

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 24 Issue 01 2016-01-08

It's the Best of The Voice, 2015

What More do you Need to Know?



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***The Voice
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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**The Best of 2015!****Karl Low**

So what's involved in a Best Of issue? Do I just pick the stuff I like, and foist it off on you people as the Best of? Well, in some cases, yes, that's exactly what happens. However, most of this issue was picked by students. I don't get a lot of responses to my calls for students to tell me what they thought was the best of 2015, but I do get a few, so I compile those, look at what the students picked, and try to select what most of them have suggested. But my own vote gets extra weight, because who's gonna know, right? (Although that'd probably work better if I didn't tell you about it.)

That said, I do like to make sure that what you see as a "Best of" issue is representative of what you're going to get in every single issue of *The Voice Magazine*. Fortunately, there was enough good stuff from all of the writers this year that it wasn't hard. Unfortunately, that makes for a huge issue.

And while some of you were kind enough to nominate a couple of the editorials or articles that I've done, I've chosen not to include any of those, it just seemed like too much hubris to me, and I've got more than enough of that to go around already. Besides, I couldn't help but add to each article the reasons why it was chosen, so that's

already plenty of my writing represented in here.

Speaking of that, if you're reading this on the web and you find that some of the comments don't make sense, it's probably because I wrote them while laying out the PDF, and some of them do have slight references to what was written before. One of the strange take-aways of reading on the web is that, because there's no specific order to things online, when we make our own order works can get confusing. And if you happen to be taking the Hypertext and Literature course from AU, you now have an example of how the medium can screw up the message. You're welcome.

Usually this is where I'd say we've got a good or great issue, and give some details on the articles, but come on, this is the Best Of issue, they're all great, and giving the details would merely spoil the surprise. If you're a long-time reader of *The Voice Magazine* this issue should be a nice trip down memory lane, and may highlight some of those articles you skipped over the year but really shouldn't have. If this is one of your first issues, well then welcome! You've picked a great one to start, and you can expect to see more of this type of goodness (though perhaps not as concentrated as this) in the weeks to come.

And who do we have to thank for all this? Why, you, of course. The readers and AU students who support this magazine, and those of you who are out there doing this amazing writing that serves to remind all of us that even though we're all doing this on our own, none of us are doing it alone.

Enjoy the read! I certainly did!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karl'.

MINDS WE MEET



Dustin Blumhagen is an AU student living in Cochrane, Alberta. Dustin is a teacher, writer, and music lover, and he's currently enrolled in the Labour Studies degree program at AU.

Dustin's schedule as a freelance writer is a bit chaotic, so The Voice Magazine caught up to him via e-mail, and interviewed him about school, writing, and music.

Whereabouts do you live, and where are you originally from?

I am currently living in Cochrane, where I can see the glorious Rockies almost every day. I grew up on a ranch on the flat prairies of east central Alberta, so this is a nice change.

You mentioned you are a freelance writer. Can you describe what you do and how you got into that?

These days freelance writing is one of my hobbies. I currently write for a number of music sites (thepunksite.com, New Noise Magazine, etc.) and do it when I have some free time. In the past, I have been a photojournalist for a few community newspapers and took part in a wonderful internship with Metro News Edmonton while working on my first university degree. I love to

write and try to do it on a regular basis.

Describe the path that led you to AU.

I am a secondary school teacher who started in the field a few years ago. Due to cutbacks last year, our school downsized a number of teachers and support staff and, being one of the newer hires, I found myself with unexpected time on my hands. I was teaching at a great distance education school and gained a lot of respect for online learning, so I thought that working on my second degree while job hunting seemed like a great way to build my resume and expand my career options for the future.

What do you do like to do when you're not studying?

I like to be busy. I have three young children who are very active and we spend a lot of time out in the Rockies or in museums or at sporting events. I coach baseball, hockey, and I am planning on starting to coach lacrosse. I love to read and write, which is always an enjoyable time filler. On top of all of that, I am a huge music fan and I try to attend as many live shows as possible, although admittedly that is more difficult to logistically manage these days. I'm in the launch stages for a boutique record label, Dusty45 Records, which is intended to be a way to share music that I enjoy, rather than a legitimate business. I am travelling with a friend (Joe Vickers) down south in April to record some songs to be pressed for a vinyl release. I'm trying to organize a tribute album to

late cowboy country singer, Chris LeDoux, although the red tape when talking with artists' management is discouraging. I just want to honour an artist who makes up the soundtrack to my childhood, but everyone wants to discuss dollars. I'm a terrible Capitalist, believing that all art should be shared freely.

What happens after you finish your education?

To begin, I am hoping to get another teaching position and carry on with that for a few more years. I really enjoy being a teacher and would like more experience in the classroom. In the long term, I hope to use the knowledge gained from my second degree to support my goals of becoming a superintendent in the public school system.

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

From a young age, I loved to read and I think that this naturally grows into a lifelong love of learning over time. But I floated for a few years after high school, unsure what to do with my life. Once I became a father my whole outlook on life was altered. I want my children to be compassionate, successful, and happy people, and I strongly believe that a good education plays a big part in achieving that. In order to provide a better life for them, I knew that I needed to become educated myself, so I enrolled in university for the first time after my second son was born. It has been challenging (I spent time living in my car on the streets of Edmonton, I would often go a day without eating anything, I lived half a province away from my sons and missed out on a lot of their first few years...), but now I feel at ease with my path. My struggles will provide a better way for my children.

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

I always dread this question because there are so many great and interesting people that I would love to have a conversation with (Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Hemingway, Bukowski . . .), but right now I would have to say Ian Tyson. I grew up listening to his music on dusty cassettes in my dad's pickup as we were headed off to a rodeo somewhere or bouncing down a dirt road with our horses to check on our cattle at pasture. I've always enjoyed his Canadiana songs and it would be wonderful to sit and talk for an afternoon with him. From his folk days in Greenwich Village with Dylan to his simple, quiet life on a little ranch out near Longview, it would be great to listen to him talk about everything that he has seen and learned over his 80 some years.

Describe your experience with online learning so far. What do you like? Dislike?

I am enjoying learning online. The majority of my tutors have went above and beyond to help me reach my personal goals and ensure that I am completing my work. As an adult with ADHD, I admit that my organization and time management skills are weak and I do occasionally struggle with maintaining a regular timeline for my courses. That being said, if I feel like spending 3 hours in the middle of the night working on something, I love that I have the option. I used to hate having to make it to a 6am class every single M,W,F at UofA. Learning at my own pace on my own time is a wonderful thing. I just need the occasional crack of the whip to remind me to keep moving forward.

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

When I was the victim of Conservative education cutbacks, I was frustrated. I have three children whom I love and while I can offer them my time and give them emotional and educational support, as a parent I still have to worry about paying the most basic bills. Seeing that there were lots of well-educated teachers laid off because of what I perceive as a lack of respect for education hit me hard. I thought to myself, "if the government sees me as worthless and I back that up by being essentially unemployable because of my degree, what good is an education?" Time and reflection helped guide me past that dark time and I realized that what I was lacking was something to make me stand out among the other 1000 applicants for the job that I was applying for. I am continuing my education and working on myself to hopefully be able to present a sought-after employee in these upcoming months. I am driven, and have definite long term goals, but getting my foot in the door is

frustrating. I respect and value education and I hope to be able to show my children that it is a worthwhile endeavour once I re-enter the professional workforce and rise to meet my goals.

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

This is difficult because I am enjoying being an AU student so much. I am currently loving my English courses, but I would have to say that the most memorable was MUSIC 286. I had always wanted to take a Music course at university, but never had an opportunity to fit it into my schedule. This time, I am supplementing my required courses with some that will likely be extra to my degree requirements. My tutor was fantastic and helped guide me toward a deeper understanding of the material. The content was fascinating and ultimately inspired me to take a deeper look into the history of music. I am going on a pilgrimage to Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana in April to dig deeper into the history of the blues, jazz and country music. Dr. Kevin Whittingham pushed me to improve my research work and encouraged my interest in the subject. I have enrolled in MUSIC 285 this term (although I wish I had been able to complete them in the other order!) and I am enjoying it as well.

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

I was proud of my wife when she gave birth to our lovely children. I have been proud of my children for a million reasons as they grow, never failing to surprise me with their awesomeness. I have been proud of students who excel beyond their own expectations. I have been proud of players who have performed exceptionally well in games. I don't really reflect on what I've done; I feel that I have way too much to still do.

What have you given up to go to AU that you regret the most? Was it worth it?

Compared to what I went through to be a student at UofA, my time at AU has been a breeze. Granted, my grades have room for improvement, but I am home with my children every day now. I have food to eat and can shower at will. I have an operating cell phone and don't have creditors trying to track me down. I remember getting stuck one day during my practicum in the school parking lot. The principal of the suburban school I was at helped to push me out, then berated me and told me to go buy some new winter tires. I thought then that he had zero concept of my life and likely the life of many of the students in the school. I hope that even when I reach my goals, I remain humble and remember how hard it was to get there.

Compared to what I went through to be a student at UofA, my time at AU has been a breeze. Granted, my grades have room for improvement, but I am home with my children every day now.

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

The distance education format of AU allows for a bit of disconnect from the university. I feel that the everyday workings don't affect me as much as being on a physical campus, so I'm not really sure what my first project would be. I would have to reconnect and evaluate what would be most beneficial to students/potential students and go from there.

Describe your favourite sound.

No question: "I love you, Daddy."

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

An acoustic guitar so that I could play music, a large empty journal, and a well-stocked pencil case.

Describe one thing that distinguishes you from most other people?

I'm just a regular guy. 😊

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

Keep a Positive Mental Attitude. Life isn't always fair, but learning to shake off the difficult times and enjoy the beauty of everyday life will make living a much happier experience.

What do you think about e-texts or the plans to make the university follow a call-centre model?

I have a soft spot for certain things, like music played on vinyl records or physical books, but I recognize that times are changing. I see e-texts as being disposable like MP3s. If I'm no longer paying textbook fees, I'm okay with e-texts, but if I am paying, I would love to see actual texts. The majority of my courses so far have used physical books, which is great. Of course, there are positives to everything. Using an e-text makes citing and copying direct quotes much simpler. I tend to be an independent learner, which is why I love the freedom of distance learning, so I'm not offended by the call centre model. I very rarely reach out to anyone for help. I understand why it is a controversial idea, but I don't feel that it affects me either way.

How do you find communications with your course tutors?

I am an independent learner. I appreciate that tutors are there if I should have a question and value their feedback on course work.

Where has life taken you so far?

I haven't travelled too far outside of Alberta over the years. My upcoming trip to the Southern US is exciting though.

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

I am reading *Light in August* by William Faulkner. I love Southern Gothic literature and I look forward to visiting Faulkner's home when I am in Oxford, Mississippi.

If I could, I'd simply print all of the Minds We Meet columns and call it a day, because truly the Best of the Voice are the students who read it, write it, and, like Dustin here, are in it. That said, Dustin's interview from May was chosen by students for being an inspiring example of all that AU allows us to do, narrowly edging out Natalie Allport, an Olympic hopeful for 2018 who we interviewed in June.

**The Travelling Student
Liberated****Philip Kirkbride**

My name is Philip Kirkbride. I'm a college graduate from Ontario studying at AU. I've always wanted to do an exchange program or study abroad but never found the right time to do so. This is part fourteen in the story of how Athabasca University has allowed me to create my own study abroad program. In part thirteen I woke up completely drained from my excursion as a brush cutter. After realizing the job would make studying for my Athabasca classes extremely difficult I decided to call it quits. I bought myself a ticket to Quebec City.

As I stood outside, waiting for my bus from Longue-Rive, I felt like a bit of a strange sight. People could tell I wasn't from the Cote Du Nord area, and they could probably tell I was an 'anglo' (if you're an English speaker in Quebec you'll hear that term a lot). A woman walked past me and I greeted her with "Bonjour," still staring straight ahead she increased her pace. "Ouch," I thought to myself.

A few minutes later the young man who'd been called to sell me my ticket because he knew English came outside, seemingly for the sole purpose of speaking with me. Longue-Rive essentially gets no tourists and an anglo being there must have intrigued him. His English wasn't great but we exchanged stories and found a common interest in nineties grunge rock and video games. After a few minutes my bus arrived and I said "Au revoir."

It was an uneventful ride but the scenery was great. Especially the bits where we drove along the Saint Lawrence River. To this day I regret not stopping in Tadoussac for a whale-watching cruise, the Saint Lawrence is home to thirteen species of whales including belugas and blue whales. Of course lugging around a large blue tote and my backpack wasn't exactly appealing.

After about six hours of driving and break stops we were approaching Quebec City. I thought about the embarrassment I would face going back to my hometown so soon, the dullness of said town, and the feeling of complete lack of opportunity. As I pondered what I would do next I looked out the window to see a large sign which read "Bienvenue Quebec la capital nationale".

I stepped off the bus in my steel toe boots, my bomber jacket, my backpack strapped over my shoulders, and holding a large plastic storage container. I got some weird looks from the people with convenient travel bags with wheels, something that I wished I had instead of having to carry this tote into the bus station.

At the ticket counter I asked for the pricing on a ticket back to London. After a few minutes on the computer the attendant informed me that their company only operated in Quebec, I'd have to transfer to Greyhound in Montreal but she could sell me a ticket. After she called Greyhound on the phone and spent a few more minutes on the phone I was informed that the trip would be just over \$300 after taxes.

That was more than I expected, so I headed to subway to think about what I'd do next. I didn't have much waiting for me in London, so paying over \$300 to get there seemed like a steep price. I figured I'd stay in Quebec for the night and think about it. I used Google Maps and found a nearby hostel. What would normally be a ten-minute walk was a very painful 20-minute walk thanks to my large blue storage container. Every few blocks I had to stop when I felt like my arms were about to fall off. It probably didn't help that I was still sore from lugging the brush cutter through the bush yesterday.

I finally arrived at a hostel, *La belle Planet Backpackers*. The first floor was a café with a 'chilled out' atmosphere playing a mixture of indie rock and underground hip-hop. I walked over to the counter where a heavy-set man with a small dog sat. I informed him that I had made an online reservation. In a condescending French accent he told me that check in was not for another hour and I'd have to wait.

Not discouraged, I sat down in a comfortable chair. I figured I could take advantage of the next hour by enjoying the atmosphere and getting a head start on an Athabasca course that I'd start in the coming week. The class was an overview of Electronic Commerce (ECOM320), and I was excited to learn about the field I'd worked in but from a Managerial perspective. As I read my textbook the hour flew by.

I approached the counter again and asked if I could be checked in. The large man with the dog said it was a busy time for them and because of that they only had 1 very small room, for a price of \$40, minimum stay two nights. I was surprised because I had a confirmed booking for \$30 for a single night. After arguing my point to no avail I gave in as it was still a lot cheaper than any hotel, and all the other hostels had been booked up.

A girl in her mind-twenties showed me to my room. It was a horribly cramped room with a single bunk-bed and enough room for two people to stand up straight. The bedding felt like the kind of plastic sheets which I thought were only made for children who frequently wet the bed. While I wasn't happy with the room, or the price, I figured, "Oh well, at least I can have a hot shower."

After my shower I went downstairs to ask about what I should see in the city. The owner rudely mentioned that I should probably pay first. I handed him my credit card and said "I figured you already had my card on file from the online booking I made."

"We only take cash," he said in his most condescending voice.

That was it. I'd have enough. I tossed the key over the table at him, "You keep it," I said, "Saving a few bucks isn't worth being treated like dirt."

I walked back up to my room and proceeded to empty my blue storage container. I had a few extra bags I was able to cram most of my stuff into. A few things including the storage container and some extra clothing were abandoned in the room.

I walked out of the hostel feeling liberated. I had been treated like crap and I spoke up, letting the owner know I wouldn't have it. What was even more freeing was not having to carry around the storage container I'd left behind. With that, I found a bench where I'd fire up my phone in an attempt to find somewhere, preferably cheap, to sleep that night.

The Travelling Student series of articles was mentioned as a favorite by a couple of students. This one, from January of last year, I particularly like for having a solid story-arc, including a hero in strange circumstances, a conflict that gets resolved, and even a villain.



Decoding an AU Transcript

Tamra Ross

Semester	Course	Term GPA	Accum GPA	Accum Hours
Fall	130 MODERN PHYSICS	3.33	3.61	39.0
	129 SOPHOMORE LAB			
	100 ANAL GEOM-CALC III			
	065 INTRO TO COMPUTING			
Spring	133 ELECTRONICS			
	101 MATH REASONING			
	161 RHETORIC & WR			

AU's online transcript preview is convenient when you just need a copy for your own use. Also, some grant and scholarship providers now accept the PDF preview under the same rules that apply to submitting receipts for taxes (i.e., they will take your word for it, but reserve the right to request a hard copy at any time).

The only downside is that transcripts aren't easy to decode without a legend, and AU has oddly chosen not to provide this information with the PDF. If you search for answers on the AU website, you will find this (not) useful bit of information: "The back of the

official transcript is the legend which indicates the grading system, accreditation/recognition, classification of students, etc." That's great, except that they haven't duplicated the back of the page anywhere for students to download, or included it with the preview file. Since most of us now use the online preview to check our academic record, it's likely few students have the information they need. Also, you should know that scholarship providers that accept electronic transcript previews may ask for the legend to be included. For NSERC applications, for example, the back of the transcript is on the list of required attachments.

Here is a summary of the information most students are missing:

Accreditation, Mandate, and Establishment: A good portion of the back-page notes detail AU's accreditation in Canada and the US. It also details how and when AU was established, and what types of credentials it is able to grant. This information is of use to other institutions that might not be familiar with AU's status.

Course Numbering: This information is more important than you think because AU's course numbering system is non-standard. Once, bachelor's degrees were 3-years in length and a 4-year degree was an honour's degree. As the 4-year degree became the norm, most schools moved to a four level numbering system where 100 or 1000 is first year, 200 or 2000 is second year, 300 or 3000 is third year, and 400 or 4000 is fourth year. AU is one of a few still using a three year system and it also reserves the 100 levels for prep courses (usually 0-level at other schools). 200s, then, are first year, and 300 and 400 level courses cover the second, third, and fourth year, or "senior" courses in a rather nebulous way (in other words, some 300 level courses are very rigorous and as difficult as any fourth year course, while others are clearly junior courses intended for second year). This is not only confusing to students: it can wreak havoc with transfer credits because receiving schools might not properly assess the level of your AU courses. If someone needs some clarification on the numbering system, send a hard copy transcript to ensure they have the course numbering explanation and always ask questions if you think you weren't given appropriate credit!

Legend: the information students need most – translations for the letter codes that can appear other than course grades.

AD	Audit	If you audit a course (a choice you can make at the time of registration), your grade won't count toward your GPA and you won't get any academic credit. At some schools there are further limitations for those who audit courses.
AS	Advanced standing	For grad courses, when a student is exempt from a requirement
CH	Challenge for credit	Different schools have different opinions on challenge courses. Make sure to inquire first if you plan to transfer your AU courses!
IP	Course is in progress	This will show up as soon as you register in a course, even if the course hasn't started yet, so don't panic if you see it!
N, NCC, NCI		Non-credit course, complete or incomplete
P	Pass	For courses with a pass/fail grade mode
R	Repeated course	AKA re-registration. As with auditing, some schools are more positive toward courses that are retaken than others. Inquire if you plan to transfer the course. Both attempts at the course will appear on your transcript.
TR	Transfer credit	No grade will appear for transferred courses
U	Fail	For courses with a pass/fail grade mode
W	Withdrawal	Early withdrawal
WF	Withdrawal fail	Late withdrawal – this is not the same as an F as there is no academic penalty so it's a bit of a misnomer. It's always better to WF than to F.

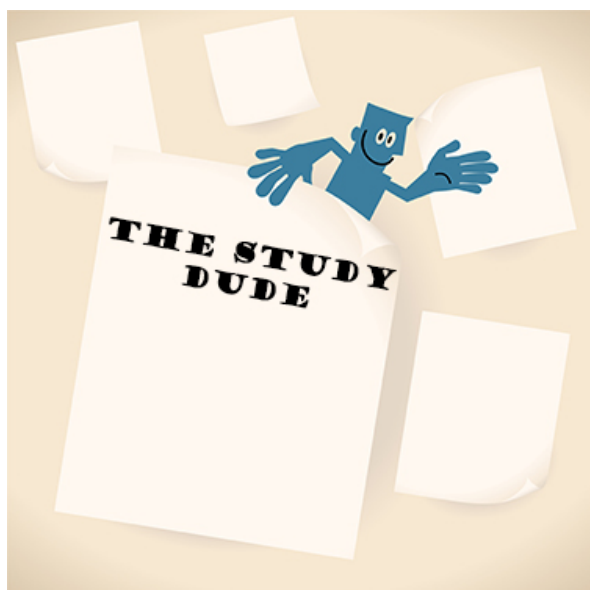
* In all instances above, with the exception of a repeated course, the grade is not included in your GPA calculation.

The remainder of the information on the back of the transcript refers to the graduate and undergraduate grading schemes.

I have to question why AU would not provide this information online when each hard copy request costs the university money: until they get around to adding the legend and other important information to the online preview, I have to suggest that you order at least one hard copy to have this information on hand. Or, in a pinch, refer to this article!

Writer, editor, programmer, designer, and perpetual student from Calgary, Tamra is working (slowly) toward a second AU degree.

An infrequent writer for The Voice Magazine, Tamra typically does one or two articles in a year, and, like this one, they typically have good information for students that can be hard to find otherwise. Fortunately, we have a couple of writers doing that now, but this article, again from May, was chosen because it highlights something you're simply not going to find anywhere else on the web.



Study Tips from a Semi-Anonymous Friend

There is nothing more that The Study Dude wants for you than to write acclaimed essays that garner millions, make speeches that go down into the annals of history, and make that winning PowerPoint that takes your future company public.

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.

What better way for the Study Dude to enlighten a book weary readership on how to write essays than to reference the *Writing*

Essays for Dummies guide by Mary Page and Dr. Carrie Winstanley. This is one dummies guide I would highly recommend (and I've otherwise come to deplore dummy guides).

The Stages from Planning to Drafting Your Essay

There was one system I read about for writing essays that hit the nail on the head for me. When I was an undergraduate, I would narrow my topic, do ample research, and take quotes and place them either on cue cards or in an outline in Word. From there, I would group the cue cards and outlined quotes together under logical headings and would often string the quotes together with introductory phrases or sentences.

However, I've since come to learn that paraphrasing is the ultimate way to go, and you should try limiting your direct quotes to only a small portion of your page.

Yet, Page and Winstanley (2009) introduce guidelines for writing your essay:

- Assess the nature of the assignment. Examine both the keywords and the action words (the verbs) that are part of the parcel of the assigned topic.
- Update your calendar. Mark in everything related to your due dates plus your leisure activities in a calendar. Make sure that you spend roughly 80% of your time reading and researching your essay and the remaining 20% writing and editing.
- Do the research. Highlight every little relevant tidbit in articles, books, or other media that you find. Note which parts are most relevant and which are least relevant. Keep a bibliography of all the articles you read, ideally on cue cards or on your computer system.
- Map out your essay. Use index cards, coloured highlighters, mind maps, or a PC outline program (such as the one you can find in Word) to get your notes together.
- Write. If you happen to be so lucky to have an intelligent friend who is not versed on your subject, pretend you are writing for him or her as your audience.
- Write more. Use headings and subheadings to structure your paper that you later delete.
- Edit. Use a printed version of your essay for making edits. Make edits and return to your computer to insert them in their appropriate places.
- Polish. Make sure that your paper is free of spelling, grammatical, and structural errors. Polish that puppy.

Write at Every Opportunity

When I left graduate studies, I stopped writing altogether. However, I later became smitten with the idea of writing book reviews on Amazon, often writing a one- to two-page write-up based on extensive notes I would take from each book. That experience became a causal factor in my ending up writing for The Voice Magazine, writing an e-book for eventual publication on Amazon, and possibly making a podcast. It's not only a reality that the more you write, the better writer you will become; it's also a reality that the more you write, the more opportunities will arise.

Page and Winstanley (2009) have some positive encouragement to get you honing the writing craft today:

- Write at any and every opportunity you have available. Always make time for writing projects.
- Wherever you go, cart with you a pen and notepad for jotting down ideas, poems, or anything in the written word format that inspires you.
- Journal daily. Write about your day, your goals, your dreams, or your day's successes. Write in a journal every day, twice a day if possible.
- "Whatever you do, tell yourself 'I'm a writer'" (p. 25).

Study Environments

Whenever I came across an essay that had a set structural requirement, I got excited. Thinking that my great performance in math classes made me a more logical thinker, structure seemed second nature. But the reality is, you don't need to be a logical, linear thinker to structure effectively. You can be a creative thinker or an outside-the-box thinker (who tend to gravitate toward mind maps for implementing structure). Yet, here are some guidelines for structured essay that may help you up your grade in your next assignment:

I've encountered a lot of conflicting views on what constitutes as an effective study environment. Some people say to have non-distracting barren walls. Others say a Feng Shui environment will make you more apt to want to study.

I do know that people who are taking graphic design courses should stay clear from a lot of colourful images, as the colours on the walls can drastically alter on-screen colour perception.

Perhaps if you are studying to become an accountant, you may opt for barren walls and organizers to boot, but if you are like Mary Page and Dr. Carrie Winstanley (2009), you will want a place to study that makes you calm and happy:

- If you have writer's block, go to an enjoyable place to mix things up, such as a park or a coffee shop. Even your bed or kitchen are places you could consider working in.
- Keep a clean, tidy desk, unless you get energized by a mass of papers and objects surrounding you.
- Do things to relax you, such as burn aromatherapy, ensure adequate sleep, listen to enjoyable music, and post relaxing and beautiful photos or images around your working space. If you would love to study on the beach, replicate that environment in your study area by posting pictures of Hawaii and other tropical places around your room. If your thing is snowboarding, post images of snowboarders sailing off of the snow-capped Himalayas. Don't make it dull. Make your study space your escape.
- Turn off cell phone.
- Have all of your necessary items within arm's length.
- Guzzle back the water, only drinking tea and coffee in moderation (if at all).
- Eat lots of healthy snacks, such as berries and nuts. (Don't forget to chow down on spinach at every opportunity.)

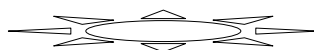
At an aromatherapy shop called Saje, you can find many study friendly formulas. I really enjoy the Ylang Ylang sedative for calming nervousness and impatience. Whatever scent you decide to buy, make sure it is one you love to smell, as that is an indicator that your body is deficient of whatever the scent provides.

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.

References

Page, Mary, & Winstanley, Carrie. (2009). *Writing Essays for Dummies*. West Sussex, England: John Wiley & Sons.

One of the mainstays of The Voice Magazine is trying to provide students with advice and resources to help them succeed in their courses. This installment of the Study Dude was chosen because it gives a solid primer that anybody can use for practically any course at all.



Maghreb Voices

Palm Fronds and Olive Branches

Wanda Waterman



The Anti-terrorism Protest at Bardo, Tunisia, 29 March 2015

"How do you defeat terrorism? Don't be terrorized."
- Salman Rushdie

We take a taxi to Denden to meet a friend at an outdoor café before searching for another taxi to take us to Bardo, the site of the March 18 terrorist attack that resulted in the deaths of 23 people—19 of them tourists from Italy, Colombia, Poland, France, Spain, Japan, and Australia—and injuries to many more.

Little do we know that last night in Gafsa, my husband's hometown, Tunisian security forces killed nine members of the Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade (a jihadist group alleged to be connected with the

Bardo attack), including its leader, Lokman Abu Sakhra.

Unaware of all this, we're looking forward to the protest. It's a gorgeous, cool, sunny spring day, the kind of weather exiled Canadians adore, sandwiched in as it is between the Maghreb's cold, rainy winter and its summer's sickening heat.

Taxis are cheap in Tunisia and a frequently used means of transport; you can ride for 20 minutes for the equivalent of two or three Canadian dollars, and there are cabs everywhere, night and day. But today the cabs are refusing to go to Bardo because the crowds are making the town unapproachable.



Neither taxis nor the metro are going to Bardo today, and so we walk.



A protestor holds a palm frond, an olive branch, and the Tunisian flag.



Friends and family members hold photos of victims of extremist violence.

We try the metro— same thing. And parking in Bardo now is out of the question, so no calling a friend to come get us; no wheels are rolling toward Bardo today. We start walking along the metro tracks. Other pedestrians join us, and the closer we get to Bardo the more crowded the tracks become.

Bardo is heavily guarded by police and special forces, lounging at street entrances and brandishing rifles from the roofs of buildings. We inch our way through the crowd toward the Bardo Museum, the site of the attack and thus the site of the protest. There oodles of people wave flags, wear flags, hold signs, chant, "Tunisia is free! Terrorism out!" and sing the national anthem.

One man holds a palm frond (symbol of victory), an olive branch (symbol of peace), and a Tunisian flag. People hold photos of loved ones murdered by Islamic extremists since the Jasmine Revolution that began at the start of 2011. There are people of all ages, all races, all styles of dress, and all religious and political persuasions.

People are holding signs sporting, "I am Bardo," and other expressions of solidarity. I make a sign that says, "I am Canadian. I am Bardo. I love Tunisia." After this, many people ask to take my photo or to have their photos taken with me. Others thank me sincerely for my support.

Later, on television, we see a news segment in which people the world over express their defiance of the terrorist agenda to destroy the tourist industry on which the Tunisian economy depends. How are these foreigners showing their support? By pledging to visit Tunisia as soon as they can.

The irony is heartening; instead of driving tourists away, the attack has brought more publicity to Tunisia and made her fans more determined to join forces with her against extremism.

All of this has really brought home the existence of two Tunisias. There's the one on the ground—politically polarised and disorganised, apathetic in the face of urgent necessity and passionate in the face of trifles, economically mired, and clouded by a general malaise.

But Tunisia has another reality in the world's eyes, a view of which more Tunisians should be made aware.

Tunisia has for years been the vanguard of the Arab world in terms of women's rights

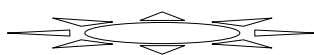


Activists perch on columns in the middle of town. The sign, in French, translates as "All united against terrorism."

and freedoms, democratic values, and a commitment to living in peace with different cultures and belief systems. Tunisia's was the first revolution of the Arab Spring and it's reputed to be the only Arab Spring country to have made concrete progress toward building a just society. Hard as it is to live here, this nation is a pint-sized hero whose story has been writ large for the benefit of activists and freedom-lovers everywhere.

Here's hoping that the sense of hopelessness on the ground can be lifted a little as Tunisians become more keenly aware of how lovingly the world is watching.

The Voice Magazine isn't just about the courses, however. This article, first printed in April, was chosen in part because it works so well to shine a light on the huge variety of circumstances that AU students live and work in. It brings home part of the challenge that is AU, to be able to serve students around the world and having a diversity of experience that is practically unknown in most post-secondary institutions. I also chose this one because of how it highlights how The Voice Magazine, at its best, can provide information on events that most other media doesn't even acknowledge.



Stop the Press?

Does AUSU Council Want to Kill The Voice?

Barbara Lehtiniemi



In a puzzling move last week, AUSU Student Council announced it would seek to replace *The Voice Magazine* with a "Writer in Residence."

Without notice and with minimal fanfare, AUSU placed an upcoming event listing on its website, and on the AUSU Update page in April 3rd's *The Voice*, for the seemingly hastily-organized 2015 Annual General Meeting. The meeting notice link reveals an agenda that contains a heretofore unheard of Special Resolution to "replace Section 7.5 with Writer in Residence".

No further information is provided. Unless you know that "Section 7.5" refers to AUSU's bylaws, and that particular bylaw section—actually called Article 7.5—refers to *The Voice Magazine*, you'd be in the dark.

Is AUSU torpedoing *The Voice Magazine*? I'm still waiting to see if more information is forthcoming from AUSU Council. If the student members of AUSU are expected to cast a thoughtful, informed vote on this proposed Special Resolution at the Annual General Meeting April 21, they will certainly need more information.

Here's what I know now, with the information that is available. In the [meeting notice](#) posted on the [AUSU website](#) for the April 21, 2015 Annual General Meeting, agenda item 5.0 reads:

Special Resolution Motion to replace Section 7.5 with Writer In Residence.

In the AUSU bylaws, Article 7.5 currently reads as follows:

7.5 The Voice Magazine

7.5.1 The Voice shall be allocated 12.5% of AUSU student fees for each fiscal year as the operating budget.

7.5.2 The Voice shall manage its own affairs with the monies provided by AUSU.

7.5.3 The Voice will operate an autonomous publication without interference from AUSU regarding content.

The Voice Magazine, according to AUSU Policy 7.3, has a mandate and mission statement as follows:

Mandate

The Voice is an online publication used for communicating with the members of Athabasca University Students' Union. The Voice will endeavor to provide current, factual, pertinent information and entertainment in a clear and understandable format, and also to provide a forum where students may gain experience with having their writing published. The Voice will maintain an open submissions policy and actively encourage student participation.

Mission Statement

- a) The Voice will focus on issues and topics of importance or interest to AU students
- b) The Voice will represent the students' point of view.

I've been reading *The Voice Magazine* regularly since I became an AU student in 2012. I find *The Voice* to be the single-best source of information for news about Athabasca University. While AU does a decent job of getting good news out to its students via its website and direct e-mails, it's AUSU that makes sure I learn all the not-so-good news about AU that students also have a right to know. And AUSU does that primarily via *The Voice Magazine*.

The Voice, in its turn, publishes news about AUSU, including the good, the bad, and—heaven forbid—the ugly. Because AUSU is funded solely through student fees, students have a right to know what goes on at AUSU. We, the students, provide the oversight to AUSU Council. We, the students, vote in members to represent us on council. We, the students, are the ones to whom AUSU Council is accountable.

Having an independent press like *The Voice* encourages, if not ensures, that AUSU council perform their duties in a forthright manner. Having an independent press gives students news—the good and the bad—about AU and AUSU, as well as perspective, entertainment, culture, and those ever-helpful study tips. *The Voice* also gives student writers a chance to get published while honing their composition skills.

Is a Writer in Residence going to serve students' interests with the same breadth and comprehensiveness that *The Voice* does? AUSU Council, you have 11 days in which to attempt to convince us, the students.

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

2015 was a bit of a tumultuous year both for AUSU Council and for The Voice Magazine. At one point, there was a serious possibility that the Magazine would be disappearing forever. This article and my own "It's All About the Benjamins", both from April, were noted by students as possibilities to include to remember what was happening at that time. This one, however, is a more solid piece of writing on the subject, and so is here in our Best Of issue, as it deserves.



What I Know For Sure

On the last page of every issue of *O* magazine, Oprah has a column entitled 'What I Know for Sure.' In those few words she summarizes the life lesson that supports the theme of that issue.

Some recent topics included: 1. "The only thing you shouldn't miss is what matters to you." 2. "What daring, brave, unconventional, adventurous, aspiring, and inspiring dream can you behold?" 3. "Am I having a good time? Am I doing what I really want? What does fun look like?" 4. "Our internal space has to be given the same level of respect and diligent attention as the external." 5. Freedom is "to wake up at dawn and *decide* what to do with the day."

As with all things Oprah this is big. Big concepts, big aspirations, big challenges. Ever the marketer she's also captured them in a book by the same name.

Because I'm not the big thinker, big success Oprah is, my own list is more simple, more observational, more tongue-in-cheek. Here, in no particular order are some things I know for sure:

1.) No matter how warm, beautiful, promising March first appears, she is at heart a scheming harriidan who will wallop us (at least once) into accepting her supremacy as a bi-polar weather goddess.

2.) Having just binge-watched season three of 'House of Cards,' it becomes apparent that it's not easy (or perhaps possible) to sustain the calibre and edge-of-your-seat intrigue of the early writing. It's better than a lot of what passes for entertainment out there but overall it wasn't as good, in my opinion as the previous two seasons. I'd blame myself for being distracted while watching, but all thirteen episodes, no, not my fault.

3.) If you can't attend your church Joel Osteen's TV ministry may provide a reasonable alternative. His message is faith based but also sounds like something a success coach would advise a client. A recent sermon to a full church that seats 16,000 people warned that what we say has the power to affect our lives, whether the words are positive and

loving, or fearful and destructive. He says that having worries and doubts or negative thoughts is natural. It's when we give voice to those thoughts that they really begin to hurt us.

4.) I'm reminded that I prefer people with humility. It's wonderful to be successful—financially, academically, or vocationally— as a cook, a mother, a carpenter, a whatever. Better yet if the accomplishment is accompanied by modesty. I'm turned off by arrogance and self-promotion. True talent will be self-evident. It doesn't require a tickertape parade to get our attention. *Everyone* had a first day, first job, first mistakes. To forget that and harshly judge others further back on the continuum that connects us all is unfair and possibly cruel. We owe it to those behind us to mentor not minimize.

That, my lovelies, is what I know for sure, today, from where I sit.

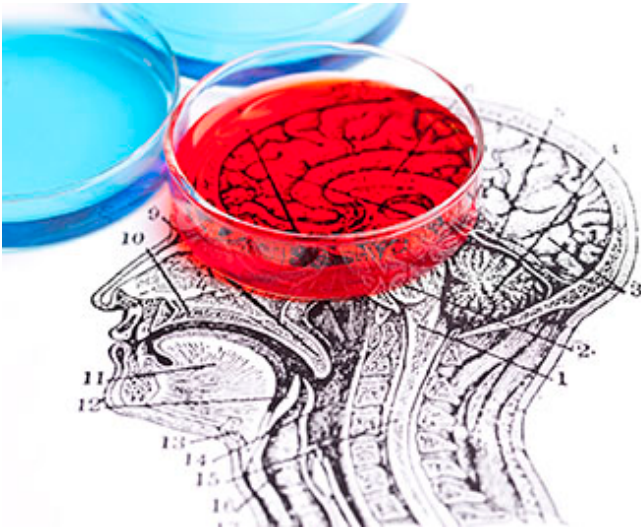
Hazel Anaka's first novel is *Lucky Dog*. Visit her [website](#) for more information or follow her on Twitter @anakawrites.

One of the many things Hazel does really well is write exactly to the length of a page. While an invaluable boon when I'm doing layout, it makes it hard for me to add any comment to her work. Fortunately, this piece, from early April, stands on its own quite well. I just had to adjust the font size to get this comment in here.

Primal Numbers

The Cramming Game

S.D. Livingston



If you're a student, procrastination is probably as much a part of your day as textbooks and quizzes. Your laptop's ready, your books are open, but there always seems to be something more important to do. Call a friend, grab some lunch, maybe even help your kids with their homework. Besides, you can always squeeze in some last-minute studying. You'll brew some coffee, pull an all-nighter, and pass with flying colours. Except for one little problem. Science has proven that cramming just doesn't work.

If cramming is how you usually study, you might think those researchers got it all wrong. After all,

the fresher something is in your memory the more likely you are to remember it, right? And if you've just spent the last few hours poring over the names of Roman emperors or topics in vector calculus, it will all be floating around up there at the top of your head when you sit down to write your exam.

It sounds good in theory but the reality is that our brains just don't work that way. As this BBC article [explains](#), there's a big difference between recognizing something and being able to remember it. Suppose, for example, that you spend a few hours studying a chapter in your textbook. Your visual cortex is processing images and words just fine. You close the book and go to bed, the details fresh in your head.

But then, the next day, you need to remember what you were reading and recall it for an exam. And that means calling on different parts of your brain than you used for studying. The trouble is, they probably won't be able to find it. That's because cramming a subject for one or two study sessions doesn't mean you've created a memory of it. All you've done is run it past your visual processors, and that's not enough to make it stick.

In fact, a long, intense study session could work against building long-term memory. As this article over at the *Association for Psychological Science* [explains](#), researchers used different study methods to test how long and how well students remembered new vocabulary words. The result? Students who did two or more study sessions with a long break between them performed the best. Cramming, on the other hand, "reduces long-term retention."

Still, even if science has proven that cramming doesn't work, it's not always an easy habit to break. There are all the usual distractions, like a new season of *Game of Thrones*. And going back to school as an adult can mean plenty of unavoidable delays in hitting the books—things like kids getting sick or meetings that run late. Before you know it, that resolution to stick to your study schedule gets sidetracked through no fault of your own.

So what if you've got tons of studying to do and not much time to do it in? Well, science might still be able to help.

Several recent studies have found that physically picking up a pen and writing your notes down on paper has a much better impact on memory than typing the same notes on a computer. It might seem counterproductive

to take the slow route when you don't have much time to study, but slowing down is the whole point. It forces you to focus more deeply on what you're reading. If you're typing notes into a computer, it's much easier to let your mind skim over the words as your fingers fly over the keyboard.

And writing notes by hand means you're more likely to condense the lesson and put it into your own words—a proven help when it comes to committing those notes to your long-term memory.

It's not the perfect solution to cramming. But it might just keep you from looking like Mr. Bean at exam time.

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.

Reporting on science and technology, Primal Numbers was (and hopefully will be again) a mainstay of The Voice Magazine. This article, also from April (wow, April was a good month) was chosen by students because of how it is particularly relevant to them.



The Fit Student

Mitigate Distractions and Stay Focused

Marie Well



Student fitness requires learning at optimal physical and mental performance. Studying requires enormous energy—energy that we can't afford to deplete by spending time on distractions. Our bodies burn so much energy throughout the day that any redirection of that vitality on something irrelevant or superfluous exhausts our supply. With studying, every ounce of energy we can muster for the tasks at hand remains essential to our success as students.

And have you ever spent the day multitasking in such a frenzy that your ability to concentrate reduces to nil? Have you ever had that sensation that anything you read, or more accurately reread, seems incomprehensible due to the amount of stress and burden you experience?

Well, Peter Bregman in his book *18 Minutes: Find Your Focus, Master Distractions, and Get the Right Things Done* provides savvy tips and tricks for ensuring your study sessions start and finish with a clear mind.

Accomplish Tasks without Struggling

Bregman suggests crafting a list of activities that you are either passionate about or long to try. Once the list finalizes, consider the activities you would normally perform alone and consider how to perform these activities with other people. For me, I love everything from media and public relations to graphic design to reading, often engaging in reading sessions alongside my true love. The togetherness of the activity makes for wonderful hours spent doing what I love in the companionship of a loved one. I also make book covers for people I love, collaborating with them to bring a product to fruition. These moments far exceed my need for belonging than a mere social gathering could possibly offer. The working together for a common goal or the sharing of time in common interests makes life fun and intriguing. Once you decide what your favourite task or bucket list

activities consist of, go ahead, try them out with someone other than yourself. Other people—especially sharing with other people—make the world meaningful and worthwhile. Just choose your companions wisely.

Select Five Big Activities that You Wish to Achieve

Bregman says to fill out a table with five major accomplishments you'd like to achieve within the next year. These headings should be general enough for you to fill in related sub-activities under each heading. Your sixth table heading should involve superfluous activities that should take up less than 5% of your time. Once you fill out your chart, ensure that your activities consist mainly of these five key objectives. In doing this, you will produce a chart that guides your choices of activities day by day. The chart focuses your activities on key goals, ensuring your productivity meets your long-term objectives. My five goals consists of writing articles, ebooks, and books; fostering my relationship with my loved one through shared activities and service; spending time daily with God, whether I study God from my Christian identity repository or expand into Hinduism, or Sikhism, or Buddhism, or the Koran, or some other moral delight for curiosity's sake; creating and publishing media; and learning. Anything that falls outside of this rubric is secondary, filtered into my 5% activity slot. Already, this year I've achieved four of my New Year's Resolutions by slotting out my core activities and adhering to top priorities most days.

Aim So That Failure Seems More Probable

Bregman posits to make our goals so lofty that the probability of success is only 50 to 70%. With such a likelihood of failure, we must learn to embrace failure as part of thinking big. In other words, if you plan big goals, expecting to fail nearly half the time, then you planned wisely. When you do fail, analyze the reason for your failure, and then try again with a new action plan. One time, I looked through job postings during a graduate program, finding a position I felt completely unqualified for during a downturn in the market economy. My true love encouraged me to go ahead and apply, assuring me that I was overqualified, and sure enough, the company eagerly hired me, offering me a wage well above my highest expectations, and I went on to outperform all of my predecessors in the position. Had I listened to my gut, I would have sidestepped the application process in favour of something I felt more consistent with my meagre qualifications, thereby losing out on the spectacular opportunity that came to fruition.

Make Your Work Enjoyable

Bregman fantasizes a number of ways to make work fun. For instance, he suggests collaborating with others on a common goal is the key to enjoyment in the working environment. You could even set up prizes for activities to motivate people, such as an iPod or a Nintendo. I believe that academic book clubs, school newspaper journalism, school debate club participation--and, most ideally, school journal publishing are prime means for collaborating with others on meaningful, academic-related projects. A lot of local organizations willingly donate prizes for recognition. Once, I accumulated rows and rows of prizes for a charity that prior to me had a meagre silent auction. The charity made a killing through me sending out a prize request letter to big companies listed on a single database. So, it is easy to gather prizes. When you decide on group activity that will further your interest, certainly equip the gatherings with prizes for performance. Everyone loves prizes.

There you have it: ways to make you a mentally fit learner. The leaner your body and the thicker your brain, the better results you will produce.

The Fit Student is a bi-weekly column that started in May of 2015. This, the first instalment, was what convinced me to run it. Connecting the personal experiences of an AU student with tangible advice on how to improve your life seemed a no-brainer fit for The Voice Magazine. It still does.

The Writer's Toolbox

Write On

Christina M. Frey



There's a chance this may be the final issue of *The Voice Magazine*—the final in a run that's lasted more than two decades and that has given readers a wonderful glimpse into the lives and interests of their fellow students. A run, too, that's helped launch the careers of several former *Voice* writers, and has allowed countless other writers to hone their writing skills, tackle different genres and topics, and get the confidence they need to move forward and onward with their writing.

During my time as managing editor of the *Voice* and now here in this column, I've offered advice to both new and experienced writers on improving tone, style, grammar, and punctuation—and on finding and strengthening their own unique voice. I'll continue doing this through my editorial business, and I hope the *Voice* will be preserved and I'll be able to continue to do it here.

But if this is the last time we break out the Toolbox—at least in this medium—it's time to bring in the one tool that surpasses all others.

What bit of advice is more important than anything else an English professor, editor, or fellow writer will tell you?

Write.

It really is that simple.

Write every day. Write different things. Write responses, descriptions, snippets of dialogue you hear. Write impressions—whether external or internal. Write down your thoughts. Write down your fears. When inspiration hits, grab your pen or your laptop or your phone's notes app and get it written down.

But don't limit yourself to the good times. Part of what will most help you improve as a writer is learning to stretch your muscles and move outside your comfort zone. In fact, it's when inspiration is the furthest thing in the world that writing is most important.

When you're feeling uninspired, write your way through it. There is another side, and you can bridge the gap.

When you're trying something new and you don't think you're very good at it, write your way through it. Next time it won't be so new. By the tenth time, you might even feel comfortable.

When you know what you've written is terrible, clunky, and boring, write your way through it. Revise it later, or not. Consider it a workout, not a competition.

When you get disappointing feedback on your writing, write your way through that too, even though you want to give up. Making mistakes and learning from them is part of the writing process.

Write, and learn. Seek feedback. Study books, writing, style. But remember: it's only through writing, and evaluating that writing, that you'll move toward becoming the writer you truly can be.

Write early. Write often.

Write on.

If you'd like to get in touch with me in the future, email me at editor@pagetwoediting.com or visit my website, www.pagetwoediting.com. I'm also on Twitter @turntopage2.

Christina M. Frey is a book editor, literary coach, and lover of great writing. For more tips and techniques for your toolbox, follow her on Twitter (@turntopage2) or visit her [blog](#).

I love this article. While there were some student votes for other articles in this series, including part of "A Company Affair" that happened to be exactly what a student needed at the time it was written, this one, to me, is the Best of the Voice because it's poignant, true, valuable, and universal, all at the same time. Write on, indeed.



Love After Loss

Barb Godin



The death of my husband, following a brief fight with cancer, left me totally devastated. The overwhelming grief was extremely difficult to go through, but I knew I had no choice. To cope, I thought it might help if I fulfilled some of the dreams Ed and I had together. We had often discussed taking our grandchildren to Disney World in Florida, and I felt it might be a healing trip for us. After booking the trip, my next priority was finding someone to watch Suzie. Suzie is a little black and white Bichon/Poodle I had found on Kijiji a few weeks before Ed's death. He had encouraged me to get a puppy to keep me company after his passing. Fortunately, my neighbor, who had watched Suzie while I was staying in the hospital with Ed during his final days, was more than willing to watch her while we were in Florida.

The trip was difficult, filled with tears and sadness, but also with some good times. But I was happy to get home, and immediately went to Eleanor's to pick up Suzie. While there, Eleanor mentioned that the man on the corner had lost his wife a few days ago, and that maybe I could talk to him. I didn't recall ever seeing the man she mentioned. She went on to

describe him to me and told me that he walks a little black dog. I never gave it much thought until a few days later.

I was out in my garage when I saw the man walking a little black dog. I walked up to him and asked him if he had just lost his wife. I don't know what made me approach him, it was so unlike me, but it felt like the right thing to do. He confirmed he had, and I could see the sadness in his face, and I knew how he felt. I told him I had just lost my husband as well. He looked down, obviously not sure what to say. So I assured him things would get better and he went on his way.

During the course of the next year I saw him, Stan, four or five times. Each time we talked briefly about our missing loved ones. Since I was ahead of him in the grieving process I always assured him things would get better. He was very quiet but pleasant. I did feel drawn to him, but I thought it was due to our mutual loss.

It had been over a year, but my grief was still all consuming. I knew I needed to get involved in something, so I decided to take golfing lessons. One day while I was putting my clubs in the trunk and getting ready to go to my last lesson, Stan came walking by with his dog, Joey.

"How you doing?" he said casually.

"Going to my last golf lesson."

"You golf?"

"Well, not sure if I would say that, but I'm learning."

"We should go golfing sometime."

"Sure!"

"Okay I think I have your number, I'll give you a call next week."

*It does seem that there
were a few hands
arranging for Stan and
me to meet.*

I wasn't sure if I really wanted to go with him, but then I thought, "Well, it's only a game of golf." A few days later he called and we went golfing. I had so much fun, I briefly forgot my grief. However, the next few days were filled with confusion and guilt. How could I go out and have fun with another man! Stan called again and I reluctantly went to dinner and a movie. Ultimately we began seeing each other on a regular basis. I struggled terribly with the guilt, but Stan seemed to be handling things well. At times I pushed him away; only to draw him close again later. We both persevered through as there seemed to be an attraction between us that was difficult to ignore.

As we got to know each other we agreed the parallels in our situations seemed to be more than coincidence. We had both lived in the same unit within our condo complex, where some units are similar, but not exactly the same. This would not be that significant on its own, but when you add all the incidents together the parallels are quite unique. Stan moved into the complex six months after Ed and me. We had both viewed many homes before settling on this one. My husband passed away two and a half years after moving in and Stan's wife also passed away after living in the condo for two and a half years. We had both been attending the same Cancer Unit for treatments, but never seemed to run into each other. Then there was the fact that Eleanor had been

Stan's neighbor and mentioned him to me. I call her our Angel on earth. It does seem that there were a few hands arranging for Stan and me to meet.

Ultimately, we found our way through the grief, the loss, and discovered a special love. A love we both never would have thought was possible. Two years ago, we married. We now share a deep understanding and a bond that I know will carry us through—'til death do us part.

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.

One of the articles without a direct connection to Athabasca University or students, this one was chosen simply because the tale it tells is universal. Sooner or later we'll all experience a significant loss of some kind, and, hopefully, sooner or later we'll be able to get through it and move on. I hope this article serves as inspiration to those dealing with the former, and as a touching reminder for those who've reached the latter.



A Convocation Uncommon

Donette Kingyens



It does not take more than a few minutes attending the Athabasca University Convocation to see just what sets AU apart from other universities.

One of the first things I noticed was how many graduates had travelled from all over the world to be there, many more than at brick-and-mortar university ceremonies. Since AU is a distance learning institution, very few students ever visit a campus, and most of the graduates that make the journey to convocation are seeing the AU campus and meeting the staff in person for the first time. I spoke to students who had come from all over Canada, from the Yukon Territories to the Maritimes. I spoke to students who had come from various places in the United States, a student living in Asia, and one from South Africa. Most of the graduates had traveled hundreds of miles to walk across the stage, and many with families or friends that traveled to see them graduate as well.

There is excitement and pride in the air as the graduates and their families tour the grounds, taking pictures in front of some of the campus landmarks like the fountains in front of the main building. Everyone who visits marvels at how beautiful the campus is, embedded amidst the spruce, pine, and aspen trees of the Athabasca River Valley. Many of them did not even realize the campus existed until now, and a few students told me that being here made their degree with AU seem all the more "real".

Wandering around the booths set up in the arena, visitors could buy AU clothes, merchandise, and fresh cut flowers; they could visit with various Faculties and Alumni Affairs at their booths and (most importantly, of course!), they could visit with the staff and council presidents of AUSU and AUGSA at the union booths, which

were located right inside the entrance. Most of the graduates were just excited to talk to the staff and faculty in person for the first time. In return, the staff, professors, and faculty were just as elated to see the students, the one time of year they get to meet them in person and truly celebrate their students' success.

Working at the AUSU booth, many of the graduates and even AU staff thanked us for just being present. Numerous students told us about how a scholarship we granted them was the only reason they were able to get their degree, or how much our student planner had helped them keep themselves organized. It was enlightening to hear!

What is also amazing about meeting the graduates is the incredible range in demographics and backgrounds. At brick-and-mortar universities, undergrad graduates tend to be primarily in their mid-20's, having achieved their degrees right out of high school. Certainly, that demographic is well represented with young graduates proudly facing their first taste of life free from school, but there is also a huge range of other demographics graduating, far more than you typically find with other universities. Here you meet 30, 40, and 50 year old moms and dads who worked on their degree from home while juggling full time jobs and kids. Here you meet army recruits who worked on their classes while they were overseas. Here you meet senior citizens who completed their first degree when they retired to reach a new milestone in their lives. Here you meet people who live in such a remote region or town that they could not attend a local University. Here you meet people from every age, gender, and culture that were able to complete their degree amidst busy lives, careers, personal struggles, and, in some cases, immense obstacles.

Here there are just as many proud children coming to see their parents graduate as there were proud parents coming to see their kids graduate.

Here students are grateful beyond words that Athabasca University's distance learning gave them the flexibility and opportunity to get a degree they otherwise would not have been able to achieve.

The next thing that sets the AU convocation apart from that of other Universities is how intimate and personal the ceremony is. At most universities, graduates are called across the stage with a simple recitation of their name and degree. At AU, however, they embrace the fact that each graduate has a story to tell. When graduates are called across the stage, the audience is told their story, so that everyone watching can truly see how amazing each of these students are. You get to hear the stories of triumphs they achieved, how their family or friends supported them, publications and awards they won, or how their work is already helping people or changing the world. In some cases, you also get to hear stories of perseverance over incredible hardship—such as the story of a graduate who struggled to overcome homelessness to achieve his degree. Each students' story is told, and each one is an inspiration.

Good for you, graduates. Each one of you is a testament to AU and the benefits of distance learning. More importantly, each one of you is a testament to personal achievement and perseverance. You are our future, and we could not be more proud.

Donette Kingyens is a writer, animal lover, and advocacy junkie in Edmonton, Alberta. She is the office coordinator for AUSU.

One of the odd things about going to AU is that almost nobody ever "goes" to AU until they're leaving. This article was chosen because it gives us some concrete images to set our goals on, to look forward to. A little fodder for the imagination certainly doesn't hurt when you hit those times when you start wondering why you started all this studying.

Music Review

Fable Cry

Samantha Stevens



Album: *We'll Show You Where the Monsters Are*

Band: Fable Cry

To follow the review that I had done on their singles from this album back in [April](#), I am excited to review Fable Cry's album *We'll Show You Where The Monsters Are*. Full of the same goodness, fun, and eccentricity that we sampled in their singles, *We'll Show You Where The Monsters Are* brings the monsters from your childhood stories and nightmares to life.

The album is arranged in a grand theatrical fashion, full of stories and wonder slowly pulling you further and further down the rabbit hole. Be prepared to be faced with ghosts, zombies, witches, fortune-tellers, deadly journeys, hungry wolves, claustrophobic tombs, and anything else that may frighten you.

I absolutely love this album and I don't think I could say enough about it. The first song "Dead or Alive (For Now)" prepares you for the magnificent journey that you are about to embark on. Feeling like the prickling of the hair on the back of your neck as you watch the sun blink out of existence on Halloween night, the lyrics in this song build that nervous apprehension that starts at your toes and ends at the very tips of your hair. Prepared for anything, you step out into the dark.

"Fancy Dancing" is the following track. This was one of the tracks that I reviewed back in April, so a quick recap...dwindling courage, an encounter with a witch, a dreadful realization, and all accompanied with brilliantly composed gypsy-like music. Ready for the next step of the journey?

The high seas await you in "From Myth to Moon" (available in both in a clean and explicit version). The music is very much like the typical pirate music, but it feels as though there is an uneasiness lying behind the overly giddy violin. Sure enough, upon listening closely to the lyrics you discover the singer is warning you of the darkness that resides in the deepest reaches of the human heart.

Ever wonder what Dr. Frankenstein was thinking as he built his monster? "The Good Doctor", also available in clean and explicit, creates such a vivid mental image you feel as though you are there in the very laboratory where the monster is being created. Perhaps the best thing I love about this song is the lyrics, especially the part "...to the cacophony of coffin-covered corpses..." which is such a wonderful example of alliteration. For anyone studying any form of English and literature, you will find yourself swooning over the ingeniousness of the lyrics.

"Onion Grin" is the next track, which was the other single that was reviewed in April, and I still absolutely love this song. What could be better than a song from the perspective of the villainous wolf found in so many fables.

"Set Me Loose" is unnerving, but fantastic at the same time. I feel that the song is about Dracula or some other similar vampire character calling to his beloved. Although the track starts out somewhat claustrophobic with the character describing his surroundings in detail, the character is true to the vampires of old, which is something I feel the vampire genre needs.

The final track that I will mention is "Slow Down". The blues sound is fantastic, and the lyrics are extremely entertaining. Going along with the general theme of the album, I imagine that this song is from the perspective of a zombie imploring to his victim to slow down as he chases him.

Three songs remain on the album that are as superb as the others, but I'll leave these for you to discover on your own...that is, if you are prepared to venture into the world created by Fable Cry. Keep your wits about you!

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

This one is all mine. I like the music and film reviews in general just because, with everything that's out there these days, I think it's a valuable service to have students informing students as to some of the hidden gems that are out there, but this one, from June, I like in particular because after reading it, even though I realized I had no idea what any of the songs might sound like, not even what instruments were used, I still found myself thinking about picking up the album. That's good writing, in my books.



The Mindful Bard **Red Knot**

Wanda Waterman

**A Marvelous Living Side-by-Side
Before an Immense Sky**

Film: Red Knot

Director: Scott Cohen

"But once the realization is accepted that even between the closest people infinite distances exist, a marvelous living, side-by-side, can grow up for them if they succeed in loving the expanse between them, which gives them the possibility of always seeing each other as a whole and before an immense sky."

- Rainer Maria Rilke

Writer, Peter, and artist, Chloe, haven't been married long and are giddily in love. They're taking an Antarctic cruise together and both have high hopes for the experience—Chloe because it

seems like a wonderfully romantic escapade and Peter because he'll hopefully get to interview some important scientists and environmentalists.

The filming was done on an actual Antarctic cruise: in 2010 artist Gregory Colbert chartered a large research boat to travel for three weeks from Argentina to Antarctica and back. For reasons unknown, Colbert had decided that in addition to providing a spectacular experience to a boatload of passengers he would create a kind of intellectual incubation chamber within the ship itself, and he brought this about by extending invitations to some really smart folks, scientists and creatives both.

Among those present on the boat and also appearing in the film were iconic novelist Cormac McCarthy, film star Juliette Binoche, and famed whale-song environmentalist Roger Payne. Colbert also offered a spot to artist Scott Cohen, who quickly leaped at the chance to put together his first feature film under circumstances that might never be repeated.

The Antarctic landscape itself is a vast metaphor for angst. The shots of the claustrophobic interior ship spaces, intermittent with views of the terrifying vastness of the Antarctic water sky and ice, are a microcosm of the human dilemma. Francesco Casetti's dictum that film negotiates reality—especially the reality of the conflict between technology and nature—is clearly spelled out in the scenes where mountains and glaciers dwarf the 385-foot research vessel.

The film, as a whole and in many of its details, is profoundly symbolic, and the two poles, north and south, are key to what the film aims to represent. The meticulous and patient crafting that Cohen put into this project make repeated contemplations a rewarding experience. (I predict that it will be discussed *ad nauseum* in university lecture halls for decades).

At the start of the voyage Chloe and Peter are emotionally fused. When one wishes to change, the other resists. As often happens in couples, both of them wish to change at the same time, but in different ways. They seem to hardly know each other. Even a brief discussion about having children looks like a hot potato—as if they've never discussed it before.

The comportment of this couple at first looks contrived, but it's not bad acting; rather, it's exactly the way newlyweds might act together on their honeymoon while still feeling slightly self-conscious, as if, yes, they're in their own movie. Olivia Thirlby's face changes from achingly lovely to bordering on homely, and her cutesy-pie mannerisms can be annoying, rendering the relationship emotionally intense, but weak and superficial. (Some of the early romantic scenes are quite moving, but others look like commercials for a Ralph Lauren fragrance.) Vincent Kartheiser is amazing as the writer Peter, who means well but often comes off looking like an ego-driven poseur, so lost in his own trees that he misses the forest.

Against their expectations this cruise has handed them a heap of stress; they're only really alone together in their cabin, whose cramped space, shared bathroom, and bunk beds tend to put the kibosh on intimacy. What's more, Peter has had the good (or bad?) luck of having stumbled onto a goldmine of writing opportunities related to one of his lifelong obsessions—Antarctic exploration. This leaves Chloe in the dust. When he becomes so immersed in his work that he makes a significant life decision without consulting her, the enraged Chloe decides to leave him. But she can't quit the ship, so instead she decides to take another cabin.

Then, something interesting happens. The young woman who was just a bit too clingy and acquiescent, who went ballistic when her husband forgot about her, suddenly starts finding herself again. In her new cabin she

creates the romantic, feminine cocoon that she hadn't been comfortable creating in the cabin with her man, and hunkers down to reflect, read, and draw as she could never have done when her focus was always on Peter.

She starts reaching out to the other passengers for meaningful encounters. She expresses herself more often through her art and becomes more playful, optimistic, charming, and friendly, while Peter's wonderful writing opportunity looks more and more like a dull academic exercise.

Chloe also becomes wiser and more self-possessed. When Peter interrupts a checker game to tell her he wants to talk to her, she affirms the break in their emotional fusion by calmly replying, "I'm in the middle of something right now. I want to talk to you, too, but we'll have to do it later."

Later the boat's handsome captain sits for her as she draws his portrait. The focussed gazing required to copy his features is precisely the kind of intimate connection she needs.

Finally, Peter lowers his head and joins Chloe in her sacred bower. His need surpasses hers because she has achieved individuation and he hasn't (quite). His error had been only a moment of unconsciousness and had in no way erased their bond.

Red Knot is like a couple's version of the Narcissus myth: only in knowing yourself can you help your partner to transcend the limits of time, body, and space. Negotiating couple-hood requires a balance of solitude and intimacy—an achievement only possible through mindfulness.

Red Knot manifests seven of the Mindful Bard's criteria for films well worth seeing.

- It's authentic, original, and delightful.
- It poses and admirably responds to questions that have a direct bearing on my view of existence.
- It provides respite from a sick world, a respite enabling me to renew myself for a return to mindful artistic endeavor.
- It's about attainment of the true self.
- It inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation.
- 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.

Many thanks to the research assistance of Bill Waterman.

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

The Mindful Bard columns are an interesting beast. Part review, part exploration of the world of art and, for want of a better term, mindful living, I'll admit that sometimes I question if they're really relevant to AU students. Then the Best Of The Voice issue comes around a student names one of the articles as having caused the movie to stick in her head. That answers that question.

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.

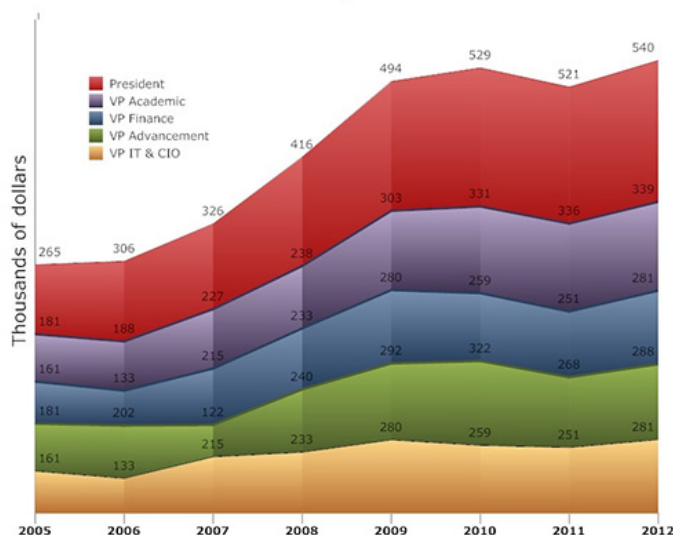
However, the report also outlines a number of reasons why this option would have negative consequences for the university: without out of province students, "we could not maintain current levels of programs." There would be "fewer faculty, tutors, professional and support staff, with negative consequences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

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

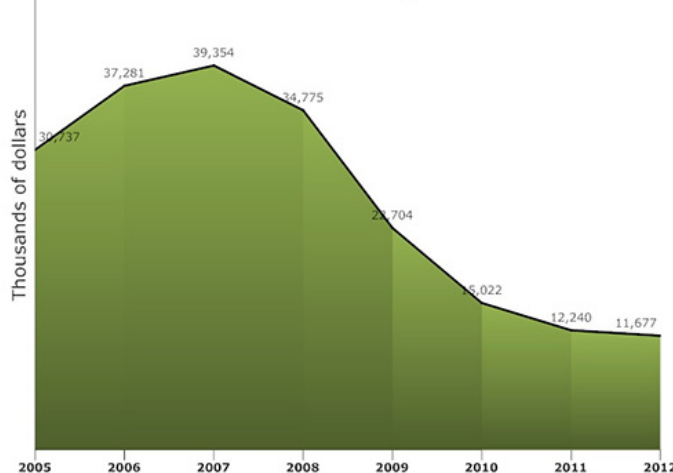
Ensuring that the university is being efficient seems like a very good, straightforward idea. But after years of trimming spending at the university, it seems like it would take some very significant changes to create enough additional efficiency to move the university from insolvency in two years to 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.

Athabasca University Executive Salaries



Athabasca University Net Assets



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

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."

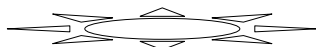
AU was created by the Province of Alberta to help provide exceptional quality post-secondary education to all people, regardless of their respective (social, cultural, economic, educational, and what-have-you) backgrounds. This is a mission that, despite chronic government underfunding and questionable 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.

Discussions of AU's financial situation are always relevant and interesting to AU students (and if they're not, they probably should be). This year it was made especially so because of the release of the report that Bethany Tynes examines in this article that The Voice printed in June about the possibility of AU going insolvent. I also liked it because it introduced me to the word "alumna". Did you know that there's a gender difference in the singular of "alumni"? Hey, I'm an English geek, these things are cool to me.



Living My Learning

Cara Doane

A Response to Bethany Tynes' Course Exam of WGST 422



It's been nearly a decade since I took WGST (then WMST) 422, but the statistics and stories I learned have affected every day of my life since.

The part of the course that provoked the most immediate emotional response was the readings – which both the tutor and student interviewed in Tynes' article noted could be unsettling. One of the course texts, *Fleeing the House of Horrors: Women Who Have Left Abusive Partners*, by Aysan Se'ver, contains

particularly graphic and disturbing descriptions of women's horrifying experiences (to get an idea of the level of *Horrors*, check out the [beginning of Se'ver's introduction on Google Books](#)).

The stories included in this collection are heartbreaking and more than sufficient to reduce any compassionate human being to tears. At the same time, though, these stories made me feel lucky that things in my life weren't worse than they were. When I took WMST 422, you see, I was living in an abusive marriage. But as angry and controlling as Brent was, the physical abuse was not as frequent or severe as many of the women whose stories Se'ver collected. I never suffered any permanent injuries, and the majority of his violence was directed against property.

Brent was particularly hard on phones - I don't know how many phones we went through in the first year of our marriage, but they were often the first thing he'd grab when angry. Cordless handsets and cell phones were frequently thrown at walls or the ground, and I remember one wall-mounted phone that Brent ripped out and stomped on, not only destroying the phone, but tearing out the drywall sinkers and phone jack.

Brent had agreed to allow me work on completing my university degree because he was unhappy with our financial situation. I had few qualifications, so his job paid much more than mine did, and he felt it was unfair that I should be contributing less to the household than he was. So he gave me permission to return to school, though he never had any interest in what my courses were, or how I was doing, only that they were completed as fast as possible, and that they didn't cost him anything.

Every month, my paycheck covered the rent and groceries, and I applied for bursaries wherever possible to cover the cost of my courses. Even though Brent worked full-time, he insisted that all of his earnings were going to pay down his credit card debts. He stayed out late most nights and blew up whenever I asked any questions about money, especially if they were related to how much he made or why we were always so short. He retained, as did the men in *the House of Horrors*, complete financial control over our household.

And as many of the women in *Fleeing the House of Horrors* noted, I also had little control over the nature or timing of sexual activity, or over methods of birth control. Brent believed that "natural timing" would effectively prevent pregnancy, and was morally opposed to both barrier and hormonal contraceptives. He pitched fits whenever I mentioned the possibility of pills, and threatened to kill me when I asked about his beliefs on tubal ligation. In spite of his belief in the power of "natural timing," he frequently ignored the dates scribbled on the calendar.

When I became pregnant, Brent began staying out even later than before. When he came home each night, sometime between two and five in the morning, he would begin shouting at me – asking why I was asleep, why I didn't wait for him to have my supper, why I was too lazy to do the dishes. The questions were not rhetorical. He expected an answer, and he expected me to immediately get out of bed and fix his problems. He also decided that he wouldn't eat food that had been cooled and re-heated, so he further expected that I would cook him a fresh new supper and stay up to eat it with him.

One of those times, when I got him some food and then tried to go back to bed to sleep, he was so furious at my refusal to eat with him (at three o'clock in the morning) that he hurled his dishes down the hall after me from the kitchen towards the bedroom doorway, complete with the supper still on them. The al dente spaghetti held some of the Corel shards onto the hallway walls, while the remainder of the noodles and broken plate chunks, coated in sauce, splattered the parquet floor. After weeks like this, eventually, I miscarried.

Later, after another miscarriage, Brent announced to my doctor that I would not be consenting to any more check-ups or a D&C (a procedure commonly required to clear tissues from the uterus after miscarriage). On our way out of the clinic, I briefly spoke to the receptionist to cancel my previously-booked pregnancy checkups, and Brent excused himself to use the washroom. My doctor immediately pulled me aside and told me that my

pregnancy had been healthy, and should have been carried to term, but that he believed my living environment had placed my body under such significant stress that it would be unable to sustain pregnancy.

I felt broken by Brent's anger, and I felt broken by the loss of two pregnancies. But at the same time, I felt relieved that I was not bringing an innocent baby into the chaos of my life. And then I felt broken for feeling relieved.

That night, I tried to bury myself in schoolwork, at which I'd always excelled, to forget all my brokenness for a while. So I sat down at my desk and resumed my WMST 422 readings. And while the women's stories collected in Aysan Se'ver's *Fleeing the House of Horrors* were certainly enough to cause great emotional upheaval, the details of these personal anecdotes did not make a lasting impression on me. Perhaps surprisingly, what has stayed with me ever since were some of the statistics that I came across in my readings and research—statistics that helped change my life.

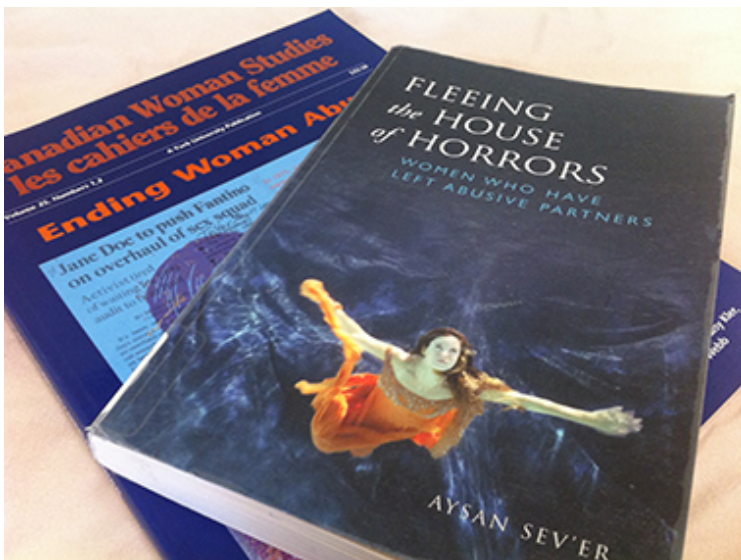
Check next week's issue of *The Voice* for Living my Learning – Part 2.

This two-part article, published in August and September, was mentioned by literally every single person who made suggestions for this Best Of issue. So without further ado, the second part:

Living My Learning

Cara Doane

A Response to Bethany Tynes' Course Exam of WGST 422



Can you say that statistics have changed your life? Maybe even saved it? Probably not.

But when I took WMST 422 (the precursor to WGST 422, subject of a [recent Course Exam article](#) in *The Voice*), the most important thing I learned wasn't the global prevalence of violence against women. It wasn't the responses of global community and UN to violence against women. And it wasn't the systemic and institutional power structures that allow violence against women to continue. It was the simple, straightforward statistics about violence against women in Canada.

These statistics weren't just about the overall occurrence of violence, but also about when and where certain women experienced abuse—including rates of abuse by age, income, and geographic location. For example, did you know that, [according to Statistics Canada](#), those aged 15-24 are most likely to be victimized, followed by those 25-34, and the risk continues to decrease with age? The same groups are also more likely to be victims of spousal homicide. And consistently, about 70% of those in abusive situations say they have told someone within the last year.

Statistics helped me make sense of my experiences. They explained that abuse often increases with life changes, like beginning a new job or schooling (as I did) or becoming pregnant (as I did). They predicted that abusers

often try to isolate women from their families and friends, frequently by moving long distances (as we did), or controlling access to transportation and communication devices (remember how I mentioned Brent's problem with phones?).

Eventually, I reached a point where I knew that there was nothing I could ever do that would make things good enough for Brent to be happy. I knew that no amount of housekeeping or healthy cooking or changing my behaviour to fit into Brent's mold would ever fix his anger management problems. Sadly, it took years to get to that point, and multiple failed escape attempts before I was successful. In the end, I knew that actually getting out for good would require money, a careful plan, and both personal and physical strength.

And then statistics helped me to stay safe and prepare myself for possibilities that I had once never imagined. Things like the potential that even once I got away from Brent, he could still be dangerous.

The Canadian Women's Foundation, in their [Facts About Violence Against Women](#), notes that "about half (49%) of all female murder victims in Canada are killed by a former or current intimate partner." And violence often escalates after separation: [Statistics Canada reports that](#) "in 2009, 17% of Canadians who had contact with an ex-spouse or partner... had been physically or sexually assaulted," and further, that "female victims of spousal homicide were more likely than male victims to be killed by a partner from whom they were separated." In [Fleeing the House of Horrors](#), Aysan Se'ver notes that married women are *nine times* more likely to be killed by their partner than by a stranger, and after separation, even though husbands have less access to their estranged wives, this risk increases *six times*.

Part of what continues to disturb me is that, in all the years that we were together, there were many times when people had the opportunity to intervene—and didn't.

Because I had learned about these statistics, I took several precautions when and after I left. And I was lucky: though there were some threats and indications of stalking, and one incident where Brent became physical, eventually these petered out.

Part of what continues to disturb me, though, is that in all the years that we were together, there were many times when people had had the opportunity to intervene—to help me escape the hell—and didn't. Along the way, there were times when people could have stepped in and offered to assist, and it always hurt to wonder why some people had passed up these chances.

Once, for example, Brent answered the door to find a police officer who asked to speak to me. When I came into the living room, the male officer announced, in front of Brent, that my friend Kari was worried about my safety and thought that I was in danger. I had no idea how to respond. The officer looked back and forth from me to Brent, and then said "you don't look like you're in any immediate danger. Is there a chance that your friend might have exaggerated things a little?" And then he rolled his eyes, turned, walked out, and left. Guess how well that went over with Brent?

And many months later, there was one day when I was terrified of what Brent would do, and for the first time, I called the police myself. It took them more than half an hour to arrive, and when they did, the female officer

advised me that I had the right to press charges about Brent, but that based on the fact that she couldn't see "any *real* injuries," and couldn't be sure "what had *really* happened," it was highly unlikely that any judge would believe there had been abuse. When I asked her about an emergency protection order, she told me that I would have to go to court and talk to a judge about it. After that, I never bothered to call the police. What good would it do?

Brent would scream and throw things at me and strangers would walk by, trying not to look at us.

But it wasn't only the police who turned a blind eye to our situation. Throughout our time together, there were times we lived in apartments with paper-thin walls, and neighbours could easily have stopped by when Brent was out to ask if I was okay or ask how it was going. There were many times when we were out in public that Brent would scream and throw things at me and strangers would walk by, trying not to look at us. And there were people in his family who were there when he would give me strict orders and physically push me around.

I know that jumping into the middle of a potentially violent situation might not be the best way to help, but neither is turning a blind eye and trying to walk by as if nothing is going on. Family violence, violence against women—it isn't a private or personal matter. It's bad for women, it's bad for their friends and families, and it's bad for our society as a whole (in fact, if you think in monetary terms, spousal violence in Canada comes with an estimated price tag of 7.4 billion dollars per year).

There are hundreds of reasons why some women choose to stay, and the Ray Rice / Janay Palmer incident that happened about a year ago saw many abuse survivors taking to Twitter to share their stories with the hashtag #whyIstayed. Based on my experience, the most important thing that women in abusive situations need to hear is that people will believe their stories and be willing to help. Just believe them, be there to help if needed, and be patient with them (even when you can't understand why they're staying) until they're at a point they're ready and able to leave.

Years later, I can say that I feel safe and happy. But the many years I spent living in hell I will never get back, and they continue to create challenging repercussions. On the whole, though, I'm incredibly lucky: I have a wonderful life in the world after violence against women.

If learning more about violence against women just isn't a top personal priority for you, that's okay. We don't all have the same interests or inclinations. But I'd also suggest that this is perhaps the best reason why you should consider taking WGST 422. It might not be directly applicable to your future education or employment plans, but if you have the ability to take it, I can think of no other course I would more highly recommend.

According to the Canadian Women's Foundation, a full half of the women in this country have experienced physical or sexual violence at least once. Half. Every second woman in Canada. Maybe your learning, your knowledge, your belief, or your support could be what helps one of your friends or family members to escape.

We call it the "Best of the Voice" issue for a reason. Now you know why.

Fly on the Wall: Lost and Found in the Moment

Jason Sullivan

Education and the Search for Epiphany



Snorkeling in clear and bright Okanagan Lake the other day allowed me to ponder future course opportunities and dream up esoteric 'Fly On the Wall' Topics. Just as I began to suppose that I'd see no fish on this swim, a huge carp glided into my peripheral vision. Had it been watching me and decided to investigate? Instantly I wished for my camera, yet, in a flash, realized that the moment itself was special. A wise person had recently counselled me that some moments really are meant just for us as individuals. I began to wonder how to approach meaning in terms of photographic

journaling and my educational journey.

Whatever 'meaning' means in a teleological sense (meaning can merely be our own creation as we experience life, or meaning can have some cosmic 'everything happens for a reason' significance), the fish did clarify my sense of wonder at the joys of under-lake reality. Within a few seconds my mind had traversed boundaries of thought and emotion; I thought of Henry Miller's line: "tremendous voyages sometimes occur without the person moving from the spot" (Miller, 1964, P. 121).

I then turned my attention to how capturing a moment with a camera is a bit like fishing for enlightenment through education; the purpose is in the pursuit, the chase, as much as in the result. Yet the horrifying potential of an empty bucket at the end of the day drives us onward.

The carp set me to thinking about social theory too, and how in our media-saturated century even the perfect image may drown in a sea of other pictures posted online. And we may capture the fish, but do we really share the essence of the moment? Ubiquitous digital cameras mean that sublime beauty doesn't stand alone on a wall the way it might have in art galleries of yore. Walter Benjamin's famous late-1930s essay 'Art and Mechanical Reproduction' was already lamenting the decline of what he termed the "aura" of art, as print reproductions of paintings and photographs made any particular visual image available to all and sundry (Benjamin, 1936, P. 423). Mona Lisa prints are available in big box stores; a person can watch YouTube videos and claim to have learned the course material of a post-secondary course. Technology has opened the floodgates of self-education and yet there's still tangible and intrinsic value in taking a course 'for credit' at an institution like AU. Like an artist who feels pride at the completion of a work, we students attain real gratification at passing real courses at official institutions. With the wonders of the internet's dissemination of knowledge comes a loss of the aura from successful completion of post-secondary degrees. Benjamin stated that "to pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose 'sense of the universal equality of things' has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction" (Benjamin, 1936, p. 424). The unique object, in this case, is university, which today may seem watered-down in the face of all the content (if not experience, form, or expectations) available free for all online.

The visual arts uniquely reflect the desire for expression, which can be both artistic and academic. Benjamin asserts that, at root, a painting seeks to convey the actual lived experience of the artist; likewise, students learn to express their lives in new ways by becoming educated. "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (Benjamin, 1936, P. 422). Were I to capture the carp for all time with my camera, my Facebook friends would lack the full content of the moment. The daydreams and ponderings leading me to drift out of full conscious awareness would be lost. So too would my pleasure at seeing this huge creature after beginning to doubt that I'd see any fish at all. Even the play of light upon its smooth, dark body would be restricted to the precise snapshot moment which the lens had lassoed. In this same way, the abstract sensation of "being there" in a class (even an online course!) contains perhaps a unique experiential kernel. Maybe the possibility of failure, contained in authentic life experiences, gives real moments their varnish of authenticity.

Then there is the matter of whether any moment or topic can ever really be caught. Photos give us the eternal present, yet they lose the past and future which brings the present to life. Benjamin claimed that "the presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity" (Benjamin, 1936, P. 422). Yet the original representation of a moment only implies the moment itself. Imagine a safari bus full of tourists snapping photos of elephants and zebras; each individual is deferring their own personal present into the photo. The split-second that the lens clicks becomes a moment put off for another day, a procrastination until the picture is shared with another person who, even then, will only be seeing a simulation of a split-second in time. One that never happened in that the photographer was never really there in the way the photo presents the event. The photographer was busy taking a picture even as the reality depicted occurred within the picture itself. A tourist taking a photograph wasn't there looking at the wildlife in the sense that the camera conveys. She or he was busy taking the picture which functions only as a simulacrum of the moment of awe in the face of nature. We know the aura of the moment is there, but it's easy to forget that the picture is only a pale imitation; we know we've read the textbook, but not whether we've fully grasped the author's intent.

Then there is the matter of whether any moment or topic can really be caught. ... The very act of seeking to reflect a moment by taking a picture may tarnish its original sheen

Baudrillard discusses this hall of mirrors, whereby simulacra reflect off of each other and exist detached from original, authentic existence in his 1981 book 'Simulacra and Simulation'. With regard to the post-modern proliferation of visual images (such as occurs on Facebook) he wrote that "the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum - not unreal, but simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference." (Baudrillard, online). This culture of simulacra may be akin to randomly looking up an academic topic without it being tied to a full syllabus and program of study. A reproduction of authentic experience stands in for the real unmitigated awe of the viewer-student lost in the spectacle of education.

The very act of seeking to reflect a moment by taking a picture may tarnish its original sheen; "the quality of its presence is always depreciated" at the moment we seek to share it (Benjamin, 1936, P. 423). A picture may be worth a thousand words, yet, just as some things are beyond words, Benjamin suggests that some instances are also beyond pictures and hasty interactions. To learn from life we have to be there, 'all in' with the moment. In real school courses we can't just flutter (or Twitter) away from the material and never come back; likewise, wonderful glimpses of nature are irreducible to mere snapshots for other Facebook users to rifle through at their leisure.

Finally, nature's spectacle is often itself; nothing special, just nature being natural. Benjamin sensed this; he reminded the reader that we have to be there to really 'get' what an artist strives to explain visually about the natural environment. (In this sense emotional connections become a wonderful artistic thematic; we all feel human emotions and need only a flower or mountain or fish to strike a chord in our hearts.) Benjamin summarizes the wonders of nature as follows:

"We define the aura of the latter as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be. If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon to a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of these mountains, or that branch. This image makes it easy to comprehend the social bases of the contemporary decay of the aura...the desire of contemporary masses to bring things "closer" spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction...Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction." (Benjamin, 1936, P. 424)

It helps to remember that representations merely point us to authentic experience. Likewise, when we love the feeling and appearance of something it's easy to get too close and destroy the distance between ourselves as subject and it as object. Rainbows are not graspable to the touch; a lifetime of study in no way guarantees mastery of a topic. To appreciate something of interest, be it the fish in a lake or the intricacies of a school of thought, requires a headlong immersion with the material and concurrent possibility of failing the course. AU provides this brimming potential for academic experience in a way that merely sifting through the webosphere only hints at.

Yet, as students and life-artists, we must remember that the value we attain from our education depends in great part on us alone. If we expect education to magically alter our lives we may be disappointed. Baudrillard hinted at this when addressing post-modern disenchantment: "one can live with the idea of distorted truth. But their metaphysical despair came from the idea that the image didn't conceal anything at all." (Baudrillard, online) It's up to us to find meaning in whatever lies in front of us; it won't always appear on its own. Camera or no, the mind is where our imagination brings the world to life.

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Jason Hazel-rah Sullivan is a Masters of Integrated Studies student who loves engaging in discourse while working in the sunny orchards and forests of the Okanagan.

One of the things that I hope The Voice Magazine does is make students take another look at the world around them and question their assumptions. As post-secondary students, the art of critical and higher thinking is something we're supposedly striving for, beyond just getting the paper that lets us get the job. Enter The Fly on the Wall series. While a couple of instalments were mentioned by students, this one from September had the most mentions.

A Complicated Holiday

Carla Knipe



This holiday season will be unlike any other I've experienced. You see, my Mom passed away suddenly just after Thanksgiving. The weeks that followed were a whirlwind for me; travelling to my hometown in rural British Columbia, funeral planning, making sure my Dad was doing okay and had some support, and also trying to navigate and support my young son through the experience of losing the only grandma he knew. I pushed my needs down the list, which goes against all the advice out there on handling grief, but "keeping calm and carrying on" has been a coping mechanism. I felt I didn't have much of a choice because moms don't have the luxury of completely falling apart. My only choice, I felt, was to keep my routine of going to work every day, running a household and co-ordinating a busy family schedule because others were relying on me. My university studies, however, became a casualty of the trauma of losing my mother. I've tried many times to sit down to study but, every time, I found I could not. I have often told myself during the past couple of months that, on the whole, I've been doing okay—not out of arrogance, but out of a combined sense of self-reassurance and self-soothing.

Throughout the process of dealing with loss, the writer in me has sought out comforting words to try to articulate these most difficult of feelings, but words fail more often than not. I've looked at web pages—of which there are hundreds—and searched for books at the public library on how to grieve. I've discovered that the topic is written from any perspective imaginable, but right now I feel all of the perspectives come up short and feel so empty because their grief is not mine. But a wise friend said something that really resonated with me. She said that the experience of losing a loved one makes people part of a club, one that everyone gets admitted to at some point, but it is secret because hardly anyone openly talks about belonging to it. This isn't only true about death; the same can be said for any sort of loss, be it health issues, unemployment or painful family relationships.

Of course, now the holiday season comes into play. Normally, I really enjoy the rituals of baking and decorating and writing out cards while accompanied by a soundtrack of holiday tunes. However, I find that, this year, instead of these activities energizing me they are completely draining. This has been the biggest surprise about how things have changed.

The problem with dealing with loss at this time of year is that everything is focussed outward—the light displays, the parties, seeking out all those perfect presents, and the emphasis on being close to loved ones. No one seems

to quite know what to do with the members of the secret club, especially the "new recruits", who have only recently lost someone who was an integral part of their celebrations. Dealing with loss is such an intimate, individual process; so it is easy for those who are grieving to feel isolated instead of connected, especially when everyone else appears so merry. This aspect of the holidays tends to get glossed over in the midst of all the hustle and bustle. The unwritten rule is no one is really allowed to speak of difficult things in case the magic gets ruined for everyone else. Yes, I've read all tips on surviving the holidays, ones that include lighting a candle in memory of the loved one, setting a place at the table for them, and even talking to them out loud as if they were in the room. But right now, all these things just don't feel right. Granted, they might at some point, but right now, nothing seems to fit, and I am not prepared for feeling this way or know how I should best react.

When I paid attention to how drained I was, I realized that my lack of energy was a message my inner self was sending me, telling me what it needed. It was saying that I needed to take some time to reflect and absorb everything that had recently happened. Traditionally, this is what New Year's is for, but once I understood this message, I allowed myself to let go of the external pressure. I knew it wouldn't be fair to my husband and son to cancel our celebrations altogether, but I realized that, this year, I needed a break from the glitter and fancy wrapping that the holidays tend to be packaged in. I needed to downsize the scale and scope of everything. I realized that simplifying would give my soul the chance to do what it needed. As a result, at least for this year's holiday season, I have chosen not to spend time in chaotic shopping malls, and I've let go of the need to purchase a gift for everyone. My shortbread will be store-bought this year, instead of homemade, and my decorations will be kept to a minimum. I have given myself permission to just sit quietly with a cup of tea and a film on Netflix if I feel if that is what I need at that moment. Permission to not go out to social events where I don't feel comfortable—and that choice is truly okay.

I hope that others feel the courage to do the same sort of holiday downsizing, even if they aren't going through the pain of grief right now. I think taking a step back from time to time and celebrating what is truly important in a simple way is healthy. And I say a special message to **you**, the fellow members of the secret club, the ones who have also recently lost a loved one, I truly hope you can summon the strength you need to get through this difficult time. My wish for you, whose feelings of grief and loss are so raw and new and foreign, is to not feel the need to bow to the pressures of the "must do" and "ought to" lists, but to do what only you feel you truly want to do, not what you feel obligated to do. My wish for *anyone* who is going through any sort of a difficult time right now is that they can give themselves the gift of treating themselves gently and, perhaps most importantly, to allow themselves to feel whatever emotions bubble up to the surface—even if those feelings turn out to be complicated and bewildering—and especially if they go against the grain of what society dictates that people *should* feel this time of year.

For many, this holiday season will not be completely joyful. But I hope in the midst of the pain, they can still feel loved and, despite the difficult emotions of loss, they can find a measure of peace.

Carla is an AU student majoring in English. She welcomes comments and discussion on her Twitter feed, @LunchBuster.

You probably still remember this one, as it just came out in the second week of December. I still felt it deserved its place here in the Best Of issue. As AU students, we all understand, rationally, how juggling life with studies can be a difficult thing. But when I get writing that helps us to understand what it can mean emotionally, and goes on to give the benefit of how to get through that experience to the rest of us, that's something that deserves to be here.

Isolation

Deanna Roney



One of the hardest things that I have found I have had to deal with as a distance-learning student is the feeling of isolation. When you attend a traditional university you are surrounded by your peers—like-minded people taking the same courses you are. I live in a small community and, while I am able to find people to discuss ideas with it, is hard to find the same sense of community; to find people to lean on when you are struggling and who can help answer some questions, or clarify some schoolwork.

I have a fantastic support system around me, and while, most of the time, I would not change a thing about my form of schooling there are days when the feeling of isolation can become crippling. What does a person do to overcome this feeling, to overpower it and move on with the course? Sometimes it takes time away and sometimes you just have to power through. I have found a sense of community within the AU Facebook group and on the AUSU student forums, though answers tend to take time, and it is just not the same as in-person interactions. I suppose this is the path we all choose when we decided to pursue our education at AU. It is likely a feeling we all get from time to time, possibly even at a traditional bricks & mortar university.

Something which I think contributes to the isolation is that friends and acquaintances sometimes do not understand why you cannot always make the time to go out. When you go away to school everyone knows you are working hard towards your degree/diploma/certificate. When you do not leave town to attend school, when you are able to do so from your home, the work you put in becomes invisible. About a year ago I quit my job to focus on my school full-time, and to help with the bookwork end of my husband's work. Yesterday I was asked if I was keeping busy being my husband's secretary, while the question was innocent, and not intended to be judgemental, it can be difficult not to take it that way. Though I do keep busy, it is through tending to the paperwork of the business, burying myself in my schoolwork, and looking ahead to my potential work post-graduation.

There is an inherent lack of understanding about distance education and there is a question I get frequently: you're not done yet? The question in itself is not meant in a hurtful way, yet it demeans my work, my time, and the sacrifices I have made in order to be completing my degree. These questions can cause self-doubt and with self-doubt comes the dreaded feeling of being alone, being isolated. In order to move beyond the negative feelings usually means surrounding myself with people who understand, talking to my husband, my parents, or simply cutting myself some slack and just being with friends and forgetting about the entire situation.

Ultimately it does not matter if people do not understand, or question the way I am living my life; the only thing that matters is that I have the support of those around me, and that I am following my heart. Sometimes this can be a difficult concept to embody, but I feel it is a very important one. And one that is reiterated to me by those that know; those that understand; and those who are affected by my choices.

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

This one, from July, resonated so much with students that it brought in a letter to the Editor. I don't get many of those, so when I do, I take notice. Also mentioned by students, I think this one is popular because it touches on what so many of us have experienced with our studies at AU. And the idea that we're not alone, even if it's just in our alone-ness, can be a reassuring one.



Dear
Barb

Barbara Godin

Taking a Gamble

Dear Barb:

I will be graduating college shortly with an engineering degree and I have already received a job offer, which I accepted. The problem is that I have received a second job offer and the pay is better than the job I already accepted. I am not sure what to do. The job that I accepted is a great place to work and they have gone out of their way to make me feel comfortable, as I have already been working part-time while finishing school. The job offer from the other factory includes substantially better wages, but there is not as much room for progress. I am not sure if I should accept the better offer to get the experience and then leave in a few years, or stay where I'm at since there is plenty of room for progress here. I am so confused! Dan

Hi Dan:

Good for you, two job offers! As you know the decision is ultimately up to you. However, since you have accepted a job offer and are already working there, you may want to consider whether you want to burn that bridge. You said there is room for advancement at your present position, however if you accept the other offer and leave they may not be receptive to you returning at a later date. My advice is to stay where you are, as you most likely will excel beyond where you would at the other position due to the limited growth potential. Good luck, Dan and thanks for writing.

Dear Barb:

My wife and I have been married five years. We occasionally go to casinos but gambling has never become a problem until recently. My wife signed up for online gambling and she is gambling hundreds of dollars a week. She did not tell me about this and I only discovered it when I saw it on our credit card statement. My wife usually takes care of the bills so I don't see our credit card statements, but when I noticed a large payment to our Visa card I went online and saw the statement. I was shocked! I confronted my wife and she was kind of sheepish and said she thought it would be fun. Apparently she didn't realize how difficult it would be to stop the automatic payments from coming off the credit card. She says she is trying to get hold of the person in charge to stop the payments. I checked through previous statements and realized she has been doing this for at least six months. I am wondering if she may have a problem and if I should get her into some sort of group or something, as we really can't afford this to go on much longer. Thanks, Ben

Hi Ben:

I think the scenario you are describing is all too common with the proliferation of casinos in every community and online. It does sound like your wife has a problem as she has been hiding her gambling from you, so she obviously knows she is out of control. She may have every intention of stopping, but as with all addictions, it's not that easy. It would be a good idea to contact the Gamblers Anonymous chapter in your area and they will be able to direct you to the appropriate facilities, whether it is a support group, a 12 step program or individual counselling. Thanks for your question Ben.

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.

A student choice, Dear Barb deals with all sorts of issues, just as we have all sorts of students. This one was chosen because of how these issues are so different from what is normally seen in advice columns.

Weird Canada

NUDE HIKING IN JANUARY

POLICE IN COQUITLAM, BRITISH COLUMBIA, ARE STILL SEARCHING FOR A YOUNG WHITE MALE, SPOTTED THREE TIMES IN JANUARY HIKING IN NOTHING BUT A BACKPACK AND EARBUDS.

BUT WITH TYPICAL CANADIAN GOOD MANNERS, WHEN PEOPLE APPROACH HE HIDES BEHIND A TREE.



WRITTEN BY WANDA WATERMAN

This one is another of my personal favorites. From April (of course) I wish I knew the tune.



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Happy 2016

from the
Athabasca University Students' Union!

Tweet your New Year's Resolution for a chance to Win a Prize!

Tweet your **2016 New Year's Resolution** using the hashtag [#AUSUResolutions](#) between **Jan 8 – Jan 15, 2016** for a chance to win a prize pack including a **\$25 gift card** to a store of your choice!

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Email any questions to services@ausu.org.

#AUSUResolutions



Council Meeting



Our next AUSU Council meeting is January 14, 2016 at 4:30pm MST, held by teleconference. All members are welcome! To attend, RSVP to admin@ausu.org.

IMPORTANT DATES

- **Jan 10:** Deadline to register in a course starting Feb 1
- **Jan 14:** AUSU Council Meeting
- **Jan 15:** Deadline for exams for Dec 31 course end dates
- **Jan 15:** February degree requirements deadline
- **Jan 29:** February course extension deadline
- **Feb 10:** Deadline to register in a course starting Mar 1
- **Feb 10:** Call for Nominations for 2016 General Election

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