

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 24 Issue 22 2016-06-03

Meeting the Minds

Talking with Dr. Tony Simmons

The (Literally) Long Road Ahead

Parallels from Graduation to Convocation

From Where I Sit

Not Sure

Plus:

Meeting up with the Minds We Meet

Interview: AVP of Student Services

and much more!



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



We love to hear from you! Send your questions and comments to voice@voicemagazine.org, and please indicate if we may publish your letter.

Hey! Did you know the Voice Magazine has a [Facebook page](#)?

No kidding! We also do the [twitter](#) thing once in a while if you're into that.

EDITORIAL

Skip the Groove

Karl Low



I'm quite happy with the issue this week. We received two AU interviews, one with the Associate Vice President of Student and Academic Services, Dr. Alain May, and the other with an Assistant Professor in Sociology and Labour Studies, Dr. Tony Simmons. Both are solid interviews, and after some hemming and hawing, I decided both deserved a spot in this week's magazine. What's interesting is that each interview touches on what it is to become an academic, how a person goes about that, and why it might not be as difficult as you think, yet they do it from two completely different points of view. I think, in the end, that's why I chose to run them both. I couldn't resist the compare and contrast between them.

Not to be outdone, we also have an article from our own student interviewer, as she reflects on what it has been like doing almost two years (really? Has it been that long?) worth of interviews of students from across the country and even from places around the globe. It's a testament to AU students how even though we choose to work isolated from each other for our various reasons, so many of us are still willing to share themselves to help build this community of students. I'm amazed that the column has been able to find so many willing participants, or that it seems like such a short time has gone by

since the initial discussions to start the column came about.

I guess when you get into a groove, time can run by so quickly. At each step or task you already know what is next so you just move from one to the next to the next and before you know it, the day, the week, the month, the year is done. I can hardly imagine how fast time must fly for those people who managed to find themselves a 20-year career in a single firm and industry. I think that's part of why, as we age, time seems to move faster. We've gained more experience, and more experience means there are more grooves we can fall into.

But part of what a university education is supposed to provide us is the ability to reflect, to look at things from new angles, all of which help to make sure that we're not just following the groove. In that way, education can make your life seem longer, as it enables us to see beyond the groove. To look at what's gone before and be able to take new insights from it. This week's "From Where I Sit", made that particularly clear to me, as when I got to the end of it, I had to pause to consider the point Hazel had made and how it applies to my own life. I think you'll find the same thing.

And that's just some of what's in this week's issue. Of course we have news, music reviews, advice, some humour and, with convocation on the horizon, even an article looking at the parallel journey from home to Athabasca, from student to graduate.

Enjoy the read!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karl". The signature is stylized with a large, flowing 'K' and a simple 'arl'.

MEETING THE MINDS

INTERVIEWS with AU's EDUCATORS



The Perils of Theoretical Pluralism

The following is an interview with Dr. Tony Simmons, a self-defined Hysterical Materialist. Dr. Simmons is a member of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and, as his self-written AU faculty listing says, he "has pursued a troubled and an undistinguished career at Athabasca University since 1981."

What are some of your most memorable awards, positions, or acclamations?

I am going to be really honest with you. I have never had in my life any award or any acclamation. That's the God's truth. I've never received an award for anything with the possible exception of when I was younger. I used to be quite active in athletics and sports.

But, even then, I don't really recall getting anything other than a school award perhaps for track and field.

Academically, I've never won anything or distinguished myself in any way. That's the truth of it.

Do you want me to keep that question or take it out?

Put it in. It's the truth.

What were some of your childhood passions?

I am originally from Northern Ireland. We played soccer, and even though I was brought up in the Catholic community, we played cricket. We had a certain kind of apartheid in Northern Ireland back in those days. So, as a Catholic, we played Gaelic football, which you probably don't know much about over here.

I practiced Judo. I got to the level of blue belt. The other passion was what we used to call "angling", which is called fishing over here. Mostly sports and recreational fishing and things like that.

If you could instantly learn one thing in its entirety with no obstacles and no time constraints, what would that one thing be?

I should have done it when I was a kid. Because the teachers were a bit brutal, I never quite did it. What I'd like to do is to learn Latin fluently. The reason for that, of course is that it constitutes the linguistic infrastructure for all the romance languages in Europe.

French, Italian, even Romanian.

Would you like to also learn those languages, too?

It would be a lot easier. I have bits and pieces of some of those languages because, before I came to Canada, as a kid, I used to hitchhike across Western Europe. It was a lot safer to do it in those days, and I went all the way down to the tip of Spain through Germany, France, Netherlands, Luxembourg hitchhiking.

If you had omniscience, what book would you write?

I was wondering if you'd accept this as an answer: I think what I'd like to do, more than write a book, is to write an algorithm, which in a sense resolves the problem between what I call entropy and empathy.

Entropy, as you know from the second law of thermodynamics, is the fact that, within a closed system, we have to experience a degradation of available energy. Ultimately, we are going to run out of energy.

That problem is made even worse by the greater need for empathy because empathy on a global level requires greater transportation and communication.

I would like to write an algorithm which finds a solution for the need to combine growing entropy with growing empathy and do for that what Einstein did for $e=mc^2$.

Have you looked into the scientific method for approaching that? Have you actually looked at how to use a method for making the algorithm?

To a certain extent. Social scientists are not physical scientists. The concept of entropy has been imported into the social sciences to increasing degree.

For example, a book was published not too long ago called *The Empathic Civilization*, by Jeremy Rifkin. Rifkin actually discusses the problem of entropy and empathy. He doesn't go as far as searching for a kind of algorithm. That's really the implication for his work.

In economics some time ago, a Romanian economist called Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen wrote a book, *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process*. I read the book two decades ago. We are talking about the unsustainability of human life on this planet. It's a big issue.

What is your greatest purpose in life?

I'm not going to give you a trivial answer to that. I'm tempted. I think, for my purpose, to be really honest, I would have to say the acquisition of self-understanding through my relations with others.

There is a great quote from Boris Pasternak's famous book *Dr. Zhivago*. Zhivago says at one point, and I remember this quote from the book, "The soul of man is man's presence in other people."

As a social scientist, I'm deeply concerned to improve the lives of humanity in whatever modest way I can. In order to do that authentically, a person has to have acquired a certain level of self-understanding with the realization that self-understanding is not a kind of solipsistic process. You don't do it by sitting in the middle of a room by yourself. Real understanding comes from understanding your relations within the larger human context.

What is your favourite hobby?

Solo mountain backpacking. I mean like the North Boundary Trail, ten days without seeing another human being. Or the South Boundary Trail, another ten days. I'm talking about trails beginning in the Jasper area. Those are well known trails.

The reason why I like it is because it tests my limits and re-injects a sense of adventure into my life.

Tell us about one of the most memorable things that has ever happened to you.

In 2011, I got into a very serious situation while solo mountain backpacking. On the Skyline Trail, I hit very early season blizzard conditions in late August. I hadn't eaten properly the night before.

I was hyperglycaemic and hypothermic and dehydrated—without any fluid in my system. I was fortunate another hiking group came along and rescued me and incorporated me into their group.

The next year we went back and hiked the same way. The weather was a lot better.

In the last book I published in 2013, I dedicated that book to the guys who rescued me from the Notch on the Skyline Trail.

What is your book called?

It's called *Revitalizing the Classics: What Past Social Theorists Can Teach Us Today*.

Who is the one most influential person in your life?

Take a guess.

God?

[silence]

Yourself?

I don't believe in God. Sorry. You can write that down.

My wife. She has taught me humanity and empathy—the two greatest values a human being can aspire to, I think. That is the truth.

What does your ideal student look like?

I think my honest answer to that would be I don't have a template for students. I start with whoever is there. I learn from them. They maybe learn from me a bit. But, I don't have preconceptions about students.

How do you aim to stimulate student motivation in online learning environments?

A couple of ways; I find students get very motivated when they receive a fast turnaround for their work. They also appreciate it when I give detailed feedback.

I give quite detailed feedback not only on the content of their work, but on the form, which is their compositional writing skills.

Most students appreciate it, but —and you can print this—when I did look myself up one time on the "Rate My Professor" website, one student referred to me as a "grammar Nazi", but they spelled "grammar" with an *-er* at the end. I felt vindicated.

What kind of writing style do you want to see from your students?

I like students who are able to express themselves clearly—often simply: clarity, simplicity, and what I would call "parsimony". Parsimony means using the most effective way to directly express yourself without it being cumbersome, without being longwinded.

I used to send students an attachment for George Orwell's essay "The Politics of the English Language." It's a nice essay. He warns students or readers against writing in the passive voice or with multiple clauses in a single sentence. He advises them to get straight to the point.

What is your approach to giving feedback to students to help them with their learning objectives?

The feedback should be detailed, both form and content. It should be fast. Sometimes I'm even able to get assignments back within a 24-hour period. I like to do that.

Once I outline my assessment criteria, I try to reinforce it. If I find that students have learned from my previous comments that, for example, they should pay more attention to how they put the possessive pronoun—they don't put the apostrophe in the wrong place—then they get points for the fact that they paid attention (and corrected the mistake). If they continue to make the same mistakes, even though I take the trouble to outline the nature of the mistake, then they lose points.

And finally, I always insist that students have the right of reply. If they think my assessment is unfair, unjust, inaccurate, I want them to tell me. We'll discuss it in a professional manner.

What do you purport to be the role of technology and multimedia in your online environment?

I don't have a really good answer for that. I am not technologically sophisticated. In the courses I'm now developing—for example, my graduate course for MAIS—we videotaped twelve half-hour lectures—six hours of video lectures.

I also use video and audio clips from a variety of sources. I use digital readings. And for undergraduate courses, I do sometimes use automated quizzes. I do believe in the importance of mixed measures for assessment.

The more measures you use to assess someone's performance, the greater the validity and the reliability of the scores.

Canadian Education News

Scott Jacobsen



A Cooperative Education for Canadian Students

Canadian cooperative placements can give student two years of education and are appealing to Silicon Valley. These are paid placements for undergraduates with terms alternating between work and school.

According to the Matthews, these are attractive to some of the "world's most desirable companies." The largest cooperative program is at the University of Waterloo. Waterloo students were the "second most frequently hired in Silicon

Valley."

President of the Royal Bank of Canada, David McKay, said, "At Waterloo, I've seen first hand how co-op students are more demanding and curious, pushing their peers and professors to look for fresh insights and to think more broadly and creatively about problems."

Most Education Tax Credits Claimed by the Highest-earning Canadian Families

Over the last decade, the financial aid has befitted the families with higher incomes. This happened at the same time that there was "little to improve the affordability of college and university for the lowest earners."

This reflects polarization of "accessibility of postsecondary education." For example, the Registered Education Savings Plans is received more by rich families. Moreover, students graduate with more debt. Executive director at the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, Fiona Deller, said, "...mechanisms are always going to benefit those people who have extra income and pay attention to things like savings plans and education tax credits."

Quiet suffering of undergraduate students with higher debt

Post-secondary graduates are leaving their educations with tens of thousands of dollars in debt. Furthermore, those that are coming into postsecondary education have higher tuition rates now, which means burdens leaving and entering undergraduate education.

Universities and colleges are making an "attempt to lessen the load by offering financial aid" and "beefing up their mental health services." Students are having mental health problems based on the debt.

Member of University of Toronto's faculty of law, Dillon Collet, said, "We're worried about one type of debt — student debt — and we want to know how to pay it off as quickly as possible."

A native British Columbian, Scott Douglas Jacobsen is an AU undergrad and AUSU Councillor. He researches and runs In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal, and In-Sight Publishing.

Meeting up with the Minds We Meet

Barbara Lehtiniemi



Two years ago I started out on an accidental journey. That journey has taken me—virtually—across Canada from the east coast to the west, and around the world.

During this journey, I met a flautist, a saxophone player, and a woman who sings in her car. I met world-travellers, new Canadians, and people living in the same town in which they were born. I met a nurse, a librarian, and a sexuality counsellor. I met a future Olympic competitor, an aspiring writer, and a few people whose future was still wide open. And they were all AU students.

It began with an e-mail. I sent a note to *The Voice Magazine's* editor with what I thought was a brilliant* idea: a student interview series. *The Voice* at that time was running a tutor interview

series and I thought a series of student interviews would also be interesting to readers.

The editor responded promptly. Great idea, he said. Go for it.

No wait, me? I was strictly the idea person on this. I'm a writer and a student, not an interviewer. I dislike talking on the phone, my hearing is not the best, and, frankly, I'm not a people person. It would be a big challenge for me.

So I did it.

Over the next couple months, I developed a set of questions with the assistance of *The Voice Magazine's* editor. We also came up with an ad to—hopefully—entice students to volunteer for interviews. To make being interviewed sound attractive, *The Voice* offered to throw in a swag package as a reward for each interviewee.

By late summer, the hunt for students was underway. I contacted the only other AU student I knew—a friend of my son's—who agreed to be an interview guinea pig. I recruited more students through the former AUSU Forums. Nearly every student I asked for an interview said yes.

The first *Minds We Meet* student interview was published in September 2014. Since then, *The Voice Magazine* has run student interviews almost every second week. I've had the privilege of interviewing students from Nanaimo BC to Corner Brook NL. I've also interviewed an international student from Pakistan who was then living in Korea, as well as three Canadian students temporarily overseas in France, Egypt, and Australia.

Through it all, I got to enjoy what most AU students don't—interaction with other students. Speaking with dozens of AU students, I had conversations about courses, e-texts, and the challenge of balancing university

studies with everything else. We commiserated about epic fails, laughed about quirky habits, and dreamed of convocation. We connected.

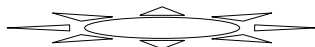
I felt grateful for each interview. Even better, each student interviewee said they enjoyed being interviewed. And *The Voice* readers reported, through the most recent readership survey, that the *Minds We Meet* series is the most-read feature.

My final student interview was published May 2016. But the *Minds We Meet* student interview series will continue to interview students like you. Every AU student has a unique story to tell. Please share yours by contacting voice@voicemagazine.org.

(* It may have been a brilliant idea but not as original as I thought. A later peek in *The Voice Magazine* archives told me that the magazine has, from time to time, featured student interviews.)

(We always like them when we can get them, but you were the first person who took up the challenge of actively seeking them out every month. For that, The Voice Magazine, and I'm sure the students, thank you. - Karl)

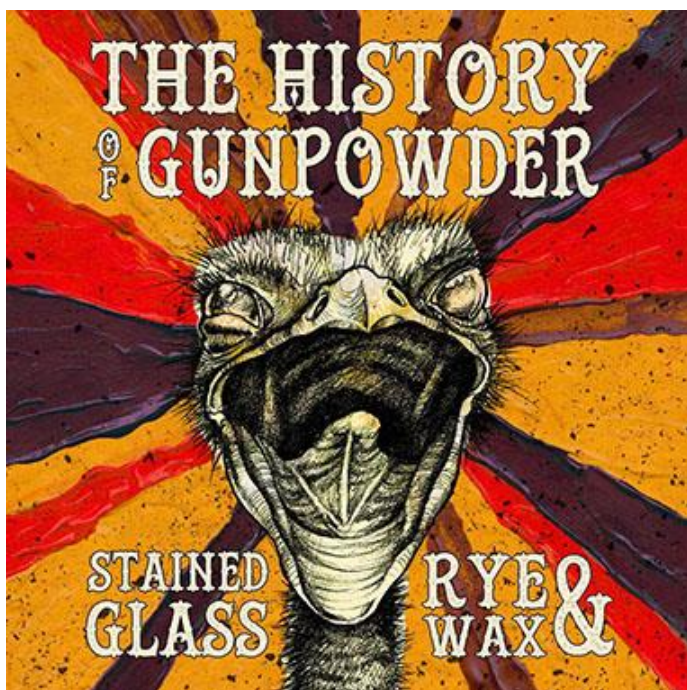
Barbara Lehtiniemi is a writer, photographer, and AU student. She lives on a windswept rural road in Eastern Ontario. Follow Barbara on twitter [@ThereGoesBarb](https://twitter.com/ThereGoesBarb)



Music Review

The History of Gunpowder

Samantha Stevens



Band: The History of Gunpowder

EP: *Stained Glass, Rye and Wax*

Released 6 May, *Stained Glass, Rye and Wax* is The History of Gunpowder's third EP. Conceived in Kerala, South India, and then polished in Vancouver and Montreal, the EP features the musical talents of seventeen extraordinarily gifted musicians. Skillfully mixed and mastered by Chris Hollywood Holmes, the recording of *Stained Glass, Rye and Wax* was spread between Greenhouse Studios and The Farm Studios in Vancouver, and Freddy's Studio in India.

The History of Gunpowder has experienced many changes over the years, with as many as twenty-five members since its founding. But, Alex James Morison, the band's front man, has remained with the band since it was founded in Vancouver, and has recently moved

the group to Montreal where they can be found playing live at many of the venues that the city offers. And with the release of *Stained Glass, Rye and Wax*, Morison and his bandmates are planning a busy summer festival season and fall tour.

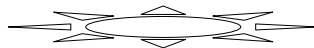
Now it is said that gunpowder changed the world. Its discovery led to the successive advent of explosive weaponry that changed warfare forever. So with a band name like The History of Gunpowder, audiences may expect something equally revolutionary.

And what a musical revolution they are in for. Considered “the fusion of sultry improvised jazz mayhem, swamp pirate rhythms, delectable funk grooves and growling blues vocals” (https://www.facebook.com/historyofgunpowder/info/?tab=page_info) the music on *Stained Glass, Rye and Wax* was given the “anything goes” treatment. The combination of vocals, drums, guitar, upright bass, electric bass, synthesizer, keyboard, trumpet, trombone, alto sax, tenor sax, baritone sax, clarinet, bass clarinet, tuba, percussion, violin, viola, and cello tends to create a cacophony of sound. Yet, from the mayhem, Morison has somehow managed to force a structure on the noise, resulting in music that pushes the boundaries of genre and musical composition.

However, audiences must pay attention to the songs to identify and appreciate the order amongst the chaos. There are even treats for those who listen closely. For example, as “The Ditch” draws to a dramatic conclusion, the attention is briefly drawn to the spoken word track, which was “retrieved by Quinn Dennehy in Montreal, speaker unknown” (<http://thehistoryofgunpowder.bandcamp.com/album/stained-glass-rye-and-wax>). Attentive listeners may hear a gentleman quoting a chorus line made famous by a Canadian singer/songwriter in 1974.

So for those who are looking for something a little different this summer, something a little unconventional created from traditional elements, why not take a chance on The History of Gunpowder’s *Stained Glass, Rye and Wax*. Though while it may not be suitable studying music, the songs on *Stained Glass, Rye and Wax* are guaranteed to have you thinking differently about music. And for a student, thinking out of the proverbial box is always a good thing.

Samantha currently uses her skills as a writer to promote independent musicians and raise awareness and support for many global, environmental, and humanitarian issues. Check out her website and blog at: <http://sstevenswriter.wix.com/writer>



Study Tips from a Semi-Anonymous Friend

Smoke and Mirrors of "Context"

There is nothing more that The Study Dude wants for you than to realize that top academics only pretend to know the meaning of "context."

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

This week's Study Dude further explores *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* by Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale.

"Context Stinks," Says Latour

When you get into graduate studies, the word "context" gets shoved down your throat. Professors prod, "What's the context?" Even more tiresome, professor responses to your questions simplify to "It depends on the context."

So what does context mean? After reading Brinkmann and Kvale, I have discovered that lazy academics use the vague word "context" to throw pebbles in your eyes. By using the all-purpose word, "context," the lazy profs can throw away the need to give meaningful detail.

When you're doing a study, you can say, "In light of the context of the study, we chose to implement such-and-such strategy." Most professors will swoon over your use of context. But a critical thinker would ask, "What *specifically* do you mean by context?"

Don't be like a lazy professor. Use specifics instead of the fuzzy "context." Brinkmann and Kvale give you the lowdown on context:

- There's a difference between the parts of something and the whole. For instance, a story's parts consist of things like paragraphs, chapters, and subplots. The whole represents the overall "context."
- Given that, in an interview, the parts include things like the interviewees, interviewers, recording objects. Define these things.
- The word, context, however, often reduces to the container of something. A pocket may contain a key, but doesn't tell you much about the key.
- Also, when you talk about context, you need to decide what points of context are most important. What about the physical setting is most important? The cultural groups? The demographics? You could go on and on forever listing stuff about context. So, where do you draw the line?
- Latour (as cited in Brinkmann and Kvale) says "context stinks" (p. 105). Latour argues that using the word context gives profs a lazy way out of discussing details.
- In reality, context has no bounds. You are person who studies at Athabasca, lives on earth, in the solar system, and in the universe; who once might have eaten Greek pizza, Asian fried bees, or Mama's bratwurst, etc. You could go on forever about "context," so define specifically what you mean by "context." Give your context meaning.

The Seven Stages of Interviews

Brinkmann and Kvale lay out the seven stages of interviews. They also cite the philosopher Bourdieu on his take of the seven stages of interviews.

Just to sidetrack, let me say that Bourdieu sucks at writing. For instance, take this sentence about one of the stages of interviews according to Bourdieu (as cited in Brinkmann and Kvale):

Understood in this way, conversational analysis ... reads in each discourse not solely the contingent structure of the interaction as a transaction, but also the invisible structures that organize it ... [it] avoids reducing ... as in so many 'tape recorder sociologies,' and knows how to read in their words the structure of the objective relations, present and past, between their trajectory and the structure of the educational establishments they attended, and through this, the whole structure and history of the teaching system expressed there." (p. 130)

But what does that mean?

Well, it took me some time to figure it out. I reworded his sentence as such: "Discourse is contingent on not just interviews, but on abstract things like our education and educational systems." Go ahead and try interpreting Bourdieu in your own clearest words. See? Not easy. Steven Pinker and Helen Sword, authors advocating for clear writing, might bitch-slap Bourdieu for trying to sound like the "structure" he-man.

Brinkmann and Kvale outline the seven stages of interviews and include Bourdieu's take.

The seven stages of interviews consist of (1) thematizing, (2) designing, (3) interviewing, (4) transcribing, (5) analyzing, (6) verifying, and (7) reporting.

- Thematizing addresses the purpose and theme of your interview. (Theme means "topic." As for Bourdieu's take on thematizing, he says to know your topic.
- Designing involves planning what knowledge you want to gain and what ethical issues you might need to address. For Bourdieu, use nonviolent communication by, for instance, choosing respondents that you already know and trust.
- While interviewing, you should refer to an interview guide and capture the knowledge you want to gain. Bourdieu says to do a scientific interview that allows you to gain knowledge.
- Transcribe to turn the oral word into written text. Bourdieu claims it's normal to lose meaning when transcribing.
- Choose your analysis technique. Bourdieu's view on analysis is that discourse is not just contingent on the interview, but abstract things like our education and education system.
- Verify your interview findings. But Bourdieu suggests that if you control the interview, your writing will show it.
- Report your findings in a journal article or a book or other media. Bourdieu says you must provide commentary on interviews, which is no easy task.

Interview Themes

Putting a theme—in other words, a topic—to interviews demands some prep work.

When I did a podcast on study tips, I interviewed authors. First, I would read the author's book in its entirety, taking notes in the margins. Then, I would prescript roughly forty-five minutes of questions. Lastly, I would practice the interviews three times, speaking into a microphone while wearing headphones. I even highlighted every word I intended to stress in the actual interview.

On my last iTunes interview, I didn't do much prep. Instead of practicing three times and highlighting words to stress, I winged it. During the live interview, I stumbled over every sentence. I sucked so badly that I never heard from the interviewee again.

Don't be this fool. Plan out your interview theme (and design). Brinkmann and Kvale will show you how to thematize your interview:

- The theme should answer the "why" of your purpose.
- The theme should answer what the topic is about.
- The theme should answer how you are going to approach the interview, including what theories, interview techniques, and analysis techniques you might choose.
- Some possible answers to the "why" of your interview include interviewing to (1) learn about the experiences of the subject, (2) gain knowledge of a social event, (3) look at life histories, (4) study

ideologies present in the interviewee's responses, (5) explore or test a hypothesis, (6) describe the interviewee's world, or (7) gain background material for practical or theoretical works.

- A handful of approaches to interviews include (1) a Carl Roger's lens, which could look at the interviewee's present-day experiences and feelings about your theme, (2) a Freudian lens, which could look at family history and emotions, or (3) a Skinner lens, which could look at behaviour, rewards, and behavioural consequences. [I noticed that learning theory in the education department deals heavily with behavioral theory.]
- Interviews can lead to theories.

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

Brinkman, Svend, & Kvale, Steinar. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Los Angeles: Sage.



The Mindful Bard Invocations

Wanda Waterman



Album: *Invocations*

Artist: Nat Birchall

"I'd like to point out to people the divine in a musical language that transcends words. I want to speak to their souls."

- John Coltrane

Discovering Nat Birchall's music is like finally meeting a reclusive neighbor and happily discovering that he's a warm-hearted, eccentric genius very much worth getting to know. One of Britain's hidden treasures, Birchall has a small but slavish cult following (iconic BBC musical pundit Gilles Peterson is a fan), and if you just have a listen you'll know why at once: a songbird with an ear ever cocked toward Paradise, Birchall uses the tenor and soprano sax to bring glad tidings of a transcendent world to our jaded ears.

In the title track, bassist Tim Fairhall provides an introductory solo as delicate and whimsical as a haiku, and then, just as in *A Love Supreme*, the cymbals slowly wash in, followed by Birchall's saxophone prayer, richly reverent, dancing with wonder, lifting its voice in praise.

Then it's almost as if an answer comes: Johnny Hunter starts to really swing on the drums as the piano dishes up luscious jazz chords and odd rhythms that the bass somehow manages to echo from time to time. The sound then becomes rhapsodic, and free jazz begins to emerge. But nothing ever flies off the rails; there's a profound integrity to this music that keeps it ever in balance.

These tracks sound so polished and authentically *jazz* that it's hard to believe that Birchall came to jazz by way of Jamaican dub, or that he's also been known to mesh jazz with both hip-hop and Turkish folk music.

When Nat Birchall began listening seriously to music in the early seventies it was to Jamaican dub music; the experience launched a lifelong fascination with how musicians and instruments worked together to create aural beauty and meaning. Not surprisingly, his first introduction to jazz came with John Coltrane's album, *Blue Train*. Soon afterward, a chance encounter with an aged alto saxophone gave him an almost mystical epiphany that compelled him to start taking lessons.

That's right—*lessons*. No conservatory of music. No scholarship to Juilliard. The man that Gilles Peterson calls one of the best musicians in the UK is largely self-taught.

His compositions, playing, accompaniment, and worldview are all reminiscent of John Coltrane, another saxophone player with an otherworldly bent. His discography boasts a host of albums with deeply spiritual concepts and titles (e.g. *Akhenaten, Guiding Spirit, and Sacred Dimension*), and yet we find little published information about his actual spiritual practice. It appears that his spiritual practice is, as it was with Coltrane, the music itself. Praise be.

Invocations manifests six of the Mindful Bard's criteria for music well worth a listen.

- It's authentic, original, and delightful.
- It provides respite from a sick and cruel 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 makes me want to be a better artist.
- It makes me appreciate that life is a complex and rare phenomena, making living a unique opportunity.

Wanda also writes the blog *The Mindful Bard: The Care and Feeding of the Creative Self*.

Women of Interest

Julie Payette was born in Montreal, Quebec, October 20, 1963. Payette is an engineer and was chosen as an astronaut in 1992 from a pool of 5330 applicants. She obtained her commercial pilot license, studied Russian, and logged 120 hours on board a reduced gravity aircraft in preparation for her 1999 space mission. Julie Payette was also a pianist and has sung with the Montreal Symphonic Orchestra, the Piacere Vocale in Switzerland, and the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra in Toronto. In 2010, Julie was appointed as an Officer of the Order of Canada and has also received honorary doctorates from the University of Alberta in 2006, and the University of British Columbia in 2010. In 2011 the Julie Payette Public School in Whitby was named in her honor.

Additional information about Julie Payette's life and accomplishments may be found at the following websites:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julie_Payette

<http://www.asc-csa.gc.ca/eng/astronauts/biopayette.asp>

compiled by Barb Godin

The (Literally) Long Road Ahead

Deanna Roney



From where I'm writing, Athabasca, Alberta, is 12 hours away, or 1,174 km. The days are counting down to when I will be making this long journey to Athabasca University. I will be taking my first steps on campus, not nervous as a new student, not wondering what campus life will be like, or looking for the coffee shop I am going to become a regular at. No, I am going to walk onto campus the day (before) I receive my degree. I will take my first steps onto campus knowing I have completed years of work to get here. This is a unique experience for AU students.

The path to AU will be a long one, a day's travel, though it mimics, in a sense, the journey with AU. The journey to the completion of my degree. There will be road blocks along the way making the process longer. At times I will be

uncomfortable, and at times it will be stressful and it will feel like there are too many things happening at the same time. But, like the journey to my degree, the road journey is going to end with a feeling of satisfaction, exhaustion, and pride.

There were days when I wondered if this drive was going to be worth it. Though I know many are making further journeys than I to get there. I wondered if I was being silly in making this trip to spend a few moments on stage to be handed my degree. But, it is about more than that. It is stepping foot onto campus, to see the buildings, the bricks, the mortar, the *library*. Being able to touch these, to see them, will solidify them in my mind. It will make the whole process feel complete.

I finished my degree a couple months ago. And, it seemed, somehow, anticlimactic. There was something that didn't feel finished, it seemed to just—end. I still feel like a student, even though I have not written an essay in months. There is something about going to the small town of Athabasca and being handed the long sought after piece of paper while wearing a gown that will underline that this is real. I have completed my BA. I am graduating. Being able to meet other students who are experiencing similar things, to be able to put faces to names of students I have chatted with online, to see professors and shake their hands. To be able to chat face to face with people who have had more of an impact on my life than they will ever likely know. The journey to AU to graduate is about more than the moment on stage to receive the degree, it is about the community coming together from far reaches and celebrating a common goal, a common accomplishment.

This journey to AU to receive my degree is going to be an incredible experience (I am sure). I am looking forward to being there, to seeing everyone, and to finally holding that paper in my hand. This pilgrimage to AU will put the exclamation mark on my completion. And, I hope, it will help to make the completion of the degree feel real, exciting, and climatic.

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

Interview with the Associate Vice President Student and Academic Services

Scott Jacobsen



Dr. Alain May is the Associate Vice President of Student and Academic Services for Athabasca University. She was kind enough to take some time from her busy schedule so that The Voice Magazine could bring you this interview. This week, we look at her background, how she became the Associate Vice President, and what that means.

You've earned a BSc in Computing Science and an MBA from the University of Alberta, and later a PhD in Business (MIS) from the University of Calgary. What did these credentials

teach you?

Certainly, content was an important part of what I took away from my degrees—the theory and understanding of new fields.

In my undergrad, I started in pre-med but realized, when I couldn't stay in the dissection lab for more than ten minutes without running out to breathe, that pre-med was not for me. I didn't know what to do at that point, a feeling which I'm sure many students can relate to. My friends told me, "You're logical. You'll be good at computing science." I didn't know much about the field at all, but took a couple of courses and enjoyed them. So, I went into the field without much knowledge of it and, therefore, content was critical to my undergraduate education.

For the MBA, I started it soon after undergraduate graduation. I anticipated that I would be involved in software design mostly for businesses. So, I felt like I needed to understand business better to be able to design software in that context.

The PhD was different. Theory was important, of course. However, what was most influential for me was that it introduced me to different philosophical perspectives. At the start of my degree, I viewed the world from a distinctly positive perspective. The PhD altered how I thought about the world.

Overall, all of the degrees also helped me learn more about setting and achieving goals. You start out knowing that getting the degree is going to take a long time. Sometimes, you don't even trust that you can achieve that goal. I did the first year of my MBA part-time, while I was working full-time. I also had two babies during that time. Learning to stick with goals and finding ways to achieve them -- even when life is happening around you -- was an important part of my education.

Following that, you were a supervisor for the Technical Development Group for ACT Computer Services, and a senior product specialist for JDA Software. What skills and talents developed from these positions? How did they feed into decisions to join the academic world such as at AU?

I certainly think that the position coming right out of school helped me to learn to apply the theory and practice I'd learned at school. It was one thing to learn how to program when you only had to make it work well enough for the professor to grade your program. (Laughs) It was another for me to learn to build it for clients who needed to use the software day-in/day-out. It mattered that the program worked in a more full-featured way. It mattered that the software was easy to use. So taking all of that theory that I learned and applying it for real clients was an important part of what I learned in that first job.

Learning how to apply the theory and practice in different contexts was also important. In the Technical Development Group at ACT, I developed decision support systems. At JDA Software, I worked on an enterprise system for retail. I didn't go into either role with experience in those contexts so learning those environments was really important.

Also, learning to work as part of a team; that wasn't an important part of what we did in our university program at that time. So, learning to work as part of a team, and later learning to lead teams as I went through my career, were important skills to develop.

These roles were critical in my decision to go into academic life. I developed software for 13 or 14 years. I worked in large software projects with good, strong developers and implementers. Even so, we had these projects that failed at some point. Everybody started out with good intentions and good skills but there was something holding us back from delivering in the way that we really wanted to. And so I was really interested in why. That was a big part of the reason that I decided to seek my PhD.

You have been part of the AU community since January 2006 through a broad suite of positions. What tasks and responsibilities come with those? And how does one target these positions to acquire them?

It's an interesting question. The professorial role is teaching, research, and service. So, teaching at AU is about creating quality courses, being that frontline person who works with students in an ongoing way in some courses, in others, working with the tutors and academic experts to make sure there is strong academic support. My area was Management Information Systems in the Faculty of Business. Research at AU is about 40% of your time.

Also, there's service. Universities are collegial governance institutions. So, your participation in committees, in the life of the university, is really important. All three are important parts of the professorial role.

I took on the roles of associate dean and MBA program director after my research and study leave in 2013. As the associate dean, an important responsibility was working on AACSB accreditation for the Faculty of Business. The program director role was about working with the program faculty and the dean to set academic direction for the program as well as working with program students.

In the Associate Vice President (AVP) role, I am a member of the executive team with overall responsibility for student and academic services. I have a variety of teams: Office of the Registrar, Learner Support Services, Centre for Learning Accreditation, Library and Scholarly Resources, Student and Academic Services Web Unit, AU Press, and Learning Services Tutorial. We have also added Learning Resources, which wasn't initially in the portfolio. The responsibility in this unit is the distribution of learning resources to students. That covers the first part of the question.

The second one is interesting to me. I have to say that I'm not sure I necessarily targeted these positions in the way that maybe you mean. In my career, I have tended to follow my interests. So, for example, if we look at the accreditation piece, when I first came into the institution in 2006, there was a call in the Faculty of Business for somebody to join the accreditation committee. I thought to myself, "Wow! This would be a great opportunity to learn the ins and outs of the faculty because the accreditation committee has to look at many aspects of the faculty - learning objectives and outcomes, how we serve students, our faculty and faculty processes, our programs and courses, etc." So, this would be a great opportunity for me to get that broad vision of the institution and this faculty that I've joined. I followed that interest, and it became something that I was really committed to. I appreciated the accreditation's focus on quality, and felt like it was going to serve us well in the faculty. Out of that came the associate dean accreditation position. It wasn't that I went out necessarily targeting administration, but followed my interest and passion for that idea and out of that grew opportunities.

The AVP role that I'm currently in is a very similar thing. Through the various roles I've had -program director at the MBA, the associate dean role, and in my work with students as a professor – I became interested in, and had a passion for, student service. The connection of that to how well students can achieve their desired outcomes in online education was clear to me. So when the opportunity for an AVP of Student and Academic Services presented itself, I felt like it really connected with my interests in the institution, and I felt like I had something to contribute there. Again, I wouldn't have said that I thought to myself years ago, "Hey! I am going to be the AVP in Student and Academic Services." Rather, I followed my passion and interests.

That seems different than the standard narrative given to undergraduates. That seems to be: "You get your first two years. You get your associates. Do another two years, and you get your bachelors. Then apply for graduate school, and get grants. Then your masters. From there, you can get your PhD. Finally, you can apply for positions at this point as an adjunct, and so on, likely with low pay. After some time, if you're lucky, you may get a tenure-track position." At each stage, for at least a decade of formal post-secondary education, you have a narrative built around targeted acquisition of professional positions for a particular career path. But that's different than what you've done.

Yea! I don't know that I would hold myself up as the model people should follow, but it worked for me. There's of course also something about making some decisions along the way to seek new opportunities and new challenges. I did go do my MBA. I did go do my PhD. I took opportunities that presented themselves. I think all of those are important. But, I wouldn't say that I ever had that five- or ten-year plan that said this is exactly what my path is going to be. *I followed interests, passions, and skill-sets.*

What relates them in personal and professional interest – or is it a necessity of the career path?

It is about personal and professional interest, and I would also say that what relates them for me is an interest and passion in quality education and experience for students.

AU serves a really important role in the educational marketplace, and trying to find ways to help students in getting a quality educational experience is important. If I had to say there is a common factor among all of those roles, it is that for me.

What is the most important experience, on a personal level in a professional context, for you in each of these professional stations?

There are many. For me, it is working with students who really underscore why I do what I do. It's the student who didn't thrive in a traditional institution, but then came to AU to get her degree after having been away

from education for a while. And AU worked for her. She ended up in a great job in her chosen field because this context worked for her in ways that a traditional institution didn't.

And another particularly noteworthy one for me is a student who finished his last assignment in the hospital just before he died. Even when he found out that he had cancer, he decided his education was important to him. So, he chose to continue. Those are the stories that make me say, "This is why I do what I do." Because we make a difference for students.

It happens in smaller, less big headline ways, too. There is the student you work with who didn't get something at first, just didn't understand and, somehow in your conversation with the student, they get it. They finally understand it. Or, the student who signed up for your management information systems course knowing in his or her heart of hearts that it was never going to be a course that they were interested in, and then realized, "Wow, this is why this is important."

It is those big noteworthy, big headline, stories, but also those little ones working with them. Those are the experiences that most strike me.

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A native British Columbian, Scott Douglas Jacobsen is an AU undergrad and AUSU Councillor. He researches with various organizations and runs In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal, and In-Sight Publishing.

Student Sizzle AU's Hot Social Media Topics

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

AthaU Facebook Group

Susanne requests—and receives—help tracking down citation references. Lori seeks a used Principles of Anatomy & Physiology textbook.

Other posts include motivation, studying while pregnant, and courses CMNS 420, ENGL 200, NUTR 330, PSYC 355, and PSYC 402.

Twitter

@AthabascaU tweets: "Violin & organ music to help you study? An #AthaU tutor can show you the way: Check out <http://goo.gl/TdeVNB>."

@AthabascaUSU (AUSU) tweets: "Check out all the NEW courses at

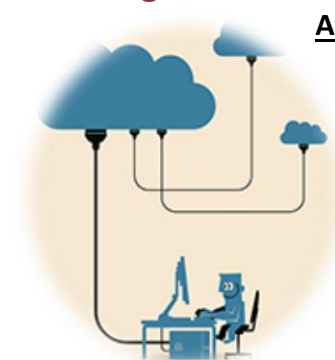
<http://lynda.com> at <http://bit.ly/1RKjwYv>! Get your FREE subscription at

<https://www.ausu.org/services/student-resources/lynda/>."

@AU Business tweets: "Because most of our students also work full-time: check out @HubSpot for tips on being a great coworker..."

Youtube

A brief introduction to lynda.com, "[Come See What You Can Learn](#)".





Not Sure

About a hundred years ago (okay, maybe more like thirty-five) I was on the executive of the village of Andrew's Chamber of Commerce. We were a small but enthusiastic group of business and like-minded people. We actively worked to help the village grow, or at the least to slow the losses. Anyone old enough to remember knows there have always been losses (think creamery, lumber yard, grain elevators, optometrist office, pharmacy, full-time RCMP detachment, et cetera). We organized events like a snowmobile poker rally.

During that time of working to make things better there was an act of public vandalism, buildings spray-painted with graffiti. I, among others, was angry, disappointed, and confused by the senselessness of willfully damaging someone else's property.

I had a platform in the media. As the organization's secretary I had an intermittent column in a couple of area newspapers to bring Chamber news to the public. Armed with the arrogance of (relative!) youth and that platform, I wrote about the crime spree. Somewhere in my tear sheets I'm sure I've still got the column.

Here's what I know. Like anyone, I was within my rights to express my opinion and outrage as long as I did it truthfully. I did. Because the perpetrators were unknown no names were ever mentioned.

What happened next shocked me. Angry letters to the editor appeared. The community was divided into those who believed it was a foolish and destructive act we shouldn't have to stand for and those who defended the act of misguided kids. Someone threatened me with the prospect of an impending call from Eddie Keen who was a fierce some and influential radio personality on CHED at the time. The RCMP was also investigating.

Luckily, soon after this backlash I was heading to a week-long retreat at Olds College with my young son. The distance was welcome. I was sick and saddened by the firestorm I'd created. I was so sure I was coming down on the side of *right*, the no-brainer response to something that happened in my town, a town I was contributing to in several positive ways.

As I sought to understand and learn from this experience I did some soul-searching. Yes, the facts of the event and the column were true. What I hadn't considered was that the guilty parties were someone's kids or grandkids. What I didn't know then, but have since seen over and over again, is that some will always defend bad behaviour rather than allow the natural, expected consequences of an action to unfold, as it should. Consequences that would (hopefully) serve as a life-altering, character building experience; the immutable universal law called cause and effect.

The good news is that I learned we are only answerable for our own actions, not those of our kids or spouse or coworkers or relatives. The bad news is that I'm less likely to take a public stand pro or con about anything that really matters. This many years later I'm not sure that was the desired outcome, from where I sit.

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



Dear
Barb

Barbara Godin

The Trouble with Great Expectations

Dear Barb:

I am in my late twenties and work full time while taking courses through AU. My parents always had high expectations for us and we all strived to meet those expectations. Throughout high school I was easily able to maintain marks in the high eighties and nineties, so my parents are expecting me to be able to maintain the same marks in university. Since they are helping to pay my tuition I feel obligated to try to meet their expectations. I was shocked when I received my some of my marks back. For the most part I am getting high sixties and low seventies. My parents are very disappointed and I feel I have let them down. I am trying my best, but with my job and other issues going on in my life, I just can't seem to do any better. I am feeling so stressed out and anxious every time I do an exam, or write a paper and it is affecting my ability to concentrate. When my parents ask me why my marks are so low I make up an excuse, and reassure them that I will try harder. This is bothering me so much that I am thinking about dropping out of school and working at Wal-Mart for the rest of my life. Do you have any advice for me, or should I just give up my hopes for higher education? Help, Kelly.

Hi Kelly:

Thanks so much for writing in, I'm sure many students can identify with your situation. It's very common for students' marks to initially

drop when they begin university. High school and university are not comparable. You are in a different place in your life, as you say, you are working full time plus dealing with all the issues of relationships, finances, and other things that are required of adults. When you were in high school, your focus was much more limited, basically school and social life, not to say that high school students don't have issues to deal with but Mom and Dad are there to lean on. You are fortunate that your parents are helping you with tuition, at least that takes some of the financial stress off you. I think you need to talk to your parents about how you are feeling and reassure them that you are trying your best. Also I would suggest you check out this AU website for resources to assist students with all aspects of University life including life, health, family, money and work: http://counselling.athabascau.ca/student_support.php

You may also need to upgrade your study skills for University, as it has been a long time since you were in high school. In the long run, education is never a waste of time.

Follow Barb on twitter @BarbGodin

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.

Weird Canada

No Duel Zone

In Canada it's illegal to challenge someone to a duel—and just as illegal to accept such a challenge.

We don't understand
what yer
bringin' us in fer,
Sheriff!

You fer challengin' him
to a duel an' him fer acceptin'.
But don't yiz worry—
Canadian prisons have
GREAT anger management
programs!



WRITTEN BY WANDA WATERMAN



This space is provided free to AUSU: The Voice does not create this content. Contact services@ausu.org with questions or comments about this page.

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Please note, the survey will ask for your AU student ID number, but this is completely optional. In order to enter for the prize draw, you must provide your student ID number and be an active AUSU member. Your survey answers will remain completely anonymous and will not be connected to your identity. Only AUSU staff will have access to the ID numbers and members list for prize qualification purposes only. If you have any questions about this, please contact AUSU at services@ausu.org.

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IMPORTANT DATES

- **June 9-11:** 2016 Convocation
- **June 10:** Deadline to register in a course starting July 1
- **June 14:** AUSU Council Meeting
- **June 15:** July degree requirements deadline
- **June 24:** Edmonton Meet & Greet
- **June 26:** In-Person AUSU Council Meeting (Edmonton)
- **June 30:** July course extension deadline

Stop by During Convocation!

AUSU would like to offer congratulations to all members who are graduating. Thank you for showing all AU undergraduates what is possible!

If you are attending convocation (**June 9-11**), make sure to stop by the **AUSU booth** to say hi and pick up some **free gifts** courtesy of your Students' Union! We will be right inside the main hall during convocation.

We also hope you enjoy the free **hot lunch** during convocation sponsored by AUSU!



AUSU Positions with CASA!

AUSU President Shawna Wasylyshyn and VP External Brandon Simmons were just in Ottawa last week for the [Canadian Alliance of Students' Associations](#) (CASA) Foundations conference.

We are pleased to announce that our executives have the following seats on the CASA Board and Committees:

Brandon Simmons	-CASA Treasurer
Shawna Wasylyshyn	-CASA Federal Policy Committee
Kim Newsome	-CASA Trades & Tech Committee

This means AUSU will have a great level of influence with CASA, which is recognized as the most relevant group for Post-secondary issues in Canada!

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