



THE VOICE

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Minds We Meet

Interviewing Students Like You!

Sail through Convocation Day

Insider Tips for a Smooth Day

Random Acts of Kindness

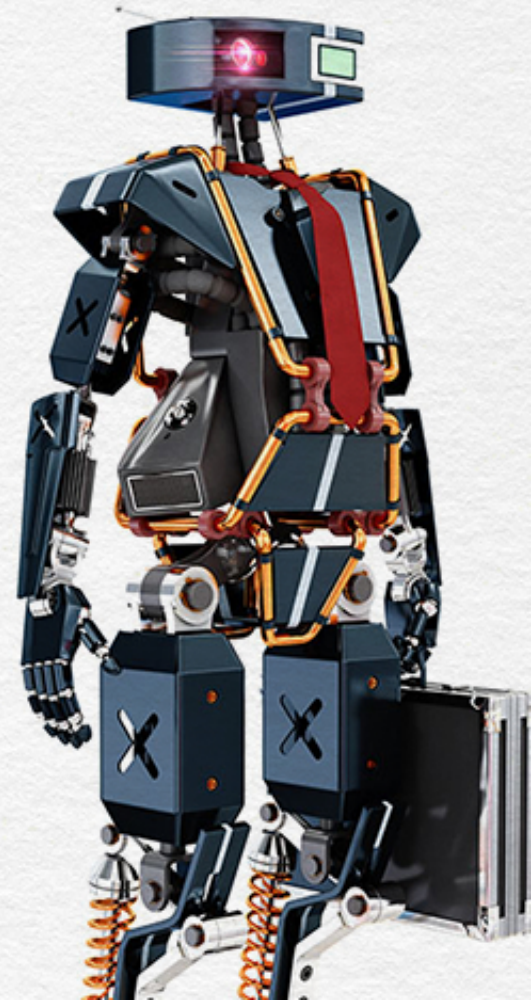
Their Enduring Power

Plus:

The Rise of AI and Job Loss

The Universal DJ

and much more!



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



We love to hear from you!
Send your questions and comments to 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 Expecting More

Karl Low



A few weeks ago, Athabasca sponsored something called the Singularity U Summit, 2019, up in Edmonton, and invited alumni and students to attend. The event was free, but you had to sign up to get access to the video feeds of what was going on at the conference.

I did so, and I attended a few sessions, but overall I came away disappointed, partly by the quality of the sessions I saw (one had a head honcho from Google come out and present, and he promptly wasted about a quarter of his presentation time getting people to draw a picture that he later had them toss as being essentially meaningless), but moreso from the idea that AthabascaU would sponsor something simply so old school in presentation and delivery.

These days you can watch and interact with people composing live music in a different country. They can seek out instant feedback from an audience as they work, and adjust what they are doing in real time, but this presentation, supposedly about the “transformative impact that technologies will have on our lives and world” was stuck firmly in the technology of a guy getting up on stage and talking into a microphone with slides playing on the wall behind him.

Slides. Not even video. And with basically zero real-time connectivity to anywhere beyond the conference hall.

Incidentally, if you're interested in viewing the conference, I just checked and the recordings of all the presentations are still available. You'll need to [log into the conference site](#) and use the “generated” password of AthabascaUSU2019 to access them.

And I was thinking about this in terms of convocation, as it's rapidly approaching. Convocation is the signature event for Athabasca University, and for the few students who attend, it absolutely should be. But why is it really the only event that AU holds for students? Most universities bring in various interesting or entertaining speakers throughout the year, and with modern video conferencing, there's no reason why AU could not do the same thing. For AU though, if you're lucky you'll be able to catch a conference with the Writer in Residence (always worth it, if you can, the people AU chooses are chosen for a reason), and perhaps a town-hall type of gathering with the AU President, but that's about it.

If the university truly wants to encourage more students, it has to start providing more offerings that will attract the type of robust, connected and engaged learners that will evangelize the university for them. I guess in that respect, the SingularityU conference was a first step, and perhaps I should be happy that they've even had that, but, in this day and age, I just expected more from a university that's attempting to bill itself as planning for 2050.

In the meantime, however, the Voice Magazine is still here, as we interview a student that AU allowed to stay on the farm while she gets her education and enjoys videogaming, give you some insider tips on how to have a smooth convocation day if you're attending, and provide a number of evocative articles to keep you thinking while you break from your studies. Be sure to check out this week's Porkpie Hat, and Wanda Waterman's article on kindness. You'll enjoy the read!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karl', with a stylized, flowing script.

MINDS WE MEET



Madison Daviduik is a twenty-one-year-old from Swan River, Manitoba. She lives with her family on a family farm and works full-time as a Supervisor for their local Aquatic Centre. She is currently enrolled into the Bachelor of Commerce – Finance program and is a self-proclaimed nerd. This is her story.

Can you give us a little bit of background information about yourself? Who are you? Where do you live, where do you come from?

I'm 21 years old and I live and was born in Swan River, Manitoba, a small town about five hours northwest of Winnipeg. I reside on a family farm with my parents and grandparents; we primarily operate with cattle and grain. I've also worked full time at the local Aquatic Centre as a Supervisor for the past five years. I'm a self-proclaimed nerd, and love all things classic rock, Tim Burton, and Nintendo.

What was it like growing up on a farm? What does your day-to-day look like when you're involved with farm life?

If I could describe it in one word: busy. There are always things to do and no day is ever the same! It could include anything from moving cows, to cleaning out trucks and tractors, filling the air seeder, running for parts or running a

combine. It really depends on what time of year it is, and sometimes it makes getting schoolwork done a challenge, but I wouldn't trade it away!

Could you describe the path that led you to AU?

I originally wanted to take a gap year out of high school, before moving onto the University of Manitoba to complete a Bachelor of Pharmacy. My school counsellors convinced me to take courses online that year, which led me to want to take my year one pre-requisites online as well. U of M doesn't offer science courses online which ended up with me taking Chemistry and Biology from Athabasca. After not being accepted into the pharmacy program (and the set of pre-requisites changing as the program was being re-designed), I needed to look at other options. I didn't want to complete another set of pre-req's and end up not getting in for another few years. After checking the programs offered at AU, I chose the Bachelor of Commerce (Finance) program. I love the program and I'm so happy I made the switch.

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

Between working and studying full time, and living on a farm, it doesn't leave much downtime! If I do have some, I like to read or play games on my Switch.

What type of games do you enjoy playing on your Switch?

So far nothing has topped *Zelda: Breath of the Wild*! It was such a well-made game, I've also played through *Super Mario Odyssey*, *Let's Go Pikachu* and *Fire Emblem Warriors*. *Super Mario Party* and *Mario Kart* have been staples as well! I can't wait for *Fire Emblem: Three Houses* and *Pokémon Sword/Shield* to come out this year.

What are your plans for this education once you finish? How does it fit in with where you want to go?

I do not plan on moving out of my town, all of my family is here, and I have no reason/desire to move. I would love to work at a bank/FCC where I could do agricultural loans! I love farm life and would like to keep some aspect of it in my career.

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

My parents always pushed me to do my best and wanted the best for me as well. I definitely learned my perseverance and determination from them.

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

I love being able to teach myself and learn at my own pace! I was always that kid in school who was done before everyone else and had to find something to do to waste time. This way I can just power through and get stuff done! The only dislike is sometimes it is hard to contact the right people when you have questions.

At what point did you waver the most about continuing your schooling?

I definitely wavered when I was not accepted into my original program. Though I'm glad I decided to change programs!

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

Biology 207 was definitely the most memorable course I have taken at AU. Being able to travel to Athabasca to do the five-day lab was such a cool experience!

Could you briefly describe BIOL 207 to students who have not yet taken it? Would you recommend the course? Was it a difficult course?

It is the second part of introductory biology and is likely going to be needed in most science programs. It builds a lot on basics from high school biology and really delved into the diversity of organisms, from big to small. I wouldn't say it's incredibly easy, but I found it easier to manage than BIOL 204, so if you can get through that, you can get through this.

Any advice for students who are about to enroll into BIOL 207?

Brush up on some diversity basics from high school biology. Prepare yourself to spend a lot of time reading. Be excited to travel to Athabasca to do the labs! Also, don't forget there are bursaries for students who go to do labs as well.

Was this your first time at AU? Could you describe the experience to students who have not had the chance to go there? Did it remind you of a "normal" university?

It was my first time visiting! Athabasca as a town itself is so quaint and peaceful. The university is nestled up in the trees on a hill and the drive through town is spectacular! Not what I expected at all. The campus actually reminds me more of my high school than any of the other universities I've visited, just due to its size and how it is laid out! Very easy to get around, but considering it is an online university. There are not many students walking around and no lecture halls, etc., so it does not seem like a typical or 'normal' university.

What was the lab like? Did it feel well organized and what experiment did you do?

I felt that it was very well organized. The instructors were very helpful and knowledgeable, and they made it fun. We had a small group, so everyone got to know each other well. We did a few small experiments to do with cell division, different fungi and spectrometry. We also dissected a pig which everyone seemed to either love or hate!

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

The only thing I think I've missed out on is the opportunity to make new friends and experience that diversity. But I definitely think it was worth it because I'm not a social person to begin with.

How do you find communications with your course tutors?

Using the student support centre isn't my favourite mode of communication. I would prefer just to be able to email my tutor directly and quickly than go through a whole process.

What's your pet peeve if you have one?

My biggest pet peeve is when people leave coffee stains on the white counters at work, or when people move my files around.

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

Tim Burton. I'd love to pick his brain about where he gets all his amazing inspiration from.

Describe the proudest moment in your life.

When I bought my Jeep, brand new, all on my own!

Could you describe one thing that distinguishes you from most other people?

I feel like there's a lot. I'm into dark humour, creepy Claymation movies, Pokémon and classic rock. Super obsessed with makeup. I also don't have a problem with helping pull a calf during calving season. Not many 21-year-old girls have the same attributes! I know I'm weird and I live by it. Not many people I know or work with would be able to guess what I'm into either! I could probably make a very long list to answer this question.

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

Not to let other people use me or walk over me. Through certain experiences I've learned my self-worth and how to speak up.

Have you travelled? Where has life taken you so far?

I've done a few road trips through the US, and one out to Athabasca through labs. All of those experiences have been amazing! It's great just to spend time with my family and make memories.

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

I'm currently in the middle of two books. *The Book of Life* by Deborah Harkness, and *Jade City* by Fonda Lee.

Could you describe the books you're reading? Would you recommend them to students?

I'm only a couple chapters into *Jade City* so I can't say much on that one! *The Book of Life* is the third book in its series. It tells the stories of vampires, witches and demons but in a very sophisticated way. It includes a lot of European history as well. I would recommend it to anyone who enjoyed the *Vampire Diaries*, *Vampire Academy*, or similar books as a teenager and would like to revisit the genre as an adult.

Brittany Daigle is 22 years old and completing her BSc in Computing Science & Information Systems with AU from Toronto, Ontario.



Sail through Convocation Day Insider Tips for a Smooth Day

Barbara Lehtiniemi



Last week, we highlighted some logistical considerations to get you to Athabasca. This week, we share a few tips to get you through your big day.

AU Convocation info.

Make sure you know where you need to be and when. The more you know, the less you'll stress! Read every page on AU's [Convocation](#) site. Pay particular attention to the [Convocation Checklist](#) page and the [Student Procedures](#) page. If you're graduating from the Faculty of Business, you'll find additional information at the [business](#)

[convocation](#) page.

AUSU info.

AU's student union also sends out helpful convocation info by email newsletter in early June. But, if your final course end date was April 30, you'll automatically get dropped off the email list. Not to worry: you can still access the newsletters from AUSU's [Newsletter Archive](#) page.

Clothing.

Gowns are not as long as you might expect. I didn't worry about what I was wearing too much for my convocation in 2018. My husband and I were embarking on a two-week trip and I didn't want to lug formal clothes around. I figured pants and casual shoes wouldn't be obvious under the gown, but photos show I was wrong. Capris and sandals would have been a better option. Also, the convocation gowns add an insulating layer. If the weather is warm, you'll sweat buckets. A lighter-weight shirt and tons of antiperspirant are good options.

Arrive early.

Once the shuttle buses arrive from Edmonton, the convocation venue gets crowded. We arrived at the AU multiplex at 9am, well before things got busy. There were no line-ups at the registration table, and we had plenty of time to browse around the display booths and meet people.

Benefit from experience.

This may be your first go-round at convocation, but the AU staff and volunteers have done this all before—many times. Everything you need to know will be explained to you. If you have any questions, just ask anyone and they'll find the answer for you.

Name tags.

You'll get a name tag to hang around your neck when you arrive. But when the volunteers put your gown on you, they'll tuck the name tag out of sight. If you don't want to be anonymous for the hour or two before the ceremony, keep your name tag on top of your gown. Otherwise, how

will anyone recognize that you were the student they were hoping to meet? Just remember to tuck the tag away for photos and before you join the procession into the ceremony.

Don't line up to pee.

There are bathroom facilities accessible from the lobby of the multiplex. But there are also bathrooms on the second level. If you encounter a line-up to the main-floor facilities, take the stairs or elevator up to the second level to access the under-used bathrooms there.

Don't go hungry.

AU advertises that food and beverages will be available for purchase onsite. If the offerings are the same as 2018, I recommend you eat a hearty breakfast, or pick up something on the way. I found the convocation offerings light—snacks, really—and expensive. A Tim Horton's breakfast sandwich or something similar would have been my better option. I was starving all afternoon. On the plus side, I enjoyed dinner at a local restaurant all the more.

Continue the celebration.

If you're looking for a nice restaurant to celebrate your convocation day, I highly recommend the 49th Street Grill. You don't even need a map to this place, as it is on 49th Street in Athabasca. The restaurant specializes in Greek fare, but the menu has plenty of other choices, including steak, ribs, pasta, and pizza. I loved this place; the meal and atmosphere provided a great wind-down to the adrenaline rush of convocation day.

Above all, pause throughout the day to drink in the experience. You don't get many days that are all about you. Savour this one!

Barbara Lehtiniemi is a writer, photographer, and AU graduate (BGS 2018.) She lives on a windswept rural road in Eastern Ontario.



Scholarship of the Week

Digging up scholarship treasure for AU students.

Scholarship name: Global Lift Equipment Scholarship

Sponsored by: Global Lift Equipment

Deadline: June 15, 2019

Potential payout: \$500

Eligibility restriction: Applicants must residents of Canada or the U.S., attending or planning to attend a post-secondary institution in Canada or the U.S. in Fall 2019, and have a GPA of 2.5 or higher.

What's required: An online application form, along with a maximum 2000-word short story, in which the main character is a piece of equipment.

Tips: Read the short story requirements carefully.

Where to get info:

www.usedforkliftcalifornia.com/used_inventory/77814/used_hyundai_forklifts_inventory_california.php



Porkpie Hat The Universal DJ

Darjeeling Jones



"Baby your mind is a radio
Got a receiver inside my head
Baby I'm tuned to your wavelength
Lemme tell you what it says:
Transmitter!
Oh! Picking up something good
Hey, radio head!
The sound...of a brand-new world"
-Talking Heads, "Radio Head"

There is a thing every good deejay understands: putting together a great mix of music is far more than just banging together some crowd-pleasing tunes. Like all worthwhile human endeavours, from architecture to cookery,

basketball to astrophysics, the act itself is a combination of two dynamic, interdependent aspects of human invention: technique and inspiration; a little magic, a little science. Music, like all art, all engineering, all the endless products of humanity, is the freezing of ideas, dreams, desires into physical, sensual formations.

Everything about bringing together a perfect set of music is a delicate balancing act. Try too hard to pander to the tastes of the crowd, and it becomes just pale, trendy, forgettable. Make it too personal and idiosyncratic, and it becomes an act of alienating, self-indulgent wankery. If it's too carefully curated, it can lack the sense of being spontaneous and inspired, not in and of the moment. Over improvisation, though, can devolve into messiness, desperation, chaos. Perhaps few deejays consciously register this, but I think most of the ones who are worth their salt know it instinctively in some sense.

By virtue of this understanding, a master mixologist can create a tray of luminous aural cocktails, served up on trays of glowing wax. The nightclub air is a blender, and she's pouring in some deep house, some fado, some acid jazz, some trip hop, some Eurodance. Sade, Massive Attack, Tom Jones, David Bowie, Serge Gainsbourg, Frank Sinatra, Daft Punk, Nine Inch Nails. Oh, she's getting cheeky now, not measuring at all, just doing it by feel, and it's turning out right.

Do it up proper, and she can consistently craft a memorable evening. Every once in a while, though, perhaps only a handful of nights in any given lifetime, it can become way more than that; a wild party of the soul. On those nights, the crowd is surging, the crowd is pulsing. It's the perfect mix of dancers: friends and lovers, poets and gypsies, boujee bohemians and charming rascals, their eyes filled with light and their hair filled with glitter. Every one of the dancers is caught up in the sorcery of this deejay now, their bodies alive with pleasure, their movements liquid and inspired.

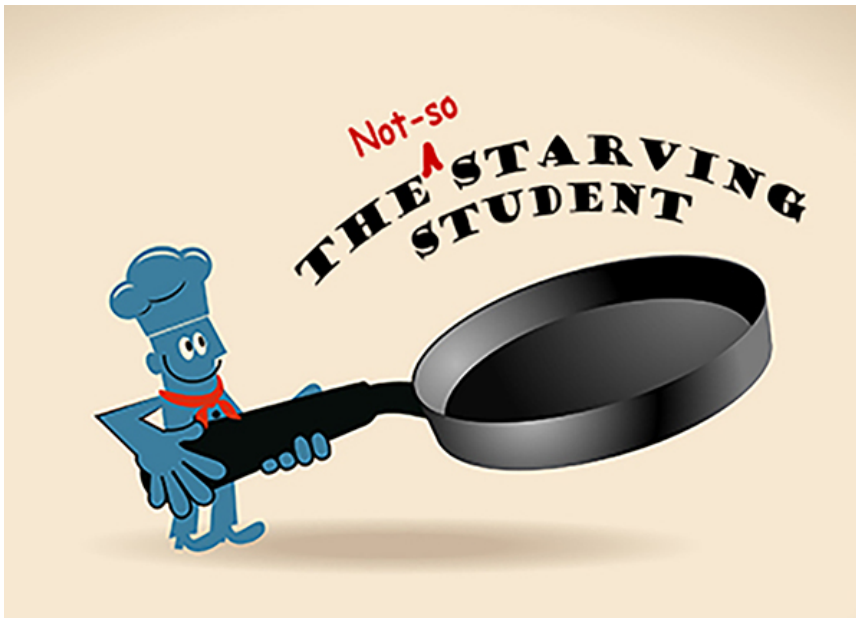
On such a night as this, music is not just music, it is the very essence of life. Have you ever felt it? It's as if there is a wondrous manifestation of universal joy in the air, delicate and translucent as some vast astral jellyfish, drifting in a crystalline solution of emotions and coloured lights, its long, wavering tendrils delicately brushing against the hearts and minds of everyone there. On

such a night as this, when a deejay is in her rarified, metaphysical realm, it hardly matters what she plays: disco, funk, free jazz, madrigals, an experimental sonata for thirteen harps and a clavinet. It is all the music of the spheres, and every note of it nourishes and replenishes the sweet marrow of the soul, as we obey its beat, and follow it home. On such a night as this, we recall the reason we were born.



The Not-So Starving Student Food Tour of Vancouver

Xin Xu



Last week, I raved about the desserts I sampled from my latest trip to Vancouver. However, it wasn't enough that I boast about the mouth-watering sweets the city had to offer, because the Vancouver food scene also offers irresistible comfort food from all over the world. Food that I couldn't wait to share with my family and friends. I had a chance to experience some of these distinct contemporary flavors from around the world.

Sura KBBQ - lunch feast

While originally having planned on going to an all-you-can-eat Korean BBQ, we came across this highly rated restaurant to try their \$15 lunch set menu. The menu featured 12 different items. I was astounded by the variety this menu offered while maintaining quality and value. For a seasoned foodie, I was impressed by the selection that awakened by taste buds.





Toshi Sushi - roasted eggplant

A friend of mine recommended the roasted eggplant option as this restaurant was one of the few that offered this item. While I have tried seafood, eel, and chicken roasted in a honey glazed sauce, roasted eggplant was foreign to me. At face value, I almost mistook the eggplant for unagi (eel). Quite unlike your traditional eggplant, this dish has no flavors of eggplant at all since the eggplant had completely absorbed the saucy glaze brushed on its surface.

Pepper Lunch - pepper beef teppan

After wandering around Richmond, window shopping for the next dining choice, we stopped at Pepper Lunch to sample their famous *teppan*, a Japanese hot plate dinner. The marinated cuts of beef was served on a scorching hot metal plate that not only cooked the beef to perfection but also kept the rice and contents of the dish warm. Within minutes, the raw beef had transformed into perfectly seared and tender bites of beef. Somehow the cast iron hot plate also cooked the rice to a crisp creating a distinct smoky flavor that is hard to forget.



Kokoro Tokyo Mazesoba - soba noodles

Another favorite this trip was a noodle joint that served colorfully topped soupless noodles with a raw egg yolk on top. At first, I was skeptical how soba noodles (usually made of buckwheat) could be flavorful. Typically, buckwheat soba noodles are similar to whole wheat noodles with a grainy texture that is difficult to fall in love with. However, after closely examining my noodles, I realized they more closely resembled udon noodles rather than soba noodles. They were elastic in texture and freshly made in-house. When I finished the noodles, the waitress also arrived with a small container of rice to mix with leftover seasoning. The seasoned rice with the noodle sauce produced a unique combination that was hard to find elsewhere.

Xin Xu is a post-graduate health-science AU student, aspiring clinician, globe-trotter, parrot-breeder and tea-connoisseur



The Enduring Power of Random Acts of Kindness

Wanda Waterman



“Remember there's no such thing as a small act of kindness. Every act creates a ripple with no logical end.”

- Scott Adams

I know I should be boycotting Facebook like my socially conscious cohorts, but it's just such a handy way to stay connected with friends and family back home and to share a little love once in a while. Even better, and as the following story attests, it can be a highly effective instrument for peace.

Last week I came across an anti-Muslim post, shared by a dear

friend we'd always called CJ. I remembered CJ as an open and tender-hearted guy, someone always ready to help a friend or a stranger. If this had been posted by someone who held intolerant views, I would have posted a gentle objection in their comments section. In all probability they would have responded insensitively and I would then have blocked them. It wouldn't have been the first time. But this was CJ.

Let me provide a bit of background here.

I grew up and spent most of my adulthood in a lovely but drug-addled rural town in southwestern Nova Scotia. During the time in question I was residing with my son and husband in a large flat at the edge of town. It was a rough area where lawn parties would often carry on to the wee hours.

So, I wasn't startled one night to hear a fight taking place out in the hall, but it was troubling to hear it going on for longer than normal, with one voice becoming ever more enraged, screaming, “It was you! I know it was you!” I climbed on a chair in the bathroom to the tiny window that looked out into the hall. There a young man lay on the floor, curled up in a fetal position, being kicked and beaten by at least five others. Blood was coming from his face.

An aside: The RCMP were now providing police services to our area, something that happens in Canada when rural areas can no longer afford to support their own police departments. In their fight against the drug trade the RCMP had adopted the conventional practice of paying local informants to report on drug sales.

This type of exchange forms an essential part of the plot in many police dramas, but what it means on the ground is a bit more sinister. A policeman once told me that the vast majority of these paid informants were the dealers' close friends and confidants, even their romantic partners. But because no one wants to believe they could be betrayed by their bosom pals or bedmates, suspicions are cast further abroad, which means that, once you get busted, any one of your customers or party pals can serve as a target for your wrath.

CJ had been caught in one such web of suspicion, and a trap had been laid. With my husband shouting at me to stay out of it, I climbed down, ran to the kitchen door, opened it, and said,

“Time to go home, boys.” The attackers flew out the door as CJ leaped up and ran into my kitchen. I remember calling the police, but by the time they came, CJ was gone.

Since then he’s called me his guardian angel, swearing he’ll never forget what I did for him. I was amazed that no one else had budged to do the same and that I received criticism for “getting involved.” What had I done? Next to nothing.

But now here was this message on his Facebook wall, and I had to say something. Rather than embarrass him by posting something on his wall, I wrote CJ a private message:

“Hey, CJ, I hope this finds you well! I just wanted to say something about the post on your page. It kind of hurts me because my husband is a Muslim and he’s a really good person. The vast majority of Muslims I meet are really good people, and we have to admit that our people have the same percentage of violent nutcases as the Muslims have. I know you’ve got a good heart and if you knew some of these people you’d love them, too.”

I saw that he’d read my message but hadn’t responded. I sadly assumed this meant he was angry with me and that despite my good opinion of him he’d turned out to be just another brick wall.

But several days later I checked his Facebook wall to see if he’d taken the hateful post down. That’s when I found this, posted on the day I’d sent my message:

“I would like to send out a heartfelt apology to my guardian angel Wanda and her husband for reminding me that I do not hate any race or religion and would like to extend that to everyone, I allowed myself to get caught up in hateful propaganda that is hurtful to so many good people. This is not me or who I am and I am truly sorry from the bottom of my heart.”

Yes, I’m still riding high on the bliss.

It reminded me of a story my grandfather used to tell. He’d left home in his early teens to find work and found himself at the shore of Lake Superior, not having eaten for two days. There was a docked boat full of working men, and for some reason he approached the only black man on the boat, saying, “Man, I’m hungry!”

The man snarled at him and told him to stop bugging him but at the same time was winking at him. When no one was looking he whispered to the boy to wait around a corner. Before long the black man returned with what my grandfather described as a loaf of bread stuffed with a rich stew. It was the most delicious thing he’d ever eaten, and it kept him going until he was able to find work. Like me, that black man probably thought nothing of what he’d done, and indeed, it was a small thing. But a young boy’s hunger had moved his heart to respond with compassion. What else is an act of kindness but this?

My grandfather came from a working-class Irish community in southern Ontario, and racism was just something you inherited. But because of the kindness of one black man he took a personal stand against intolerance, later insisting that his children respect black people and treat them well. This story has enriched and instructed our family for generations and continues to do so today. Whoever that man was, he’d kept our grandfather alive, and he would always have our love.

As Archie Bunker once said, “Always be sweet to people.” You never know how far that will go toward building peace.

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





Brittany Daigle

Course Exam

AU courses, up close

Course Exam

Brittany Daigle

CMNS 301 (Communication Theory and Analysis) is a three-credit communication studies course that is intended to provide students with a grounding in the field of communication studies, a relatively new interdisciplinary field that draws many of its theoretical ideas about human communication from psychology, sociology, cultural studies, linguistics, philosophy, and literary studies. The course focuses on developing notions of mass communication in the twenty-first century and debates in the field. There are no prerequisites for this course and there is a Challenge for Credit option as well.

This course is offered as an individualized study online or grouped study. Both options are offered with an eTextbook and with a video component. Students that are studying overseas are asked to contact the University Library before registering in a course that has an audio and/or visual component.

Communication Theory and Analysis is made up of three parts (introduction persuasion, and media and culture), nine units, nine-unit journals, a critical review, and a final essay. There are no exams for this course. The nine units within this course cover several interesting topics such as propaganda, classical rhetoric, public communication, semiotics, and agenda-setting theories in the digital age. To receive credit for CMNS 301, students must complete all the assignments and obtain a composite grade of at least fifty percent.

Dr. Michael Lithgow was hired as an Assistant Professor of Communication and Media Studies in June of 2016 and became the tutor for CMNS 301 when he was hired. Alongside CMNS 301, he teaches two courses in the Masters in Interdisciplinary Studies (MAIS) program: MAIS 623 (Introduction to Trends in New Media: Digital Humanities) and MAIS 620 (Digital Storytelling). He also coordinates a number of courses in the CMNS program, such as CMNS 201 (Introduction to Mass Media), CMNS 202 (Media and Power in Canadian Society), CMNS 301 (Communication Theory and Analysis), CMNS 315 (Understanding Media Literacy: Inside Plato's Cave), CMNS 321 (Computing in Everyday Life), CMNS 358 (Popular Culture and the Media), CMNS 380 (Corporate Communication), CMNS 420 (Topics in Communication: Children and Media), CMNS 421 (Being Online).

He provided a brief introduction, stating "I am an Assistant Professor of Media and Communication Studies. My research interests generally have to do with citizen engagement in public cultures. I am particularly interested in questions of power, aesthetics and epistemology in discourse. Current research includes an international study of changing practices in professional journalism in response to the growing importance of user generated content; exploring community strategies in indigenous and rural contexts in Canada, Mexico and Argentina for designing, building and operating telecommunications infrastructure; developing expanded strategies for data, network and technology literacies; and a study of organizational transformation through embedded artists-in-residence."

He continues, “In 2016, I completed a post-doctoral research fellowship from McGill University examining the aesthetics of public participation in policy proceedings at the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC).”

Dr. Lithgow concludes, “Before pursuing graduate studies, I worked for many years as journalist in community radio, community television and freelance writing. My first collection of poetry, *Waking in the Tree House*, was published in 2012 by Cormorant Books.”

When asked to describe the course to students, he states “CMNS 301 is a survey course introducing students to a range of theoretical approaches to the study of mass media communications including semiotics, rhetoric and propaganda; the Toronto School (the space/time biases of communication technologies), the Frankfurt School (critical theory and the industrialization of mass media); the Birmingham School (cultural studies / identity and representation); uses and effects models of media consumption; and agenda setting.”

Dr. Lithgow continues by explaining the structure of the course, stating “Each unit explores one or more theoretical approach. Marks are based primarily on short essays in response to questions designed to encourage reflection on the readings (journals), and a longer, end-of-term research paper.”

As for what type of work ethic students will have to have in order to be successful in CMNS 301, he believes that “Students will have to bring a disciplined post-secondary work ethic to this course, applying close reading skills while developing the ability to apply concepts explored in course readings to real world examples.”

When asked to provide some advice for current or future students, he states “Take the time to answer the short answer questions thoroughly, and in doing so, develop your skills of close reading the articles in each unit. Don’t be afraid to re-read articles, and if there is something you find puzzling, ask your colleagues in the class: guaranteed if you have a question, other students will have the same question. Often, a discussion among peers produces excellent answers to questions and in ways that are particularly relevant for students. For the assignments, find examples from the real world that you care about. The more deeply you are interested in the examples you choose, the easier you will find the work and likely the better your assignment will be. If you are not sure if something you are interested in is appropriate for the assignment, ask your tutor. The course offers students a chance to apply media theory to the real world of popular culture and new media.”

Dr. Michael Lithgow believes that “CMNS 301 will be of interest to anyone who wants a deeper and more complex understanding of how mass media shapes and is shaped by the world we live in. Understanding mass media and communications can emerge in many ways, and different theoretical approaches will produce different kinds of understanding. This course will be of interest and relevance to: communications professionals who want to push the boundaries of their practice and begin to cultivate 'out-of-the-box' thinking about media systems and practices; scholars, journalists and educational professionals who want to develop critical complexity in thinking about the role of media systems in contemporary society; and students who want to broaden and deepen their thinking about how media and communications shapes the cultures we live in.”

Whether CMNS 301 is a program or degree requirement of yours, or the topics discussed above are of interest to you, this course will have you learning interesting material surrounding the topic of communication theory and analysis.

Brittany Daigle is 22 years old and completing her BSc in Computing Science & Information Systems with AU from Toronto, Ontario.



Fly on the Wall

Kant We All Meaningfully Agree?

Jason Sullivan



AU Studies and our Meaning of Life

The meaning of life: what can that mean? Possible answers run the gamut of human thought and experience. Meaning is both personal and general; each of us has our own private mission statement whether we think of it that way or not and invariably there will be affinities between ours and others. As AU students, the prospect of our academic success hinges on the personal meanings we invest in, and glean from, our studies.

Immanuel Kant made it a focus of much of his life's work to answer an open

question posed by the Berlin Academy in the year 1764: "Are metaphysical truths generally, and the fundamental principles of natural theology and morals in particular, capable of proofs as distinct as those of geometry?" (Walsh, 307). Can one meaning apply to all and sundry, in other words. We can note here the scepticism we may receive about our AU studies; isn't the best life knowledge not taught in school?

That a square is a square no matter how you view it or measure it, stands as a matter of fact. Upon deeper enquiry, and Kant was notoriously so deep in his studies and so rigorous in his life's routine that neighbours claimed to be able to set their clocks by the sight of him taking his 9'oclock garden stroll, Kant concluded that our subjective selves are constant and unequivocal, not unlike Newton's law of gravity (which Kant much admired). W.H. Walsh summarizes Kant's support for universal experience but contingent interpretation: "metaphysical contentions are groundless, since metaphysical concepts such as spirit cannot be characterized in positive terms" (Walsh, 307). In other words, we have a geometric precision to our consciousness, if not to our ideas. It remains for us to decide what meaning to make of our perceptions. In terms of we AU students, our coursework really is what we make of it.

Kant thus trusted the senses, believing "that there is an absolute difference between sensing and thinking, and that sense experience need not be in any way confused" (Walsh, 308). There's an "air of finality to this approach" that leaves out our capacity to decide how we feel for ourselves as we evolve along the way (Walsh, 305). After all, we think from what we sense and that same sense changes as we learn and grow. The great thing about education is that it changes us; we're not just adding to a reservoir of knowledge— we're literally growing and forging new selves in an alchemical sort of way. To discover meaning is thus to discover its changeable nature. Thanks to our decision to enroll at AU, we're changing for the better. We never stop learning and growing as humans but it helps to have real textbooks and deadlines to encourage the process along.

So, our minds conceive and perceive using a combination of our sense and our thoughts. Two people may see the same event differently, and this parallels the way we each can only define our life's meaning on our own terms. No one can tell us what our meaning is, and we cannot be sure what our future selves will think of our own present endeavours. Finally, from an omniscient point of view (if one exists, Kant was certain it did although he also believed that, by definition,

we could not know it ourselves) we can never truly know whether our life matches some standard applicable to all humans in terms of humans.

Despite lacking access to absolute knowledge, what we do receive is subservient to universal laws. In Kant's eyes, then, "nothing whatsoever...can be given to the senses save in conformity with the primary axioms of space and the other consequences of nature, as expounded by geometry" (Kant, 308). So, for Kant, at least, the meaning of life just might be explicable in the same way we understand, say, the cycles of the moon and its corresponding tides.

Rhythm and flow, though, doesn't that suggest an inherent changeable, seasonal, nature to life's nature? Perhaps at AU we share the value and meaning of education with students in traditional universities while also experiencing a unique twist to the process; certainly, we receive more freedom to fit our learning into our lives.

All For One, One Meaning of Life for All?

Finding our personal meaning doesn't mean finding a one-size-fits-all keystone to educational success. And yet, for Kant—as for us—it doesn't hurt to place ourselves in the role of the other and ask whether the meaning of our life and studies is realistic for our peers. If not, we may be missing a blind spot.

Kant, for his part, was a deontologist. A moral absolutist. He asserted the essence of his moral philosophy in what he called *categorical imperatives*: each action contains moral worth "not in the purpose to be attained by it, but in the maxim in accordance with which it is decided upon" (Kant, 317). Basically, we ought to not use others as means to an end (not matter how pleasurable, and this includes mutual pleasure based only on self-fulfilment), but as ends in themselves.

We ought to act as though others are valuable each in their own right. If our meaning is only personal and includes no one else what good is it? A meaningful life for Kant involves valuing things intrinsically rather than as a series of lesser events and interactions leading inexorably to an exalted final goal. If we're just at AU to graduate, then maybe we're living down to the anti-schooling belief that a degree is just a piece of paper.

For AU students Kant's categorical imperative translates into taking each course seriously and giving it our best; we may enjoy some more than others, and we'd be lame scholars if we didn't have favourites that piqued our interest, but we do want to give our schoolwork the best of our minds rather than just the old college try. Considering how course material relates to our daily life helps to provide meaningful perspective and is unique to AU; all of life's a class, just as for Kant each moral act ought to be thought of as potentially universal for all.

Poetry in Motion; Disentangling Philosophy from Mean Dogmatism

If we stand back on a lovely May day and ask us what the meaning of life is for ourselves as AU students, we probably will come up with different answers at different times. Too often, personal meaning seems to correlate with personal consistency. But how can that be so? We don different thinking caps to meet different course objectives. What is good for the business course may not be applicable to literary studies.

Daniel Kaufman asserts that the problem with philosophy, in terms of aiding the discovery of meaning in life, is that while it attempts to remand dogma to the sidelines in its search for truth, it actually misses out on much of what it is to be meaningfully human. Modern philosophy tends to ignore and discount the poetry of existence. Like searching for the meaning of life, Kaufman claims that good philosophy inherently asks questions that cannot be answered in finality and for all time: "philosophical disagreements are by nature ultimately unresolvable. For there to be

correct positions on their subjects would require that there be some accessible fact of the matter as to what reality, obligation, or warrant *really* consist of; but no such facts can be established. There is nothing in philosophy that corresponds to confirmation and disconfirmation in the sciences. Instead, to deem something obligatory, or warranted, or real, is to take a certain point of view towards it; and there are many such points of view that one can recommend, or not, for many different reasons. Yet there is nothing beyond the views themselves and our reasons for holding them” (Kaufman, online). If we want to access our meaning of life we thus must look within; no one can tell us the answers to that pop quiz!

Where Kant saw commonalities in terms of morality and meaning, Kaufman notes the limits in seeing us all as reducible to common denominators. That's the realm of the so-called hard sciences, and not where daily life, let alone rigorous academic study, is necessarily at. We don't just plug in our laptops and upload information to our brains; the process of distance education takes all of our mind for it to succeed. Meaning, at the broadest level, philosophy in our times tends to miss out on; in its search for universal solutions it shears away, like a paper cutter, the details that make life unique and special.

It doesn't have to be that way, and happily much philosophy supersedes the enclosure of what's come to be known as *scientific discourse*. Kaufman suggests that, rather than seeking meaning acceptable to all (and at AU that typically means non-student peers), we must consider our education as a creative endeavour not reducible to objective terms. Of philosophic works he says rather “than treating them as exercises of speculative, creative imagination, they are treated as analogous to large, intricate, scientific theories, every piece of which needs to be taken up by an army of researchers. This presumes that philosophical inquiry ultimately is about the acquisition of knowledge rather than about the development of apt points of view – which presumption, as we've seen, is fundamentally mistaken.” (Kaufman, online). As progenitors of Protagoras' creed that people are the measures of human reality, a panoply of ideas comes to replace the finality of final truth.

Jacques Derrida to this end notes that “if one must love truth (this is necessary, is it not?), how will one love anything other than one's own truth, a truth that one can appropriate? (Derrida, 44). Behind shared realities and their attendant truths lurk the herd consensus of majority rule. Derrida notes how desire for a transcendent meaning tends to cloak itself in the language of value-neutrality: “universalization hides the cunning of all dogmatisms” which are in essence “the cunning of the common sense of the community” (Derrida, 44). We're wiliier foxes than that, we AU students, and it helps that we don't inhabit classrooms full of like-minded people. As distance students the creation of a meaningful experience is in the last instance up to us alone.

Whatever the meaning of our studies means to us this May, each day is a new day where a new and more wonderful version of our student selves may emerge. The poetry of this life process, like the unfolding of flower petals and butterfly cocoons, is a magical one that begs us to enjoy for its quality and not only in its quantity.

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The Rise of AI could mean a loss of jobs Are you Worried?

Francesca Carone



Although you may already be on the path to an educational goal and career, it is good to think about things from another perspective. Many students, despite starting university, still do not know exactly what path they want to take and what their career choice will be.

The role of AI in the job sector is something to consider when planning that career. Many people fear that the automation of jobs and inclusion of AI may be eliminating more jobs that it is creating. As stated by technology media, IoT For All, “A two-year study from McKinsey Global Institute suggests that by 2030, intelligent agents and robots could eliminate as much as 30 percent of the world’s human labor”.

McKinsey Global Institute also found that “automation will displace between 400 and 800 million jobs by 2030, requiring as many as 375 million people

to switch job categories entirely” (TechRepublic, online). The fear of what impact artificial intelligence could have on our workforce is growing. The speed at which technology is increasing can mean the speed at which jobs are being destroyed is also increasing.

Some people wonder what jobs will be left if AI takes over jobs such as driving, translating speech, food manufacturing, or others that humans once considered their domain. This is a good question. New technology has helped millions around the world be more efficient and has sped up development, but when is it enough?

The number of transistors that can be packed into a computer chip has jumped from 2,300 to more than four billion in a 40-year span. (TechRepublic, online). We now have robots with humanoid bodies and animal bodies that resemble them and can behave in predictable ways. Of course, there may still be a few bugs left, but if you do a search on robots you will find the progress and the life-like ability of those robots is amazing. However, robots that have been used so far are limited to their own specific tasks, while AI can be applied to a variety of industries and tasks. This worries some while exciting others.

These fears have been around for many, many years. In the past, these fears have been wrong because although technology removed some specific jobs, other jobs were created. Many believe the automation of mundane repetitive jobs was helpful in opening more creative and meaningful jobs. Plus, there are some jobs that only humans have been able to do. Whatever you believe, it is good to be educated about, and be prepared for, the future. In the past, workers were re-skilled and moved on to other jobs, but now, the fear is that we are running out of jobs to replace them with.

What jobs will be needed in the future of artificial intelligence? Most low-level and high-level jobs are less vulnerable to loss for now. Jobs such as childcare services, custodial services, and other types of physical labor jobs. While these types of jobs will probably be replaced by robots in the future, it is slow coming. If you are in university you are probably thinking about higher-skilled jobs, so you are already out to a good start. If you know someone who is not, you can help them think about long-term and aim for high-skilled jobs such as technicians, nurses, doctors, managers, executives, writers, software developers, and anything related to the repair or maintenance of robotics. Those are just some examples given by Hubspot of jobs the least likely to be replaced any time soon. However, there already are robots performing surgeries, so that could change in 50 years. In the end, if you're concerned about the next 30 years or so or are a student trying to think what career path they would like to go in, consider that high-skilled jobs will be required and the more creative or hard to replace, the better. There is no need to panic, in part because it won't help. But what we can do is prepare ourselves for the future with education, training, and skills.

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Student Sizzle — AU's Hot Social Media Topics

Following What's Hot around AU's Social Media Sites.



AthaU Facebook Group

Jason hints that he'll soon be looking for research subjects; a queue begins forming immediately. Wayne wonders how to tell if a course's exam is online or paper; replies suggest that info isn't always easy to find. Angela seeks feedback on student loans versus lines of credit; lots of province-specific feedback flows in.

Other posts include slacking tutors, Degreeworks, program costs, returnable software, and using a smart TV to watch course videos.

reddit

A pair of questions about courses NURS 328 and NUTR 331.

Twitter

@AthabascaU tweets: "We're looking for our #AthabascaU graduate superstars who will be at Convocation for a little video project! Interested?? #AthaU19."

@austudentsunion tweets: "Finished any AU courses recently? Fill out a peer course evaluation on our website - or check out what other students had to say about a course at t.co/oVOdNqd8MA."

The Fit Student

Are You a Health Nut—or a Coconut?

Marie Well



Do you want to tip into health-nut status? No shame in that label. But do one better and claim the status of health *coconut*. Now, that's a tasty way to shine your skin, teeth, and hair.

I use coconut oil throughout the day. With coconut oil, you can “condition your hair ... hydrat[e] your skin ... speed up metabolism ... remove your eye makeup ... use as a natural sunscreen ... [use as] natural toothpaste ... soothe eczema or skin psoriasis ... [use] as a natural chap stick ... alleviate allergy symptoms ...

improve your insulin levels ... promote healthy gums ... soothe your sore throat ... soothe your skin if you have chicken pox ... help your nails grow ... make a natural baby lotion ... help improve your digestion” (Sharpe, location 69 of 602, 11%).

That's why I buy coconut oil. “You should only buy virgin coconut oil and extra virgin coconut oil which are free of trans fats and other manmade chemicals” (location 45 of 602, 7%). I mix organic virgin coconut oil with four drops of eucalyptus essential oil. I then slather it on my face and chest. The mixture heals my headaches (Burgess, Sep 21, 2017) and eases my congested lungs (Ashley, n.d.).

I brush my teeth with a coconut oil and baking soda mixture. In my mind, it's no surprise that kids dislike brushing their teeth. After all, some toothpaste may have toxic ingredients:

Triclosan, by definition, is a pesticide but it's been used as an antibacterial agent in toothpastes with the claim that it helps fight plaque and gingivitis Saccharin is commonly used in diet foods, soft drinks, lip balms, and you guessed it, toothpaste. It's approximately 350 times sweeter than your run-of-the-mill sugar ... Saccharin was linked to cancer in a few clinical studies in the 1970's Parabens are a fairly common additive in cosmetics, including toothpastes. Used as a preservative, parabens are chemicals that can mimic the hormone estrogen and can potentially cause cancer, developmental, and reproductive issues. (Radius, n.d.).

And so on. Who wants to swish toxins anyway? Not me. But coconut oil mixed with baking soda offers a nontoxic, tasty way to brush your teeth. After all, “if you can't pronounce it and you can't eat it, then don't put it on your skin” (Herczegh, Dec 14, 2015). And I believe it was author Dr. Amen who said that what goes on you goes in you—and becomes you:

Substances that affect your overall health and wellbeing don't simply work their way through your system by travelling the gut alone. An often-overlooked route ... through the skin ... allows substances ranging from the beneficial to the bad to enter your bloodstream

and circulate throughout your body. So, if you are what you eat, and you are what you apply, the question is: What are you? (Myers, n.d.).

I use coconut oil mixed with baking soda for deodorant, too. I love the scent of coconut. And the mixture neither stings nor causes rashes. I also use plain coconut oil as a massage rub to heal athlete's foot: "Eighty percent of the medium-chain fatty acids in coconut oil are antimicrobial against bacteria, viruses, fungi and protozoa" (Holzapfel, Cynthia, as cited in Roizman, n.d.).

As well, I aim to find a coconut oil recipe for shampoo and conditioner. This week, I went into a store that sells nontoxic shampoos and conditioners. They were made with coconut oil but cost too much. So, I plan to reverse engineer the formula as best I can to make my own shampoos and conditioners. I used to go to grocery stores and read ingredients of sauces, hoping to reverse engineer those, too. By doing so, I reduced my costs and bolstered my health. Nothing like homemade.

I now beware of clerks who say they sell organic nontoxic shampoos. One clerk nodded when I asked if her shampoos were organic and nontoxic. I asked for proof, and she smiled, hesitated, and then said it's on the ingredient list. A quick glance at the ingredients revealed plenty of alcohols and hard-to-pronounce chemicals. "This is as toxic as it gets," I told her. She blinked a couple of times and smiled shyly. So, I now seek only shampoos that have the words "organic" or "nontoxic" written on them.

On the topic of hair. I've been having two steam baths a day, each followed with a shower, shampoo and condition. As a result, my hair has dried out. So, I dab my hair in coconut oil: "Rubbing it into your scalp can keep your hair naturally moist, shiny, and prevent split ends and excess frizz. Likewise, massage your skin with a few tablespoons of coconut oil everyday to keep it feeling soft and supple" (Sharpe, location 99 of 602, 16%).

You stand to gain by buying a tub of organic (extra) virgin coconut oil. But before you dip into the coconut delight, check yourself. Do you eat fruits and veggies and hit the gym? If so, say so long health nut, hello coconut.

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The Study Dude

I Bet You Can Win a Nobel Prize

Marie Well



Your thoughts can snatch you a PhD—and win you a Nobel prize. Don't believe me? According to Dr. Caroline Leaf, "We can use our thoughts to improve our overall intellect, cognitive performance, and mental and physical well-being" (p. 19 of 321, 5%). And your thoughts can take you from F student to Einstein.

But how?

Dr. Leaf says, "Today, most people can access vast amounts of information, yet few people know how to

process this information and use it to be successful at school, work, and life" (p. 27 of 321, 6%). So, process info by personalizing it, by relating it to what matters most to you. A professor of mine taught on that premise, too. She related much of her curriculum to her life stories. So, whether at work or school, find every angle that relates your hard work to "giving back" to this world. Come graduate studies, you'll thank me. That's because graduate studies demand your thesis has meaning for the greater community. In graduate school, you'll need to answer the question, "So what?"

The "So what?" question may be the unifying piece of your thesis. Dr. Leaf says, "When we gather information like puzzle pieces without putting the puzzle together, intellectual growth is stifled" (p. 28 of 321, 6%). Expertise helps us put the puzzle together while synthesizing new ideas. But expertise also takes us down the beaten path, blind to the pieces that 'just don't fit.' Sometimes, a visionary with no background on a subject can pave new ideas, ones not yet tabled by the 'experts.' So, when toying with thinking outside the box, "we have to recognize that the 'box' is a figment of our imagination—we are as intelligent as we want to be" (p. 38 of 321, 10%).

So, how can you strengthen your brain for exciting new ideas? Academic theories such as left-right brain theory and learning styles theory aim to help us succeed academically, but even these theories need tweaking. For one, they seem too simple. For another, they fail to capture the individuality of the learner. Dr. Caroline Leaf questions the effectiveness of these theories: "Two neuromyths ... that I have spent three decades teaching against are the left-right brain theory and the learning styles theory" (p. 31 of 321, 8%). For instance, did you ever feel like the label 'visual learner' didn't capture you? I'm mostly a visual learner who ranks second as a kinesthetic learner. But get me touching and staring at human bones to figure out anatomy, and I'd bomb the test. Yet, I could've aced most any math exam. How visual is math anyway? When I did math, I disappeared from the visual world. Dr. Leaf suggests focusing more on *personalized* learning than on learning styles and left-right brain voodoo.

But maybe you can strengthen your mind by playing brain games? A waste of time, I always thought. One brain rehabilitation charity used logic puzzles to help restore people's brain

functioning. I wondered, though, wouldn't the time of the "consumers" be better spent learning skills like math, physics, or logic—skills they can apply to furthering their education or careers? I'd hate to find myself stuck solving puzzles that held little relevance to real life. Dr. Caroline Leaf goes outside the box once more with her comment, "Research shows that the short-term memory and sensory skills developed in these so-called brain games do not necessarily develop deep thinking or meaningful cognitive skills that change behavior in ways that lead to success. These games do not improve the kind of intelligence that helps people intellectualize, reason, solve problems, or make wise choices" (p. 32 of 321, 8%).

So, how can you strengthen your mind? With your thoughts, of course. Dr. Leaf points out that "each thought has quantum energy and electrochemical and electromagnetic signals, which flow throughout your brain and body largely below the level of awareness in your nonconscious mind" (p. 38 of 321, 10%). So, I say, as a student, try to think nonstop about your studies. But do less worrying and more memorization, recall, and repetition. When you rehearse your studies—or hone your passions—you accelerate mastery. Dr. Leaf says, "I did some of the first neuroplasticity research back in the eighties, showing how intentional, deliberate thinking changes intellectual, cognitive, emotional, social, and academic performance" (p. 44 of 321, 12%).

And I'll bet you lunch that you've got a Nobel prize in you. Whether you win a Nobel or not, I win the bet. Now how's that for thinking outside the box?

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The Struggling Student Rants The Benefits to Having a Yard Sale

Angela Pappas



Marie Kondo is a Japanese organizing consultant whose popularity has taken off in recent years in North America, by instructing consumers and hoarders alike to rediscover joy by decluttering and throwing away stuff (Green, 2014). At 19 years old, Ms. Kondo started working as a professional tidier in Japan when she founded her organizing consulting business (Maguire, 2016). Her approach to cleaning has been dubbed the "KonMari" method. One of her most well-known books, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, and her Netflix series, *Tidying Up With Marie Kondo*, has people frantically organizing their living spaces in their attempts to spark joy and rushing to the nearest thrift store and garbage dump to offload their junk.

Under normal circumstances, this would be considered a positive change. People are donating

unwanted items and decluttering their homes. But, as all things North American, we are taking this to the extreme.

I've come across many newspaper articles lately, especially in the US, where perfectly good items have ended up in garbage bins, or, even worse, lying next to overflowing bins. Plus, while non-profits have always gladly accepted donations of unwanted, quality, items, many charities have recently issued public notices that they don't need broken or damaged items (Pannett & Hoyle, 2019). Basically, they don't want your junk! These charities are usually staffed by volunteers who need to focus on the organization's core operations. Instead, they end up spending countless hours rummaging and sorting through donated items, the majority of which end up in garbage bins regardless. In other words, instead of taking out our own trash, we're giving it to a non-profit to take it out for us (Spring, 2019).

What are we supposed to do, then, with all the things we need to get rid of? Now that the weather is warming up across the country, we're all getting into a "spring cleaning" frenzy, so there's nothing wrong with wanting to declutter and thinking some things might be useful to someone else rather than going straight to the garbage dump. Once again, I have the answer for you—it's going to be even warmer out in a few weeks and that means garage sale season. Signs will be spotted in almost every neighborhood. This is a great way to not only burn some calories setting up shop, but it can also mean fun times with friends and family. A garage sale is also the fastest route to meet your objective—getting rid of excess clutter. These reasons alone, along with making some moolah, are just the tip of the iceberg.

Cash, bread, dough, bucks, cabbage, green, moolah, legal tender

Any way you want to phrase it, you can obviously make some quick cash for items you would have otherwise taken to a non-profit or the garbage dump. But the hidden advantage to this is that you don't have to take your unwanted things any further than your front yard. The customers literally come to your doorstep. You will not only end up making extra spending money, you'll also save gas money, time, and the effort required to try and properly dispose of everything. If you think I'm exaggerating, think of the multiple trips a yard sale could save you. Trips to the recycling centre for your electronics, to the battery centre for each item's batteries, to the local thrift store for the clothes, to the appropriate city or town facility for various hazardous waste (e.g., used paint), to the local library or public school for those unused binders and school supplies, and, finally, to the garbage dump for the remaining items. That sounds like a project that never ends to me.

Marketing Skills

Yes, you read that right. Obviously, the turnout at your yard sale will depend on other things, too, like the weather. But, if you advertise effectively, nothing can stop that local garage sale aficionado from getting to you—especially, if they know you'll be selling something they've had their eye on! With a little bit of planning, you'll be a pro and sharpening your marketing skills in no time.

Think about this in terms of a course project. At a bricks-and-mortar university, students work for organizations to complete their co-op programs—sometimes, with no pay. For this project,

you won't be working for free, you'll be making money with the final results. You can apply all the theory you've learned at AU and be your own boss at the same time. Which means you won't be restricted and you can get creative. Don't think of advertising simply in terms of putting up a "Garage Sale" sign at every intersection within a two-mile radius. You should do this too, of course, but you should also think about your target audience and who you're trying to sell to. Advertise on Facebook's Marketplace, VarageSale, Craigslist, and the local library and leisure centres. If your used items cater to a niche market, for example, old baby clothes, hang some posters up the week prior at a local maternity yoga studio. Or if you have plenty of old fishing rods and lures collecting dust, hang a poster up outside of Cabella's (*honey, if you're reading this, it's just to get my point across, please don't lock me out of the house tonight*). The point is, this is your chance to get creative and think outside the box with your marketing tactics.

Community

Another advantage to yard sales: you get to meet your neighbours and other interesting folks. Larry from down the street might stop by to chat, and your neighbour Susan could come over to browse through your vinyl collection. You remember Susan, the one you usually avoid in the grocery aisles. It turns out she's the hiring manager at the company you just applied at last week. See where I'm going with this? Yard sales are an extrovert's dream. But, if you're a hermit by nature, like me, you're gagging right now. I don't want nosy neighbours knowing my business either, or having to make small talk about the weather. Being on good terms with your neighbours, though, can be a blessing in disguise if you need some help some day.

Make it a Party

Now that we're past being a recluse (myself included), you can invite friends, family, and neighbours to sell their things too. This won't only bring out a larger crowd, and a better feeling of community, but think of it in terms of honing your organizational skills. Hey, no other project management, on-the-job, training allows for drinks while working. And, the bigger the event, the more appealing the garage sale. We all know that one man's garbage is another man's treasure. Your neighbour might be interested in that moose-head you had hanging over the mantle that's now just taking up space in basement storage. Just don't end up buying other people's junk and

AU-thentic Events Upcoming AU Related Events

Online MBA Info Session

Wed, May 22, 10:00 to 11:00 am MDT
Online

Hosted by AU Faculty of Business
business.athabascau.ca/event-details/online-mba-executives-information-session-2019-may22/

Register online at above link

Third Annual Accounting Conference

Fri, May 24, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm MDT
DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel, 16615-109th Avenue NW, Edmonton AB

In person

Hosted by AU Faculty of Business and CPA Education Foundation

news.athabascau.ca/events/third-annual-accounting-conference/

Register online at above link

Nursing and Health Studies Library Orientation

Sat, May 25, 11:00 am to 12:30 pm MDT
Online

Hosted by AU Library

library.athabascau.ca/orientations.html

No pre-registration necessary

All events are free unless otherwise specified

end up with more clutter than you originally started out with—that would be taking a step backwards.

Parenting

For those of you with children, summer holidays can be fun at first, but most parents I know start counting down the days for school to start again within the first month. Trying to find an escape from the constant “*I’m boooooored...*” echoing from depths of the living room, seems like an impossible task. Well, this is a great (and free) way to give them something to do! You can inspire your kids to get involved in all this—but they will most likely not be impressed, at first. Especially, when you tell them they won’t be getting that new Xbox they want so badly, just to get them off your back. Tell them, instead, they get to keep the profits from selling all their discarded toys, games, and clothes. Whatever they make, they can put toward their wish list. And then, on the day of the yard sale, just sit back and watch George Jr. turn into a six-figure car salesman overnight. This is their chance to practice the negotiation skills they’ll need as adults. We all know negotiation skills are critical in every aspect of life and yard sales are a great chance for the kids to start practicing theirs. It’s easier to talk someone down from a \$2.00 Pokémon Go t-shirt than a \$25,000.00 car. Want to teach them another lesson on *adulthood*? Take away 25% of whatever they earn – for rent, taxes, and operational costs.

Cleaning house can be exhausting. It’s also definitely not an enjoyable task, I don’t know how Marie Kondo does it with a twinkle in her eye and an elated giggle. What I do know is that mature students have limited free time outside their professions, schoolwork, and taking care of their families. Sometimes, it can be a chore just to brush your hair, get dressed, and step outside the house to run your errands. Theoretically, none of us have time for a yard sale. Realistically, though, at the end of the day it’s nice to unwind, get our faces out of those textbooks once in a while, practice our soft skills, and get some fresh air. After locking ourselves up in the office for days, it can be nice to have some human interaction. After all, humans thrive and flourish through the help of their community, not just by listening to Sal on Khan Academy talk about statistics for hours.

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Dear
Barb

Barbara Godin

Dinner Dodgers

Dear Barb:

Recently I prepared a large meal for eight people. The day before the dinner one of the couples cancelled and then on the day of two more people cancelled. Aside from the fact that I had spent days planning and preparing this meal, I ended up with a lot of leftovers, which I will have to throw out. Food is way too expensive to just throw out. The reason these guests cancelled was not because of illness, or bad weather, which I would have totally understood. It just seemed as if something better came up, or the planning on their part was flawed.

The dinner party was not a last-minute arrangement, it was planned at least a week before. My husband and I feel unappreciated. It's as if the time and money we put into preparing this meal was unimportant to these friends. When I mentioned this to other friends, they were casual about it and said that's what people are like now. I think that's disgusting that someone would treat a person with so much disrespect. My husband and I are probably a generation older than the two couples that cancelled. Maybe this is a generational thing? How do you ever count on anyone if they can't keep their word for a simple dinner engagement? Now I am reluctant to plan another big meal. Do you think I'm overreacting? This is not something I want to go through again. Thanks, Alison.

Hi Alison:

So sorry, and I do agree with you that this was disrespectful. As you say it is understandable if there is an illness or other unexpected event, but obviously that wasn't the case or they would have told you. You are right, your time and work is not being appreciated, obviously something more interesting came up and they decided to choose that option. Perhaps social media is encouraging people to do these types of things, as you do not have to call and speak to the person directly to cancel, you can just text and so don't have to face the fact that you hurt or disrespected the other person. I can definitely understand you not wanting to do this again. Perhaps the next time you could meet at a restaurant, that way if they don't show, you haven't been preparing a big meal for the last two days. Another option would be to suggest meeting at your home, for a drink. Have some snacks ready to put out and if they don't show you are not out all that food and work. Sad to say, this does seem to be a common occurrence with a younger generation, as some basic manners have gone by the wayside. It seems for a lot of people today it is acceptable to waste other's time, whereas this was not acceptable behaviour in the very near past.

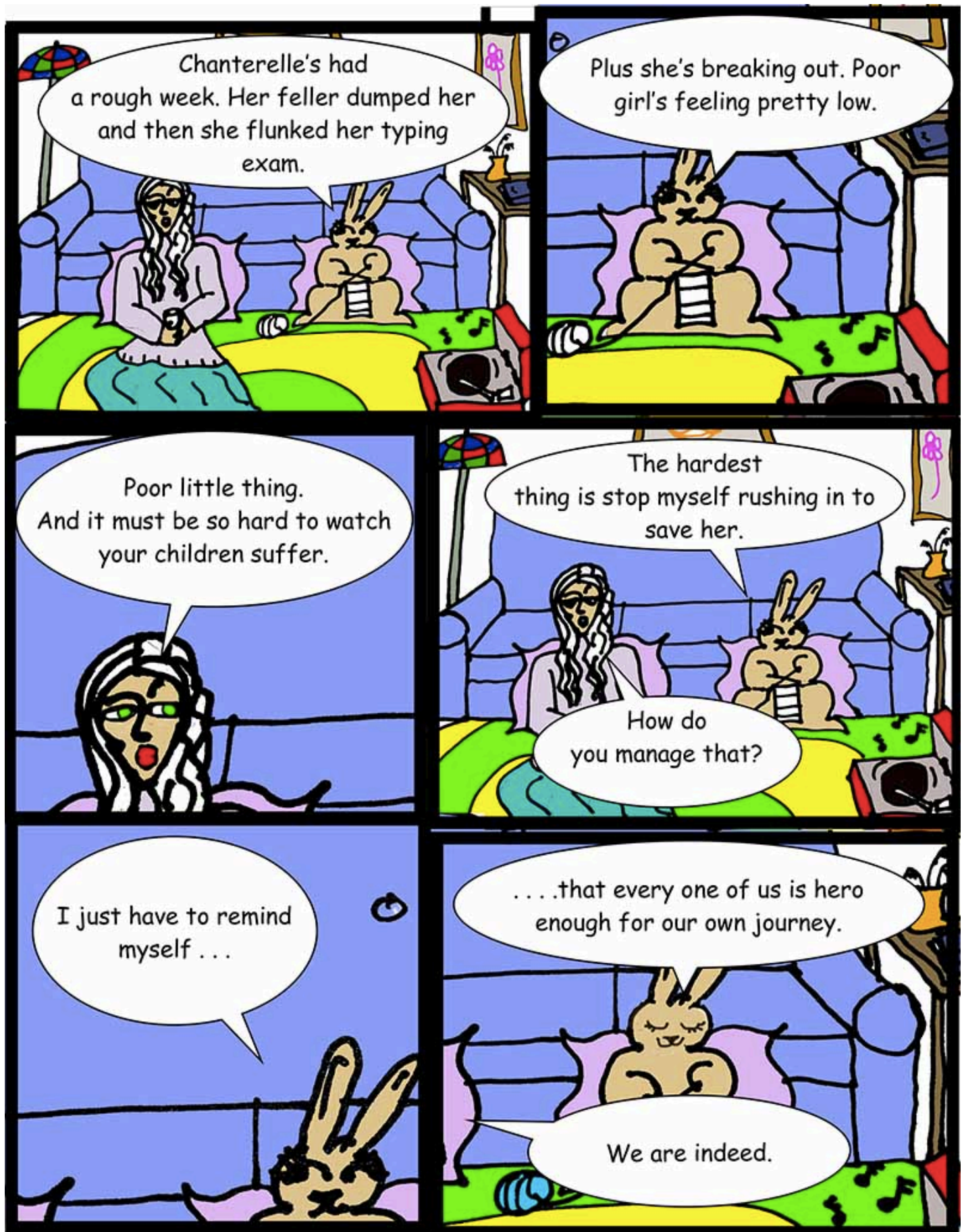
Thanks for sharing Alison.

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.



Poet Maeve
Your Own Hero's Journey

Wanda Waterman



The information on this page is provided by the AU Students' Union. The Voice does not create this content. Contact AUSU at services@ausu.org with any questions about this article.

IMPORTANT DATES

- **May 30:** [Deadline to apply for course extension for July](#)
- **May 31:** [Gatineau Student Meet & Greet](#)
- **June 7-8:** [Athabasca University Convocation](#)
- **Jun 10:** [Deadline to register in a course starting Jul 1](#)
- **Jun 15:** [AUSU In-Person Council Meeting](#)
- **Jun 15:** [July degree requirements deadline](#)

AUSU Student Advocacy

Did you know that advocacy is one of the most vital roles of a students' union?

Advocacy is vital in order to ensure transparency and accountability on behalf of the institution and the government, and advocate for affordable, accessible, quality post-secondary education for students. AUSU advocates for AU students in a variety of ways:

Individual Advocacy – Your academic concerns are important to us! Contact AUSU if you have concerns about AU services or procedures that you feel are detrimental to your student experience.

University Advocacy – AUSU advocates for all AU students at the University level, including holding seats on over 20 AU committees and the AU Board of Governors, and regularly meets with various AU VP's, Deans, and Directors to discuss issues important to AU undergraduate students.

External Advocacy – AUSU advocates for all AU students at the provincial and national levels for topics such as increased educational funding, equitable student loans programs, scholarships and bursaries, and other student issues. AUSU is also a member of the Canadian Alliance of Students' Associations ([CASA](#)) which helps AU students have a voice with the federal government.

To find out more about AUSU's advocacy efforts, visit our website [here](#).

AUSU Year-Round Bursaries

AUSU has numerous year-round bursaries available for members **in financial need**. Applications for these bursaries are accepted anytime and are easy to fill out online.

You can apply for these bursaries no matter where you live – they are not restricted by location!

*Note: Applicants must have completed a minimum of *12 credits at AU with a minimum GPA of 2.0.*

Computer Bursary - to purchase new laptops for students who need one for their AUSU coursework.

Emergency Bursary - to pay for AU course extensions, late exam fees, or supplemental exams fees for members who require them due to unforeseen circumstances.

Travel Bursary - for members in financial need who need to pay for travel or accommodation costs for their AU studies, such as travelling to convocation, labs, exams, or practicums.

Find complete details or apply online [here](#).



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THE VOICE

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