader, if it lasts that long, will probably find a different type of home: at the bottom of an e-waste bin.

Barbara Lehtiniemi is a writer, photographer, and AU student. She lives on a windswept rural road in Eastern Ontario

Primal Numbers

The Ultimate Upload

S.D. Livingston



Predictions are fun, especially when they have to do with cool, futuristic science. Will cars ever fly? Will we colonize another planet? Still, there's one forecast that seems a little disturbing—letting the cloud upload data directly from our brains. One tech futurist claims it will be reality in the next 20 years. But is that a future we really want to see?

The prediction comes from Ray Kurzweil, Google's director of engineering. As the [CBC reports](#), Kurzweil thinks that "the human brain will soon merge with computer networks to form a hybrid artificial intelligence."

That's not just some vague, sci-fi daydream. Kurzweil has a solid track record when it comes to envisioning the tech future. In 1999 he made 147 predictions, including eyeglasses with computer displays. Ten years later, 78 per cent of those predictions had turned out to be "entirely correct."

But will it really be possible to link our brains to computers? From a technical standpoint, yes. Your neocortex, the centre of your brain's higher thought functions, contains some 300 million "pattern processors." Science is getting closer to replicating those processors. And that means artificial intelligence could, one day soon, outdo the speed and complexity of our own brains.

With that kind of nimble, complex computing power in the cloud, why not harness it directly to our brains?

It sounds like an incredible vision. A chip or some other tiny implant that lets us communicate seamlessly with an endless trove of knowledge in the cloud. Forget about Googling stuff on your phone. Just imagine what you want to know and the answer will be downloaded to your brain. Textbooks could be a thing of the past. So could education as we know it. Why spend hours studying when your brain has 24/7 access to anything you could possibly want to know?

Yet we can't forget the other side of that wondrous equation. The same cloud that gives you access is also tapping your own brain. The flow of data would go two ways. Not only could we pull data in, we could also, as the same article notes, "upload our own brains to the cloud."

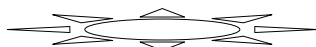
And that's a worrying thought. If you think it's hard to figure out the privacy settings on Facebook and Google, what do you suppose your options will be when the circuitry in your brain is sending data to a server somewhere halfway around the world? There might be a switch to turn it off. Or perhaps you can opt out—though the Terms and Conditions could make that unexpectedly tricky.

The hybrid mind meld also raises questions about transparency. Would the government or corporation that owns your chip (or the data servers) be able to access your brain without your permission? Could you suddenly find yourself the recipient of political ads that come bundled with, say, the research for your history essay?

It's easy to say that you wouldn't take part. That you'd quite happily live your life without connecting your brain to the cloud. But if this tech really does become reality, your refusal to take part could put you at a disadvantage. Just think of how quickly the Internet became the main access point for all sorts of government services.

Without doubt, science and technology have made our lives immeasurably better. And they'll continue to do so, in ways we can't even imagine yet. But if there's a point that we say stop, a line we refuse to cross, surely this qualifies. Because no one should have access to the ultimate upload of your brain.

S.D. Livingston is the author and creator of the Madeline M. Mystery Series for kids, as well as several books for older readers. Visit her [website](#) for information on her writing.



There Is No Impossible For Us Grads Celebrate AU Convocation, 2015

Bethany Tynes



It takes about an hour and a half to make the drive from Edmonton (the nearest major city and airport) up to Athabasca. The scenery isn't much to look at—mostly two-lane highway with grassy shoulders reaching out to mixed wood forests. But as you pass through the town of Athabasca, you begin to see AU banners. And as you drive up the hill that is University Drive, they begin to offer congratulations from every street light post. By the time you reach the Athabasca Regional Multiplex, you know you're in for an exciting experience.

Convocation 2015 took place June 11-13th, with one ceremony taking place each day. Each year, Thursday's ceremony is for grads from the Faculty

of Humanities and Social Sciences and Science and the Faculty of Science and Technology; Friday is for those from the Faculty of Health Disciplines, and Saturday is for those from the Faculty of Business.

The day begins with a hot breakfast and gowning for the ceremony participants. The buildings on campus are open, allowing students to wander at will, and see some of the departments they've communicated with through the course of their studies—like the very real, physical library, from whence all our little packages of books come! Soon, though, it is time for guests to find their seats, and grads to arrange themselves by program.

For the past few years, ASANI, an Aboriginal women's trio, has lead the ceremony's opening procession with drumming and song. When the last of the grads and platform party reaches their places on the stage, ASANI moves into *Oh Canada*, performing the anthem in English, French, and Cree. Their rendition is both beautiful and unsettling (you can listen on [their website](#) to see what I mean).

Marg Mrazek, Interim Chair of Athabasca University's Board of Governors, offers the first welcome to graduands each day. Most of Mrazek's comments sound like they're taken directly from AU marketing materials: "for 45 years, Athabasca University has been and continues to be an open university; a virtual community dedicated to making it possible for anyone to pursue a postsecondary education... Athabasca University is recognized as a worldwide leader in online, open, postsecondary education." She also took time, however, to congratulate the recipients of this year's "1,469 undergraduate and graduate degrees," noting that "the success of our students is the success of our university."

Interim President Peter MacKinnon thanks grads for making the trip to attend Convocation, and stressed the importance of the occasion: "Of the hundreds of convocations, and there have been hundreds that I have attended over my career, this one stands out. It stands out because of its uniqueness, because it focuses upon you, our students and our graduates, and especially your stories."

And then the graduands cross the stage, becoming graduates. Doctoral programs first, then Masters, then Bachelors. When RSVPing to attend Convocation, grads fill out a questionnaire about themselves and their time studying at AU, and from these answers, brief biographies are composed and read as each grad crosses the stage. It gives grads and guests (not only family and friends, but also members of the AU faculty, staff, and administration) a chance to get to know the grads, and hear about their struggles and successes.

On Thursday, MAIS graduate (and previous AU BA grad) Desi Valentine gave a particularly stirring address to graduates, discussing the skepticism with which others had viewed her studies at Athabasca University, and how some in her community felt that postsecondary would not be possible for her. Valentine stood before the crowd as recipient of the Governor General's Gold Medal, an award for outstanding scholastic achievement. "We are the graduates of Athabasca University," Valentine said. "There is no impossible for us!" The crowd immediately rose to their feet in a standing ovation.

Perhaps my favourite part of Convocation has always been the recessional. Piper Ted Soltys leads the way (because no ceremony is official or complete without bagpipes), and the AU faculty and tutors in attendance follow first. As they near the auditorium doors, the two columns of academics separate along each edge of the carpeted path. The grads then leave the stage and, after they walk down the centre aisle among the guests in attendance, they pass through between the rows of academics, who enthusiastically clap, cheer, and congratulate them.

And then more food! A huge thanks to Athabasca's two student unions for supplying lunch after the convocation ceremony this year. Thursday's lasagna was particularly delicious and plentiful (last year's Convocation lunch, which was not nearly as awesome, so huzzah for great food!). Lunch also gives grads the opportunity to mingle with other members of the AU community (fellow grads, academics, support staff, and even members of the executive and board) before they begin their respective trips home.

Convocation 2015 was a time to celebrate the successes of AU students. Those who have completed their degrees can serve as an inspiration to all the students still chipping away at courses and wondering if they'll ever finish. As Desi Valentine noted, there may be challenges along our educational paths, but we are AU students, and "there is no impossible for us!"

Bethany Tynes completed her MA in Integrated Studies through AU, and is a Canadian politics junkie

A Remarkable Woman

Barb Godin



When asked the question, "Who is your most memorable person?" most people struggle to find an answer. But for me, it's easy. Irene Loraine Girard is the most memorable person in my life.

I first met Irene when I was sixteen years old and my social worker brought me to The Inn of Windsor. Bishop Carter of Windsor provided the seed money for Irene to fulfill her dream of opening a group home that would assist in equipping young girls with the skills needed to survive on their own. After much searching, Irene found and purchased the perfect house, which she was able to turn into a home for girls aged 16 to 25 and called it "The Inn". At the time, I had family problems and was unable to remain at home, so my social worker, Carol, thought

The Inn would be a possible solution. It being a new group home for disadvantaged girls, Carol made an appointment for us.

Irene was a gregarious woman of large stature with short, dark hair. She was cordial and welcoming to Carol and me and gave us a complete tour of this majestic, old home. She also went over some of the rules and guidelines for living at The Inn. I was anxious to move in; I knew this was exactly where I wanted to be now. I was the first girl to take up residence, although others quickly followed. The Inn quickly filled up and Irene's dream was on its way to becoming a reality for hundreds of disadvantaged girls in the Windsor area.

The Inn became my home for the next year. I immediately loved Irene. Even though she was a bit stern, I found her caring and loving. Initially, Irene was spending almost twenty-four hours a day at the Inn and sleeping in her office. Occasionally she would have a volunteer come in and she'd be able to go home for the night. In time, she was able to secure funding to hire a full time housemother. This meant she was able to go home every night and even have the occasional weekend off, but she remained totally devoted to "her girls," and we all felt it. Not to say there wasn't conflict. When you have ten teenage girls there is undoubtedly going to be conflict. But she handled this conflict with her calm and firm disposition. She had been raised herself in a loving, but strict, Catholic family, which ultimately provided her with many skills that she was able to apply with "her girls" at The Inn.

During my year at The Inn, Irene helped me to learn ways to overcome many childhood issues. She also supported me in obtaining employment, as I did not want to return to school. Eventually, I was able to move into my own apartment and support myself. The Inn supplied me with many of the household items I needed to set up my apartment. Even after moving out, Irene frequently invited me for a home cooked meal. Through the years I got married, moved away from Windsor, had a family, and, through it all, Irene continued to be a part of my life.

She never married. She felt The Inn was her calling in life—that there was no room for anything or anyone else. When she retired, after twenty-five years at The Inn, I was invited to her retirement celebration as a special guest, and given a bursary to help pay for expenses, as I was completing my degree.

Irene often introduced me as her daughter and would introduce my daughter as her granddaughter. She was always there for me and I never felt it was a job for her, but rather that she genuinely cared about me and how I was doing in life. After her retirement, Irene continued to keep in touch with the girls at The Inn. Our visits often included Irene bringing me up to date on some of the latest situations there. A story she often repeated was when she was bitten on the arm by a girl in a fit of rage that she was trying to restrain. Often she would go into extensive detail about a particular girl, never revealing her name, of course, and I enjoyed hearing these stories as I shared her interest in psychology and social work.

But as time went on, I became more involved in my own life and we seemed to drift apart. I hadn't spoken to Irene for quite a while when I received a very disturbing letter from her. She had cancer. The letter assured me she was okay and not in any pain, however, I called her right away.

"Irene, I just got your letter. Are you okay?"

"Oh, yes, I shouldn't have told you in a letter, I should have called you, sorry Barb."

"What type of cancer do you have?"

"Multiple Myeloma. It is in my bones. I had a lot of pain but just thought it was my arthritis."

"Are you going to be okay?"

"I'm starting treatment next week."

"I'd like to come down and see you."

"Why don't you wait for a bit until we see how the treatment goes? I will let you know."

I waited for a couple of weeks, then called again. Irene was home, and yes, I should come and visit. I was shocked when I saw her, she was no longer the strong, vibrant woman I knew. She was weak, frail, and had lost a ton of weight. I told her she looked good, as we often do when there is nothing else to say. We hugged, although she was apprehensive, as she explained her bones were very weak and painful. In fact, she told me she broke her shoulder while holding on to the counter to help get up from the toilet. I was unable to say anything; the words became lodged in my throat. As usual, Irene was able to read my face.

"That was a while ago, I'm better now, you are such a worry wart, Barb."

We said our goodbyes after a brief visit, and I promised to call her the next week. But, before I could, I received a call from Irene's niece. Irene was in the hospital, in a coma, with only days left. I told Paula I would be there soon. "No, Barb, she wouldn't know you were here, it's a long way to come. Irene knows how you feel about her. I will keep you updated." I reluctantly agreed to stay put. Two days later Irene was gone. I was heartbroken. The person who was always there for me and showed me how to overcome so much was now gone from this world.

I took time to grieve this special woman, but ultimately I knew Irene expected me to carry on and live the life that was given to me.

The Inn of Windsor continues to fulfill Irene's dream and assist many young women to reach their potential and be all they can be.

Barbara Godin is a graduate of AU and writes the "Dear Barb" column. She lives in London, Ontario with her husband, two dogs, and one cat.

Music Review

Fever

Samantha Stevens



Album: *Fever*

Band: Canopy Climbers

Technology is perhaps one of humankind's crowning achievements. It allows me to introduce you to new music every week, I am able to connect with different types of musicians all over the planet, and, most importantly for AU students, technology has allowed us to learn and grow as people. For the members of Canopy Climbers, technology brought them together, and allows them to create.

Formed in 2009, Alan Benjamin Thomas, Cory Allen Nelson, and Nathan Andrew Miller live in three different cities and write and record their music via the internet. Appropriately, their sound is reminiscent of the 80s electronic sound with a modern spin. There are tinges of pop and electronica that combine with artistically

created dance music, and the odd disco-inspired beat.

Fever is the trio's latest EP and is now available on iTunes. The sound is, with the exception of one song, lively, and the lyrics are romantic, perfectly timed for summer. Canopy Climbers can be best compared to The Killers, Of Monsters and Men, Passion Pit, and Young the Giant.

There are six tracks on this EP, giving you a good sample of the Canopy Climbers sound. However, when I checked out some of their previous albums, I preferred their past work to the songs on this EP. I found the music on *Fever* to be heavily influenced by a more mainstream pop sound. Compared to the music I listened to on their album *Distances*, their latest EP is very different. But different is not necessarily a bad thing. As bands grow and evolve it is only natural for their sound to change. I just happen to prefer their earlier work.

There are two tracks on *Fever* that I do like though. "Mistake" leads off with a soft and heart-wrenching piano solo. The sound is basic, with simple vocals, piano, and guitar, and the added electronic effects later on in the song elevate the sound beyond a melancholy love song to a beautiful melody that speaks of a forlorn love.

The second song that I like on this EP is "Number". The song is very electronic and reminds me of the music from Passion Pit. The singing is more pop-influenced than I typically prefer and the lyrics are somewhat repetitive, but the electronic music and surprising guitar solo make the song for me.

Overall, *Fever* is a good EP to add to your summer playlist if you are a fan of electronic pop music. Although I still prefer their previous albums and EP, the songs on *Fever* have their charms, and I'm looking forward to Canopy Climbers' next release.

Samantha Stevens is an aspiring writer who loves combining her love for literature with photography, painting, music, and all creative pursuits.

Maghreb Voices

The Magical Mezwed Tour

Wanda Waterman



The group Golden Mezwed, accompanying Tunisian singer Samir Loussif. Faddour sits to Loussif's right, playing the bindir.

"I think we're about ready for a new feeling to enter music. I think that will come from the Arabic world."

- Brian Eno

Meeting Gaddour

We encounter Abdelkadr, who is better known as Gaddour, at our local café, where we often see him coming and going. He's a friendly guy with a lot of friends, but we don't pay him much notice until we see him performing on television with a large *mezwed* ensemble, singing and playing *bindir* (a lap drum like the Irish *bodhrán*, but

played with the hands) and *dharbouka* (an hourglass-shaped drum held between the thighs and also played with the hands).

We're even more intrigued to discover that in 2007 he and his band performed at a music festival in Montreal.

What it is

Mezwed is the most common musical genre in Tunisia, named after its main instrument, a kind of bagpipe made from—you guessed it—the skin of a sheep or a goat. (My Tunisian husband refers to the bagpipe as "the Scottish *mezwed*"). The other defining feature is that *mezwed* music is based on traditional Berber scale rhythms, which Gaddour has clearly mastered.

Like blues, it's a rural, working class mode of music that went viral, was embraced by all classes, and is now popular at weddings and parties. There are special dances that accompany it, even trance-inducing ones. At one wedding I saw a girl dancing in an aggressive side-to-side stomp, whipping piles of black hair in violent circles.

A Relative Musical Purity

Unlike most of the other African musicians I've interviewed, Gaddour hasn't been heavily influenced by American music. His listening is pretty much restricted to *mezwed* and other Arab genres, and it appears that the same can be said for the musicians with whom he performs.

Nonetheless, *mezwed* appears to have always been open to outside influence. Today it contains elements of rap and hip-hop, which isn't surprising when you know that the songs resonate with the same obsessions, the issues uppermost in Tunisian hearts and minds—love, political problems, family relationships, immigration, and racism.

No Conservatory

Gaddour informs us that no formal training exists for *mezwed* musicians; new musicians are taught within families or by friends. He came from a musical family, but being much younger than his siblings, no one really

had the time to teach him, and so his education came from the friends he grew up with, many of whom now perform with him in the grand ensemble, Golden Mezwed.

It's a little surprising to learn that the government does little to support this rich source of social and financial capital, and yet the lack of government support may serve to keep the genre authentic and fearless in condemning injustices.

But it's not that the government has no hand in the music business here. In order to be permitted to perform publicly musicians must visit the Ministry of Culture and pass a musical exam every five years, after which they're awarded, if successful, with a certificate of professionalism that opens the doors of employment.



A Tunisian mezwed

Gaddour has been successful enough to land a lot of local gigs, television appearances, and shows in Europe and North America, where he and Golden Mezwed perform for Tunisian ex-patriates yearning for the sounds of home.

(to be continued)

Wanda also writes the blog *The Mindful Bard*: [*The Care and Feeding of the Creative Self*](#).



The Mindful Bard

Relics

Wanda Waterman



The Vale of Tears, According to a Meditating Astronaut

Album: *Relics*

Artist: Faded Paper Figures

"To become a meditating astronaut, in our view, means using our technological and political tools to come to a more thoughtful, earth-saving perspective, realizing that our place in the cosmos is small, sacred, and fragile."

- Faded Paper Figures

A glance at their day jobs— Heather Alden is a medical doctor, R. John Williams is a Yale English professor, and Kael Alden writes music for film and television—begs the question: How in the world did they manage to reach *those*

career goals and still build a recording career together?

The prospect becomes more conceivable when you remember your own university years. Whatever education

goals you were working toward, those goals and all the subject matter associated with them quickly became so overwhelming and oppressive that the field you loved (and weren't in just for the money), demanded that you find some kind of alternative activity just to maintain your mental health. The greater the pressure, the more your mind sought some kind of creative outlet, the weirder the better.

If my memory serves, the science students sought an outlet in booze and potty humour, the commerce students sought an outlet in booze and shopping, and the liberal arts students sought escape in booze and bad relationships.

But the three members of Faded Paper Figures were wiser than most. They devoted their (no doubt limited) leisure time to constructing a sweet musical package.

This is just the kind of music produced (although not nearly as well crafted) by my friends and me in the dorms. We wrote about relationship problems. We experimented with electronics. We condemned our society's hypocrisies. We created found sounds. And it was incredibly fun and healing.

This may be why Faded Paper Figure albums (*Relics* is their fourth) resonate with smart folks and put the kibosh to any disdain pop fans might harbour toward this band for being so completely *not* from the wrong side of the tracks.

They have a healthy dose of social cynicism ("Who Will Save Us Now") and seem to have been influenced from a number of directions including the history of American folk, rock, and pop. ("Not the End of the World (Even as We know it)" is a lot like Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues.")

Many of these songs are about relationships, keeping it simple by reducing love to its elements, both winsome and harsh.

An interesting and uncommon philosophy is expressed in "On the Line," suggesting that life really has no purpose if we have nothing to lose and no dreams to pursue.

Strangers looking fine,
like nothing's on the line,
but deep, deep down inside
we'd all want to resign
if nothing's on the line,
we wouldn't last the night
if nothing's on the line.

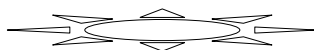
They do love to share common but rarely voiced insights. For example, if you've ever been in a long-term relationship you know you've had this experience (from "SpareMe"):

You said some gorgeous things,
but only half the time,
only half the time.
I lived your gorgeous dream,
for only half a life ...

Relics could be summed up as post-rock with pop nods, but this misses the yumminess. You really do have to hear it.

Relics manifests five of the Mindful Bard's criteria for music well worth a listen.

- It's authentic, original, and delightful;
- It harmoniously unites art with social action, saving me from both seclusion in an ivory tower and slavery to someone else's political agenda;
- It provides respite from a cruel world, a respite enabling me to renew myself for a return to mindful artistic endeavor;
- It displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering;
- It makes me appreciate that life is a complex and rare phenomena, making living a unique opportunity.



Student Sizzle AU's Hot Social Media Topics

Following what's hot around AU's social media sites.

With summer upon us, student activity has slowed down, but here's what's been on the minds of those at AU.



AthaU Facebook Group

Jesse seeks advice on whether to withdraw from a course that she's struggling with. Elizabeth is looking for suggestions on which health-related career to pursue. Janielle needs to move her exam date and wants to know if she'll be charged for the change.

Other posts include procrastination, the ASD office, rumours about AU's solvency, scholarships, watching AU convocation live, and courses EDUC 406, FNCE 300, HRMT 310, and MATH 215.

Twitter

@AthabascaU tweeted: "V. cool. Winners of Schulich Leader Scholarship chosen from a final group of 1,250 nominees from across the country <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/schulich-leader-scholarship-winners-create-network-of-stem-graduates/article24977372/>."

In an earlier tweet, @AthabascaU posted: "Check out #CBCRadio archive of @daybreakalberta and its review of #DebutNovel by AU's @TraceyLindberg #Birdie <http://ow.ly/Ohnl6>."

Finally, live from AU's convocation ceremonies last week, @AthabascaU tweeted: "Standing ovation for Heather Kennedy in her role as the Chair and raising over \$32 million for Athabasca University. #AUGrad15."

Convocation Inspiration

Deanna Roney



Over the weekend I was able to tune into some of the convocation ceremonies, and I found them to be inspiring. I watched as students, who overcame many obstacles, triumphantly walk across the stage to accept their parchment. I saw the pride in their eyes and their smiles; pride from the audience as the occasional "hoot" came through the audio, or a "way to go mom!"

One woman who crossed that stage began her journey in 1979. She strode across the stage with her son (I presume) on her arm. I was in awe of this woman who persevered for years to get her degree. She reminded me that this process is about the journey.

The years of hard work were paying off in this triumphant moment. Watching these graduates and following the "#AUGrad15" on twitter increased my already obsessive desire to be there next year. There is a voice in my head which is reminiscent of skilled curlers hollering, "Hurry! Hurry, hard!" I try to allow this voice to motivate me, to prevent me from procrastinating on an assignment, but, now I will also see the woman who started in 1979; I will use that to balance my life with

my school and not allow that obsessive voice take over my life. She will remind me to step back and enjoy the process.

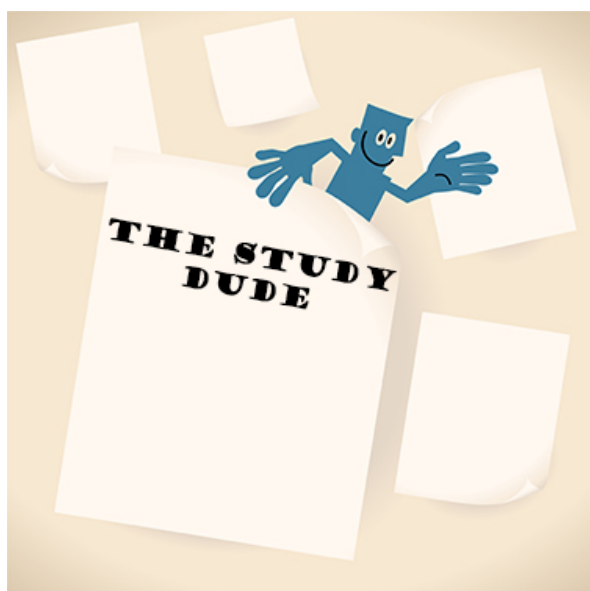
Balancing life and school can be challenging. I think this is especially true in a distance education school. A school where we must be self-disciplined if we are going to succeed. Self-discipline is a close cousin to the workaholic. How many adventures and experiences can we pass up on in our journey to our degree before we start to lose a part of ourselves, or make ourselves crazy?

Watching these graduates taught me a few things: First, I want to be there; Second, even if it takes a little extra time it will make it no less sweet a success; And third, Whether I complete my credits just in time for graduation in 2016, or just too late and wait a year to walk that stage, it is a moment that I refuse to pass up.

Having access to watch a livestream of graduates collect their degree is incredible. I think especially for Athabasca University students who do not have that same sense of community as those at a brick and mortar university. Having access to watch these students come together, meeting each other and professors for the first time, to walk as a community with others in their field, reminds me that I am not alone in my pursuit. I am one among many who are striving for this degree, and while sometimes it may feel like I am alone, I am not. I will walk with others who share my passion and collect degrees that we have all worked so hard for, for so many years...one day.

I want to offer a heartfelt congratulations to all those who graduated this year, who worked tirelessly and sacrificed to be able to achieve what you have, for never giving up and for being an inspiration for all of us still chiselling away at our dreams.

Deanna Roney is an AU student who loves adventure in life and literature



Study Tips from a Semi-Anonymous Friend

How to Write Like a Top Student with Helen Sword

There is nothing more that The Study Dude wants for you than to learn the intricacies of writing like the pros.

Well, in these articles, as The Study Dude, I'll try to give you the study tips you need to help make your learning easier. I'll also give you straight and honest opinions and personal anecdotes—even the embarrassing ones that you wouldn't ever dare read about from any other study tip guru.

This week's article peers into the belly of *The Writer's Diet*, a book written by a well-cited author in the field of academic writing, Dr. Helen Sword. I recently had the privilege of

interviewing Dr. Helen Sword for my podcast. She exceeded all expectations. Furthermore, her book *Writer's Diet* leaves a lasting impression on the reader, altering the reader's style of writing permanently with each flip of the page.

Getting the Verve in Your Verbs

I started reading the dictionary daily to glean verbs with punch. Using verbs to drive your sentences has added benefits: one is that you can more easily paraphrase others' works by making the verbs the key drivers. Another is that by paraphrasing with verbs as your central punch you enliven your writing.

I recently bought a book on how to write book reviews that included a *to be* word as the main verb in every single sentence. I couldn't take the writing seriously. How could a professional book reviewer sidetrack from good writing by piling on passive sentence after passive sentence? The book remains in my Kindle, no longer touched.

Helen Sword provides the best advice anywhere on how to energize your sentences with verbs:

- Reduce your *be* verbs (which includes *is*, *are*, *am*, *being*, *to be*, etc.) to the bare minimum. Use active verbs instead, like punch, push, rise, etc. Active verbs spice up writing with "force and complexity..." (p. 6) and "economy and precision" (p. 6).
- Change passive verbs (be verbs where the actor does not exist in the subject of the sentence) so that the actor is present in the subject. (This changes "The book was read" to "*He* read the book.")
- When you combine a *be* verb with an *-ing* ended verb, the writing stinks of over-processing (for instance *I am reading*). A better strategy involves tightening up the verb combination to one single verb (*I read*), which contains greater flare, strength, and simplicity.

Ridding Your Writing of Nuisance Nouns

Academics love to make their sentences cryptic and far removed from the real world. The stuffier the sentence, the better, it seems. The more you need to read and reread a sentence to glean the meaning, the bigger the victory for the academic. At least, some academics tend to think this way. The really great academics, on the other hand, like to make their writing comprehensible and friendly from the outset. The great academics want you to grasp their meaning, to learn from it, and, if possible, to put it to practical use.

I learned all this from Helen Sword's writings and her interview. To venture further, the following lists Helen's advice on how to avoid nuisance nouns:

- Nouns that take are derived from verbs, adjectives, and other nouns are called nominalizations. Avoid these nuisances in your writing.
- Elaborate on abstract nouns by providing anecdotes, analogies, stories, or examples.
- We can sense concrete nouns through sight (i.e., color), sound, touch, taste, or smell. These types of nouns infuse life into writing. Abstract nouns wilt and weaken writing, as the senses can't perceive them.
- If you use copious abstract nouns, surround them by the presence of active verbs and some great concrete nouns.
- Keep your verbs as verbs. When you alter the verb by making it a noun with a -ment or -tion suffix (accomplish versus accomplishment), the life gets sucked out of the word.

Beware It, This, That, There

Yesterday, I enthusiastically purchased a book called something like *Critical Thinking for Dummies*. The first several pages seemed riddled with *that* phrases. After reading three pages, my confusion overcame me. Too many *that* phrases strung together make for convoluted, painful writing. The points in the introduction seemed simple enough, but the poor level of writing interfered with my comprehension of the material. I slogged through sentence after sentence until, finally, I returned the book for a refund. If only the author had read Helen Sword's *Writer's Diet* and applied the principles, then I certainly would have savoured the book's content.

Funnily, I used to write like the dummies guide author did. My thesis, poorly drafted, strung *it*, *this*, *that*, and *there* phrases in endless chains. Even more funnily, the published authors' works that I read and cited in my thesis were really no better. They stuffed these empty *it* referents and tiresome *that* phrases wherever they could muster the nerve.

Our friend, Helen Sword, set me straight, and she'll do the same for you. Here follows some of Helen's advice on using these empty words:

- *it* and *this* should only appear in your writing when the referent is clear. For instance, *the dog shook the bag by the handle, and it fell to the ground* doesn't clearly indicate what fell to the ground (the dog, the bag, or the handle).
- "As a general rule, avoid using *that* more than once in a single sentence or three times in a paragraph" (p. 49).
- The despicable *it*, *there*, *that*, and *this* words usually string around *be* verbs, draining the vigour out of the writing.
- Avoid *it*, especially when the word is followed by an *is* and a *that*. For instance, "*it is ascertained that...*" sets up a lot of useless words. Just get to the point and your writing will improve in your instructor's eyes.

Exceptions override these rules, of course, and to learn more writing tips, order Dr. Helen Sword's book *The Writer's Diet* from Auckland University Press. I did. The book takes a few days to read and leaves an indelible mark.

So, there's nothing to fear. The Study Dude is determined to make right for you all the wrongs I made in grad school—one A+ at a time.

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Some Action Verbs

Sometimes, life can best be defined by adjectives.

I'm *proud*: that I was able to (successfully) program a seventy-dollar universal remote when the original began spazzing and sputtering during my binge watching of The Mindy Project. I had to keep my thumb on the play button to keep the images from hopping and skipping. This new unit now controls the smart TV, the satellite receiver, and the DVD player. I've come a long way, baby.

I'm *horrified*: that a pair of Canadian siblings from Saskatchewan got their fifteen minutes of fame for being stupid. I can't understand what possesses some people to do mindless/insensitive/criminal things when on vacation, when they drink, when they're young and immature, when they're (fill in with appropriate justification). I don't know which of those factors were at play when these people chose to strip on a Malaysian mountaintop but my, their parents must be proud. And siblings, yet....ewww. That'll be great when a prospective employer Googles a background check.

I'm *heartbroken*: that this week another fallen police officer will be laid to rest in a regimental funeral. Cst. Daniel Woodall was murdered by a man with mental health issues in what is becoming a much too frequent occurrence. My fear is that we will become desensitized by the frequency of these murders. We can't let that happen. We mustn't get used to the images of the women widowed, the children left fatherless, the parents and siblings left bereft. Police officers who daily risk it all to do their jobs deserve our respect and gratitude, even when they come safely home. When they pay the ultimate sacrifice, our gratitude must be made visible. Whether that means signing a book of condolences, tying a blue ribbon, laying a floral tribute, donating to a fund, or thanking a police officer.

I'm *pleasantly surprised*: that during the last of the Unique Lives speaker series, Shirley MacLaine was so damn good. I feared she'd be flaky and irrelevant, past her prime. The evening began with her narrating an hour-long montage of still photos and movie clips. (Though there were too damn many dancing clips. If we saw those gams once, we saw them thirty times.) She had no formal presentation but spent the rest of her time taking questions from the audience. Person after person lined up at the mic to tell her how she and her books had changed their lives. She had two grown men leaping onto the stage for a hug, a kiss and a butt grab. She made sense. She's a fine example of someone who has aged well. Hers is a life well lived.

Other times, maybe some action verbs would do the trick. I'll continue *learning* technology because I must. I'll *resist* the urge to desecrate other people's countries and beliefs. I'll *thank* a police officer first chance I get. And hopefully I'll *grow up* to be a great old broad, from where I sit.

Hazel Anaka's first novel is Lucky Dog. Visit her [website](#) for more information or follow her on Twitter @anakawrites.



Dear
Barb

Barbara Godin

They're Not Me

Dear Barb:

My boyfriend and I have been dating for two years. He is awesome! I truly love him, but lately he's been spending a lot of time with my best friend. They always got along well and I was happy about that because my previous boyfriend did not get along with Sarah and it was pretty uncomfortable. I hate to say this but I am starting to feel jealous, like maybe my boyfriend would rather spend time with Sarah instead of me. I haven't said anything to either of them yet and I'm not sure if I should, or just let it go. What do you think? Ashley.

Hi Ashley:

Do you have any reason not to trust your boyfriend or your best friend? If not I would just let it go and be happy they are getting along so well. However if there is a reason for your mistrust, then maybe you might want to mention it to your boyfriend. Perhaps explain that you feel uncomfortable with him spending so much time with Sarah. I am sure he would understand and if he doesn't, ask how he would feel about your spending a lot of time with his best friend. Sometimes situations are easier for people to understand if they put themselves in the other person's shoes. Good luck Ashley, and thanks for your question.

Dear Barb:

I really enjoy reading your column but I haven't read a problem quite like mine. My twin brother is gay. He came out about two years ago.

It was difficult for my family to accept at first, but now everything is good. He has a boyfriend whom the family really like. Since my brother came out a lot of my friends think that because we are twins that I am gay as well. I really don't understand why someone would assume I am gay because my twin brother is gay. I don't believe being gay runs in families. I am getting tired of answering this question, do you have any advice for me, short of wearing a sign saying my twin brother is gay, but I'm not! Courtney.

Hi Courtney:

I'm glad to hear your brother had the courage to come out and face this issue. Even though being gay is more accepted than it used to be, there are still some diehards out there who just cannot accept anyone who is different. How and why a person becomes gay is still not totally understood, which leads to a lot of unfair confusion and prejudice in many people. I would suggest when you are asked if you are gay, to answer with a clear and concise response, that "no you are not gay" then move on and don't dwell on it. Sorry but there really is no easier way to handle this situation. Until society becomes further educated on this topic, these kinds of issues will come up. Excellent question, Courtney.

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.

CHAZZ BRAVADO: BODY IMAGE



I was pleased as punch when they asked me to speak at the feminist rally. I don't know what "feminist pariah" means, but it sounded pretty darn flattering!

I chose to speak on the hot topic of body image. I helpfully pointed out that many of them looked like guys and weren't being true to their femaleness.



After all, women don't have to be restricted to one cookie-cutter shape! If you don't want to look like Anita Ekberg you can look like Marilyn Monroe, or Jean Harlow, or Sophia Loren. Or even Chesty Morgan!

They loved my talk so much they stormed the stage. I was so mad at the cops who fought them off and dragged me away!



WRITTEN BY: WANDA WATERMAN
CONCEPT: BEN WATERMAN



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IMPORTANT DATES

- July 8: AUSU Council Meeting
- July 10: Last day to register for courses starting Aug 1
- August 10: Last day to register for courses starting Sept 1
- August 1: Estimated launch of mental health services
- August 10-12: AUSU Executives attend CASA conference in Ottawa

New Services for AUSU Members!

At AUSU's most recent Council meeting on June 10th, Council voted in favor of three motions:

- Becoming a member of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations,
- Partnering with Ceridian to provide our members with free mental health services,
- And accepting the project of redesigning AUSU's website, www.ausu.org, complete with online awards applications, AU course evaluations, and much more!

After several months of prep work, we're happy to be officially putting these projects into motion. We are very excited about what the next few months will bring for AUSU and its members!

Monthly Council Meetings

We would love for you to attend one of AUSU's monthly Council meetings! Our next Council meeting is being held by teleconference on July 8th at 5:30 MST.

Members can observe Council's discussion and votes during the formal meeting and participate in an informal discussion with councillors afterwards.

Please e-mail admin@ausu.org for call-in information and details. Hope to "see" you there!!

Executive Twitter Accounts

Each AUSU Executive Councillor has a new official twitter handle – AUSU_president, AUSU_VPEX, & AUSU_VPFA. Each account is customized to the current Executive filling that role, and will later be handed over to incoming Executives during a transition period. Please tweet us or follow us on twitter! We look forward to connecting with you!

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Am I Eligible?

Students become eligible once they have reached their second course (or 6 credits) in a year. Coverage will start on the 1st of the month following your enrolment if you register before the 10th of the month.
If you register later in the month, coverage will start the 1st of the second month.
If you opt out of the plan it will not be offered again for 11 months, should you continue to qualify.

Note: Students must reside in Canada and be under the age of 70 to be eligible.

How do I Access the Plan?

Use your myBenefits Cards to submit claims at the Pharmacy, Dental Office and Health Practitioners. Download your card today at mystudentplan.ca

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Press Releases

Did you know that AUSU posts press releases on its website with important details of the latest goings-on at AUSU?

Check out our press releases page here:

<http://www.ausu.org/council/press.php>

CLASSIFIEDS

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

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www.voicemagazine.org

The Voice is published every Friday in HTML and PDF format.

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