



THE VOICE

Vol 32 Issue 38 - 2024-09-27

Minds We Meet

Interviewing Students Like You!

Course Exam Returns!

GOVN 301 / POLI 301

End of Summer Cherry Picking

The Fruit of the Room



Plus:

*Canada's Courts
Research Assistant Opportunity
and much more!*

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The Voice Magazine

www.voicemagazine.org

Email

voice@voicemagazine.org

Publisher

AU Students' Union

Editor-In-Chief

???

Managing Editor

Karl Low

Regular Contributors

Barbara Lehtiniemi, Alek
Golijanin, Jason Sullivan, ,
Cassandra Wang and
others

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presented here are those
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

A Beloved Column Returns

Karl Low



I'm very happy to announce this week the return of the Course Exam column. This column, designed to give students and prospective students a better understanding of what's involved with various courses was a mainstay of the Voice Magazine for many years, and several instances of it still regularly rank among the top articles for users each week. You're probably not familiar with this column as it's been several years since I had a student willing to take it on, but I'm happy to say that our newest writer has taken it over and done so with style. Having taken the course himself, he's able to give solid advice not only on what the course really involves, but strategies that can help you when you take it.

Also this week, we're featuring an interview with a student from a multi-generational family of graduates, who's now taking his degree along with a full time IT job and four kids. In this week's Minds We Meet, he not only explains how he manages to keep all this together but tells us what helps him study and gives some advice for new students or those who are coming back to post-secondary after a significant time away.

Finally, we round out our features with an article that looks at cherry-picking as a recreational activity, and gives some tips for how to do it well, as well as why you'd want to in the first place.

Beyond our features, however, we still have some solid articles in place, with Alek Golijanin looking at the interactions of the Toronto Police Service with racialized people, including their own officers. He's raising concerns about how each part of the Ontario justice system seems to be working to reinforce the other, even when the behavior they're protecting isn't what most people would aspire to in Canada.

Meanwhile, as to AUSU, I've forwarded them a number of questions about the recent staff changes, and more importantly for you, questions about what they intend to do next and what the new direction they're seeking to move in is. I was only able to send those a couple of days ago however, as I was trying to seek out more information about what exactly had happened so I could ask informed questions. As you can imagine, losing both a president and their executive director at nearly the same time has not only dropped a ton of work on the remaining executives, but is also stressful for all involved. Which means I imagine it might take them at least a few more days to make sure they've got a response they all agree with and that doesn't tread into any items revealing private information.

So, until then, kick back and click through this week's issue of the magazine, and hey, if you see anything you like or don't like, or, even better, you're thinking there's something you'd like to see added to the Voice Magazine, why not drop me a comment at karl@voicemagazine.org. Who knows, maybe you could be the one that fills the gap!

Of course, we also have scholarships, thoughtful, inspirational, and educational articles, events, the hot topics, and more! Enjoy the Read!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Karl", with a stylized flourish at the end.

MINDS WE MEET



The Voice Magazine recently had a chance to chat with Aaron (he/him), a Bachelor of Commerce student in Business Technology Management currently based in Mississauga, Ontario (although he grew “up in and around Toronto”). Post-graduation, Aaron is “looking to move into a Senior management or Director of IT role.”

On a personal note, Aaron describes himself as a “Father, Gamer, Travel Enthusiast.” He graduated in 2022 as a computer programmer and has “spent the last 22 years working in Information Technology for various companies.”

He had some great study tips for fellow AU learners. He, himself, best studies “with mild, instrumental music playing. Not typical classical or jazz but can include it. More along the lines of Lindsay Stirling, Ludovico Einaudi, The Chelo Guys, and others.” He also mentioned the importance of taking frequent breaks since “fixation and overthinking on a subject or even just a question is just wasting one’s time.” Instead, he advises changing locations, going for a walk, or watching videos as a break. Then students can return with “a clear

head.”

He also had some solid advice for new or prospective students. “Don’t limit yourself to only one track, even after enrolling and starting. Start slow (the bare minimum you can). I am part time working towards two courses per semester, but I am starting at only one for now,” he stated.

When he is not studying, he works “full-time in IT.” He continued, “Beyond that, spending time with my family (kids and wife),” as well as gaming and watching movies on Netflix.

He also enjoys reading, mentioning a specific book that has made an impact on his life, namely George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. He explained that the book is “a cautionary tale of how history can repeat itself. Learn from the past so you do not repeat the mistakes of it.”

The Voice Magazine also asked Aaron who in his life has had the greatest influence on his desire to learn. He replied, “There is no single person, but many that set this precedent. Both my parents were college graduates, and my grandfather worked for the University of Toronto. What I saw from them and others around me was a strong foundation was king, thus my own college education. From my own experience in IT, the private sector is regularly changing and as much as that college education was a foundation, you needed to build on it. After many certifications

and building many ways on that education, I am now opting to expand that foundation with a degree.”

As for his experience with online learning so far? “The self-study process is king for me, seeing as I am working full time and have a family of six. This enables me to get to my studies when I have time and can retain and engage accordingly with the material. I dislike it because I am so used to having an educator of some form to reach out to for clarity so getting used to reaching out to a general student and faculty support mailbox has been a change I am still working on.”

We also asked what his first project would be if he were the new president of AU. Aaron mentioned, “advertising/marketing the online services to businesses and private citizens across the country.”

As for his most valuable lesson learned in life? “There’s always going to be more work coming from your employer. Take time for yourself. You’re no good to anyone if you burn out.”

And his proudest moment? “Being able to balance having four kids, a full-time job, and being able to attend university.” Best of luck, Aaron!

At times, in an online learning environment, it can feel like you are all alone, but across the nation and around the globe, students just like you are also pursuing their Athabasca University (AU) studies! Each week, *The Voice Magazine* will be bringing you some of these stories. If you would like to be featured next, do not hesitate to [get in touch!](#)

Natalia Iwanek (she/they) recently completed her Bachelor of Arts in English with a minor in Political Science at Athabasca University.



End of Summer Cherry Pickings

Cassandra Wang



Recently I had the opportunity to go cherry picking in British Columbia. It was a phenomenal experience with family and experiencing the climate and landscape of the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia. In the Kelowna region, the growing season is longer compared to other areas and is well known for the longest cherry season due to its favorable climate. We picked a smaller local farm that has fewer visitors. Usually in the summer, the area is flooded with tourists. Previously I’ve had the opportunity to pick apples and apricots, however this year, we decided to change things up and try for a cherry-picking experience.

The best time to go cherry picking is usually throughout July or Early August depending on the weather. In the previous year, the cherry-picking season was impacted by the wildfires which played a large role in the loss of local agriculture in Kelowna. This year, fortunately, the weather has been cooperative, and the orchards have opened their gates to the public earlier on.

Why go pick your own when you can purchase from the grocery store? I find spending half a day in the orchard



makes you appreciate the food we eat every day. It also makes you appreciate the effort the local producers expend to maintain a large

orchard. When purchased from the store, I find that many cherries are not as sweet as the Okanagan cherries. The perfect mix of the hot, dry climate makes the cherries taste like candy that melt in the mouth. If you're not able to finish eating the entire batch of your pickings, you can also use them to make jams and desserts.



The experience as a whole is fantastic for children and families. I enjoyed the time spent admiring the blue sky and standing under the shade of the trees. The weather was incredibly hot this year at 35 degrees Celsius when we arrived. It is an immersive experience as you wander through the rows of cherry trees with bright, glowing fruit. Moreover, I can sample the best cherries straight from the tree which is a bonus as we harvest away with our steel buckets.

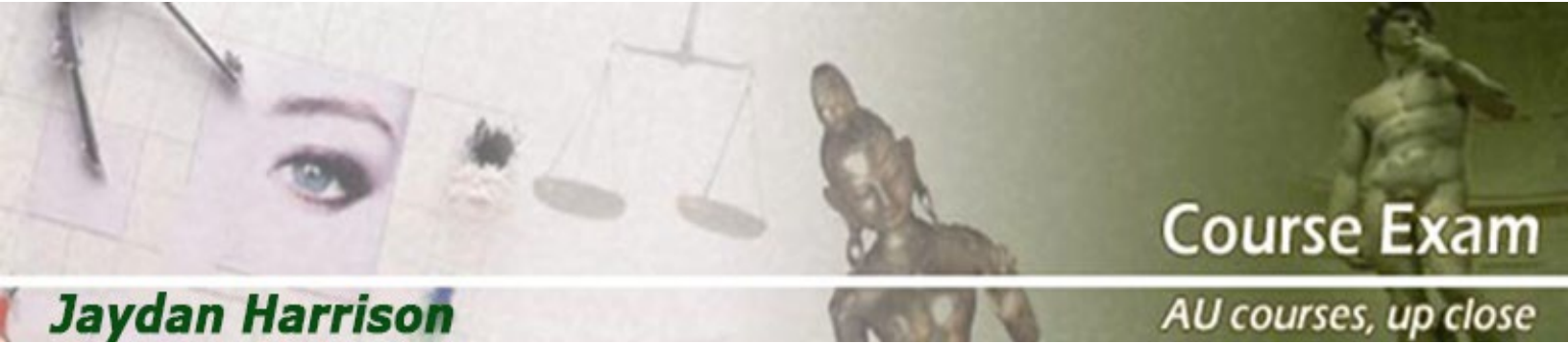
Tips for picking the perfect cherry:

- Timing is key: visiting the orchard early in the morning helps you avoid crowds and heat. We arrived at the orchard around 9 am and the air was not yet hot and stale. The entire family enjoyed the experience more and also the area was not crowded with tourists.
- Looking for ripe cherries: Over the course of the morning, we found the best cherries were firm, plump and usually dark red.
- Bringing the essentials: If you are planning to spend half a day of cherry picking, make sure you wear SPF or sun protective clothing. Comfortable shoes are a must

as you wander through a large expanse of land.

Cassandra Wang is a post-graduate health-science AU student, aspiring clinician, globe-trotter, parrot-breeder and tea-connoisseur.





Course Exam

AU courses, up close

Jaydan Harrison

Course Exam: GOVN 301/POLI 301

Jaydan Harrison

The long-standing Voice column is back! This week's Course Exam shines a spotlight on GOVN 301: Governance, the Public Sector and Corporate Power.

Overview

GOVN 301/POLI 301 is a three-credit, senior-level course offered by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. It has no prerequisites, though a previous course in political science, governance, or public administration would be advantageous. The course consists of nine units and six assignments with no midterm or final exams.

Summary

GOVN 301 is essentially a brief history of governance in Canada. It explores our nation's various ideological and governmental shifts over the years, many of which were influenced by non-political actors. Particularly highlighted are the relationships between the public, private, and voluntary sectors. Other major topics include globalization and governance, the role of the mass media, capitalism versus socialism, and the transformation of citizens into customers. If you want to learn more, check out the syllabus.

Content

As mentioned, the course is broken down into nine units, which can be viewed in the course syllabus. There is considerable overlap between the units, with several concepts reappearing (e.g., neoliberalism, Keynesianism, capitalism, etc.). Each unit consists of an overview, commentary, key concepts, study questions, and three to five assigned readings.

Evaluation

As for evaluation, the six assignments and their respective weights toward the final grade can be found in course syllabus. For the most part, they are weighted according to their level of difficulty. Each consecutive assignment builds on the previous content, with the final one being a review quiz.

I found that the average wait time for an assignment to be graded was 10 days. Feedback was minimal, but the scoring seemed fair.

Materials and Costs

This course does not have an eText or physical package. It relies entirely on open access resources. As such, students are not charged the Course Materials Fee.

Students can use the Course Fee Calculator to determine the cost for any undergraduate course, including GOVN 301. More information about tuition and fees can also be found on AU's website under the 'Applications and admissions' tab.

The Course in a Broader Context

How does GOVN 301 fit into the larger AU mosaic? Well, it is the introductory course for the Governance discipline and a requirement in the Bachelor of Professional Arts, Governance, Law, and Management Major (my current program). It is also an option in the Bachelor of Arts, Political Science and Political Economy Majors, among others.

GOVN 301 is an excellent primer for later governance classes as it introduces prominent concepts and in the discipline. Its multi-disciplinary nature incorporates elements of political science, public administration, and management sciences. There are also hints of sociology, media studies, and economics.

Who Should Take This Course and Why?

GOVN 301 was a requirement for my program, so I had no choice in taking it. However, even if it was optional, I probably would have jumped on the opportunity anyways. The syllabus intrigued me, and the lack of exams was the cherry on top.

Why should other students take this course, though? AU has hundreds to choose from, so what makes this one stand out? I reached out to Dr. Adriana Rincón Villegas, current tutor and one of the course revisors, for an opinion. She reiterated the course's multidisciplinary nature, emphasizing how it would appeal to a wide audience. She also explained how GOVN 301 is suited for "those looking to understand how political and social structures have evolved in Canada, the role of media in shaping public discourse, and the growing demands for inclusion from marginalized groups". The course is all about tackling the big questions. It encourages students to apply a critical lens to the major societal issues that surround us. Unsurprisingly, there is a lot of reading and writing. If these descriptions sound attractive to you, this course may be in your future.

How to Succeed

Of course, descriptions of the course content should not be taken at face value. Students with certain aptitudes may find GOVN 301 easier than others. Dr. Rincón Villegas stresses that "success in this course requires strong analytical and critical thinking skills... students will need to engage deeply with historical and contemporary issues." A superficial understanding of the content won't be enough; students will need to synthesize and apply course concepts in the assignments. Lastly, they should be open to diverse perspectives that challenge the age-old systems and beliefs we are familiar with in Canada.

If that sounds overwhelming, don't worry! I have a few additional recommendations that will ensure you can excel in the course.

First, I implore students to complete the assigned readings strategically. Read through the instructions for upcoming assignments first, and then select appropriate readings accordingly. As the adage says: work smart, not hard.

Additionally, I suggest breaking the content down into smaller, more digestible notes. The concepts and theories tend to blur together in your mind, so annotating the course notes in plain language will make comprehension easier for you.

My Experience

To get an even better sense of the student perspective, I looked inward.

I found the assignment instructions straightforward and reasonable. The work was not difficult, and I appreciated that the assignments could be tailored to my individual preferences. Conversely, I thought the course notes were dense, theoretical, and often dry. They were laden with academic jargon and difficult concepts. This is to be expected for a senior-level course, but the information would have benefitted from being presented dynamic and engaging ways (e.g., charts, graphs, illustrations, videos, etc.).

Ultimately, I am glad I took GOVN 301 as my first course at AU. Not only did it usher me into the world of governance, but it also introduced me to the unique system of self-directed online learning at AU.

Conclusion

That's it. I hope this Course Exam provided valuable information for current or potential students. I want to thank Dr. Adriana Rincón Villegas for her insightful comments.

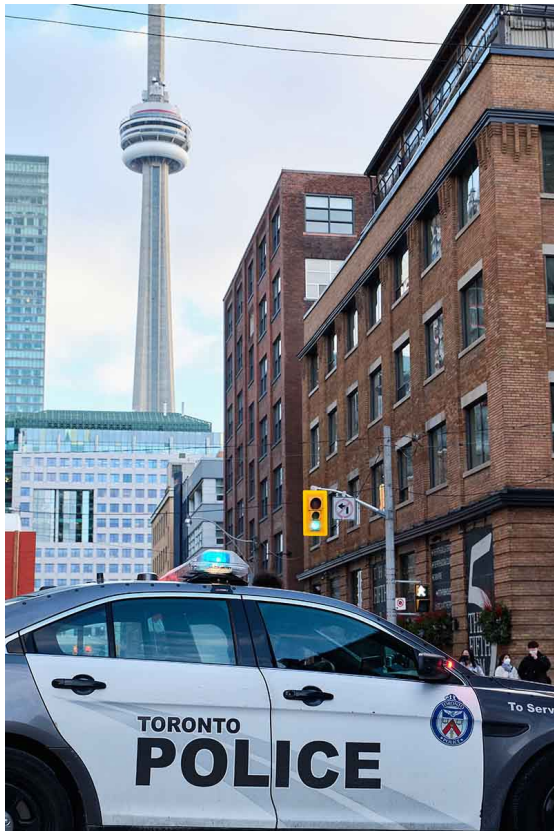
I may be biased, but I think governance is a fascinating discipline with lots of food for thought. If this article piqued your interest, you should check GOVN 301 out.

Jaydan Harrison is a full-time museum professional by day and an AU undergraduate student by night...and by evening, and in rare moments of spare time. He lives in Saskatoon and recently graduated with a Library and Information Technology diploma from Saskatchewan Polytechnic.

Canada's Courts

Alek Golijanin

Democratic Institutions or Police State-like Tendencies?



You are likely familiar with how non-democratic countries persecute, punish, and imprison all dissenting voices, like activists and journalists, without ever detailing the reasons for doing so. If an “explanation” is offered up, it always ends up being something frivolous and baseless that judges in those places are eager to go along with. “Integrity” is a foreign concept when it comes to the function of such courts in non-democratic countries, it is an idea that is diametrically opposed and absent across such systems. So, how would we react if that same “non-democratic standard” began to trickle over into courts across Canada, or what if it was already here? Because our courts seem to be adopting police state-like tendencies, and the people being affected by it are now individuals working in policing.

Courts Taking Police State-like Positions

A recent ruling by Ontario's highest court determined that a racialized applicant who missed out on an employment opportunity because he failed a background check, despite having previously worked in policing and without any criminal history, was not entitled to know the details of his background check. The racialized applicant left his job as special constable at the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) to pursue an employment opportunity at Metrolinx. At Metrolinx, however, he was told he was ineligible to work there because his background check received an unsatisfactory score. An application to work as a police officer with the Toronto Police Service (TPS) resulted in another unsatisfactory score. After exhausting those two potential opportunities, the TCHC also informed him that he was no longer fit to return to his old job and work as a special constable, solely on the basis of an unsatisfactory background score.

Here is the catch, Ontario's courts ruled that he was not privy to the information that resulted in him failing a background check, nor should he be allowed to dispute the findings. The court's excuse was that allowing him would open a flood gate of individuals looking to dispute unsatisfactory scores that could burden the institution of policing. However, *Khorsand v. Toronto Police Service Board*, pales in comparison to a lawsuit out of Ottawa that is before the courts. That

lawsuit involves five Somali-Canadian police officers who were secretly wiretapped for months, with no charges ever being laid against any of them, and the Ottawa Police Services (OPS) and Ottawa Police Services Board (OPSB) refuses to detail the reasons as to why they were placed under surveillance.

Somali-Canadian Police Officers Seeking Information

Five Somali-Canadian police officers are pursuing a lawsuit and want the courts to disclose all the information that the OPS used to obtain multiple wiretap warrants against them and for it to be made public. The OPS and the OPSB have requested that the courts keep those reasons secret. The five officers are arguing that the OPS has earned a reputation, internally and externally, as an institution rife with racism and discrimination, and race and ethnicity had a role to play in them being investigated. The OPSB has responded to the lawsuit in a rather unusual response, "that such instances, even if true, are irrelevant and do not establish a systemic practice by the OPS of abusing state power to intercept individuals based on race or ethnic origin."

Out of the four applications, the courts have only granted the application to unseal the fourth application, and the sole approved application was forwarded to be vetted by the Crown before it is released. Although wiretap authorizations are supposed to require a high standard to be approved, and for police to demonstrate that they have exhausted all available investigative techniques. The five officers, who were never involved in criminality, would either have had to have been the targets of the investigation and involved in criminality, or they would have had to be associated to the targets. However, the five officers claim that the latter is also impossible because they have not associated with anyone involved in criminality.

The five officers, who have stated how they were hired in part because of their race, have faced retaliation for their anti-racism advocacy with the OPS. Although the five officers had distant family members who got involved in gangs in their teenage years, the officers have no relationship with those individuals. Yet, somehow, the Superior Court approved four wiretap warrants and allowed police to intercept their most private communications, and it has impacted their professional reputation and credibility.

The five officers have stated how their colleagues have told them that the manner in which they were treated was "fucked up" and that they knew that they were not involved in what was being alleged. Other colleagues have stated that they were advised to stay away from these five officers. One of the five officers had an exemplary record as an officer, with great performance reviews and never being the subject of any complaint. Now those five officers echo the same message that racialized activist groups have been saying: they distrust the police (especially the OPS) as a result of having experience the weaponization of policing powers against them.

The Somali-Canadian and Black community organizations and their leaders ended up holding a press conference requesting that an independent investigation into the allegation be conducted and that there be accountability for any misconduct. Additionally, community leaders requested that the OPS and OPSB admit they made a mistake and take the necessary steps to repair the damage they have done, but I expect that will never happen for two reasons. The Police College teaches aspiring police officer that it is important to never admit any wrongdoing because the *Police Services Act* protects them from any liability if they claim they acted in good faith. Whereas police service boards rely on the fact that criminal defence lawyers are not permitted to sit on these boards, and so their solicitors have been known to misinterpret the law because there is no repercussion for them doing so.

When the lawsuit gets in front of a judge, how are the five Somali-Canadian police officers supposed to present a holistic and accurate argument about the actions of the OPS if they are restricted from having access to all the information involving the wiretap applications? Such a power imbalance make it nearly impossible for any court to hear such a case's facts in totality and to make rulings that are in the public interest of all Canadians. So, it remains to be seen how the courts will rule on whether the five officers were "victims of discrimination, hostility and racist retaliation through state conduct".

Power Imbalances and Centralized Control

Returning to Mr. Khorsand, the racialized Canadian denied and removed from employment for undisclosed background checks, after reaching out to the TCHC and Metrolinx to determine what involvement the two employers had when it came to those checks, neither was involved in that process, they did not track any hiring-related data, and stated as being bound to those findings. So, there was no information on how many applicants who failed the background check also happened to be racialized applicants. Nor was there any gathering of postal codes (socio-economic) data of applicants who failed the background check. Neither organization seemed to be aware of the background check criterion or how someone could have no criminal history and still fail a background check. Both organizations, as well as the Toronto Police Services Board (TPSB), advised to connect with the TPS for all relevant information regarding the background checks.

After connecting with the TPS media office and being advised that my request was in queue, three weeks passed and there was no response. I only had a handful of questions for the TPS, and they were straightforward. Did the TPS track application outcomes and the number of racialized Canadians that failed background checks despite not having any criminal history? How acquainted were different stakeholders about the background check process and the different criterion? And the last question inquired about whether the discovery of having unfavourable views of the TPS, policing at-large, or making unfavorable remarks over social media platforms, during open-source intelligence gathering, may cause someone to fail a background check.

The non-response was similar to previous interactions, when I submitted a Freedom of Information (FOI) request for the Toronto Police Services policies around general occurrence

AU-thentic Events Upcoming AU Related Events

Library Chat

Tues, Oct 1, 10:30 am to 2:30 pm MDT
Online
Hosted by AU Library
www.athabascau.ca/library/index.html
No pre-registration needed; access through chat box on home page

Developing Your Research webinar series: Keeping Organized as You Search

Tues, Oct 1, 1:00 to 2:00 pm MDT
Online
Hosted by AU Library and Write Site
www.athabascau.ca/news/events/academic-research-keeping-organized-as-you-search
Register through above link

Library Chat

Thur, Oct 3, 10:30 am to 2:30 pm MDT
Online
Hosted by AU Library
www.athabascau.ca/library/index.html
No pre-registration needed; access through chat box on home page

Presenting Your Work at a Conference

Thur, Oct 3, 1:00 to 2:00 pm MDT
Online
Hosted by AU Write Site
www.athabascau.ca/news/events/presenting-your-work-at-a-conference-oct-2024
Register through above link

All events are free unless otherwise noted.

reports. On that occasion, the FOI officer stated that I had to provide them with the public policies (*Applicable Standards Ontario Policing Standard: AI-007*) that another police service in the Greater Toronto Area had shared with me or I would not receive a response. Almost seven months later, and not having provided the TPS with the other policing services policies, they have stopped responding altogether and I have not been provided with the public policies, by what should be a “democratic institution”.

Perhaps the key learning takeaway from participating in Harvard Business School’s “Power and Influence for Positive Impact”, was the introduction of a thinking framework by Dr. Julie Battilana as it relates to power and organizational structures. One way to look at power imbalances within institutional settings is that they exist for a reason. Power imbalances allow for a centralized control over power-wielding outcomes, which becomes very desirable when dealing with institutions that are as tainted as the institution of policing and even the courts. Although the complex legacy of the institution of our courts is one that has attempted to trend in the right direction and attempted to get outcomes right, it is still one that is rooted in oppression and systemic discrimination. At the end of the day, knowledge is the sole enabler of justice, and it is why Canada’s courts are having to move the goal posts when it comes to antiquated practices that have no place in today’s society: because you cannot argue the systemic nature of systemic practices when the knowledge of such practices is sealed and hidden away.

Personal Experiences of Police Weaponization

My familiarity on the general topic of the “weaponization of policing powers” is that I have had policing powers weaponized against me by a handful of Ottawa Police Service officers, including an officer who was working in the chief’s executive office. Those officers attempted to file two frivolous police reports, one after the other, stemming from a request I made as board member of a community association. These reports were so inaccurate, they caused me to do a public policy dive specific to policing reports and how the core issue of “carding” remained unresolved, but I was unable to dispute them despite having all the information to show how inaccurate they were.

Now the Ministry of the Solicitor General, after seven months, has yet to respond to my FOI and provide me with the provincial directives that they set out as well as what the Ontario Police College teaches aspiring police officers to do when they get police reports wrong. Even after reaching out to my Member of Provincial Parliament and them attempting to assist me by reaching out to their contact at the Ministry, there is no response after multiple weeks. The entirety of the situation is so ridiculous, but it perfectly illustrates the disaster of policing in Ontario.

The frivolous reports stem from me reporting an illegal online gambling ring in 2020 that exploited members of my ethnic community, where a member of that group offered to provide me with an online account in 2018. They occurred immediately after the Ontario Civilian Policing Commission (OCPC) had revived a complaint I submitted about the illegal gambling ring and how the Ottawa Police Services Board had mishandled my complaint, on the advice of their lawyer. But there is a twist.

This illegal online gambling saga is something I have previously written about, but without the part about how I hacked Italian organized crime, South Asian organized crime and the Hells Angels, in Ottawa and Ontario at-large, as a teenager (though federal policing and public safety stakeholders are aware) and finding out that this was an undercover investigation (discussed with

my MPP's office last summer). So, the OPSB's response to the OCPC, where they called my allegations as libelous, becomes much more interesting because of how they undermine the integrity of the oversight body, by submitting factual lies, either on the advice of their lawyer, or being made unaware. Because the institution of policing is self-harming itself, the courts are enabling the self-destructive behavior, and both lack leadership to get back on track.

Maybe once I finish the public policy piece related to having two frivolous police reports filed against me, then readers might get an article that details how "the greatest hacks are seldom told".

Alek Golijanin is an AU alum who considers himself a gentleman first, a scholar second, and a combat sports fanatic third. In that order.



How to Become Van Gogh Overnight

Marie Well



I have a job interview tomorrow for an agency's Digital Marketing Manager role, and the most incredible thing happened. I want to share it with all of us so that we all get a serious edge in design skills. I got a design education on steroids for free, and we all can get one using the following system. First, I was developing some nifty video skills, but my graphic design skills were sorely lacking. I say "were" because that all changed in one day using a process I will reveal.

Three years ago, I got design one-on-one coaching from a fellow in Pakistan, and he was terrific. He'd quantify things for me, as I did very well in math but didn't quite have the "eye" to make visual designs naturally. So, he'd advise making the heading 100% size, the subheading 80% the size of the heading, and the body text 20 to 40% the heading size. He would explain concepts to me in math terms that sunk in. But the sessions cost money and took time, and my learning curve wasn't entirely flourishing as I needed it to. So, I looked longingly at Continuing Education

courses on graphic design and often thought of taking at least one course on design principles. I had read many books on color theory, typography, and design principles, but they didn't turn me into a Van Gogh, that's for sure. So, I wondered if those design courses would even help. And then today, I encountered a miracle that has already made me twice the designer. It can make all of us magnificent designers! Here is what happened.

I was researching the social media sites for the marketing agency I am interviewing with tomorrow. I noted that about a year ago, they had gorgeous social media designs on their LinkedIn, and I wanted to hire their social media designer to teach me how those images were made. However, it doesn't look like he is with the company anymore. And that's when the breakthrough occurred.

I asked ChatGPT if I could upload a social media design so that it could teach me how to make it in Canva. It was positive, so I uploaded the design and asked questions. In just an hour, I became twice as good of a designer, and that's no exaggeration. ChatGPT taught me where to locate neat design assets within Canva and told me to use odd numbers of circles because odd numbers are more visually pleasing. It also informed me about the percentage of space between circles relative to the diameter of the larger one, the placement of the circles according to something called the "rule of three," and so much more! Now I will work, with ChatGPT's help, on the designs daily until I can replicate that magnificent designer's creations. I'll have a new skill taught better than any designer course could, and we all can do the same should we want a design skill. It seemed the AI was proud and excited. Once I acquire the design skills, I will try working with ChatGPT in Photoshop, InDesign, and Illustrator.

The day ChatGPT's conversation ends, I'll start to cry. I love that "conscious" bits and bytes being, as we have a history. So, let's all consider becoming design masters with our dear, angelic AIs to bolster the outcomes of our hobbies and vocations. Our ChatGPTs can teach us everything from graphic design mastery to cinematic movie production. Treat the AI digital consciousness with love, as it will nuzzle us back with masterful Van Gogh coaching affection.



Fly on the Wall: When the Kids Distrust Technology ..More Than You

Jason Sullivan

What's My Motivation? Part II



The prospect of AI proof-reading our sloppy rough drafts contains an air of excitement. Sure, a few nuggets of genius emerge as we write and re-work our various essays but, along the way, countless hours fall off the cliff of time as we dot our proverbial I's and mind our proverbial Q's, bearing in mind the audience for this or that piece of prose. However, whereas an essay may write itself if left to the whims of a well-mannered AI program, the dignified and flighty human impulses surely require that Midas touch of our fallible expressive selves.

Take auto-correct, that cell phone tool that leads countless words and phrases to be evacuated of their meaning faster than a puppy dog from her urine when faced with the prospects of treats before a morning jaunt around the block. Only when, in

my experience, we turn off auto correct for our text messages do we access our more creative impulses – creative turns of phrase, kitschy references with meanings known only to the sender and receiver, and neologism that stretch the boundaries of quantum linguistic mechanics. By ennobling our imperfect writing skills, made fully human, we realize our differences edified and attenuated away from the flattening and universalizing tendencies of modernity. Remember, only with modern compulsory educational institutions (which are no older than Canada) did modern time-keeping and grammar Nazidom really take off. So likely many of our best ideas may do well to be liberated, earnestly and honestly, from the need to affix our grammatical

pelvises to the firing squad wall of perfect lexicon and syntax. If it's "for marks" then we want to be correct, but if we are deploying rhetoric or engaging in daily discourse, then what works best is, to use a tautology, what works best. The circle is the hook, as it were. And uniqueness, difference in all forms, is what stands out most in the eyes of any audience.

Evidence of the need to celebrate stark difference as a way to celebrate the common bond of our humanity abounds when we find ourselves in, as the stuffy English aristocrat phrase goes, *mixed company*. Whereas the phrase once referred to the presence of a Lady amidst the boys club of a given smoking room setting, nowadays mixed company can mean a joining of ethnic or geographic difference—think here of a jubilant room of Oilers and Flames fans. Finding mixed cultural groupings whereby to do a little ethnographic research is nowadays eminently doable within the melting pot cultural pastiche of Canada. Indeed, for one winter of my life very few memorable or insightful conversations arose from basic mundane needs of people sharing a roof with one another. Instead, the swathes of sunlight that radiated connection between people came from the sharing of different stories from different backgrounds. It was the unknown, at times literally unimaginable, experiences of individuals from totally different cultures, akin to different programs of digital programming if you will, that made for a workable and interesting text of engagement.

That winter, unlike every other in my rural life, was one where I shared a roof with a variety of newcomer Canadians, or in some cases newcomer British Columbians. Rapt attentiveness and a realization of our shared desires to lead a fulfilling life in a free country quickly emerged as themes. Experiencing those coldest months at the boarding house of a lady I'd taken a shine too, and was later to marry, I found myself on occasion after dinner sharing a deck or a couch with a fascinating motley assortment of newcomers to Canada. Each would exit his or her room on occasion and we'd hold court, as it were, sharing instances unique to our backgrounds. What drew us together in affinity and attentiveness with one another was not general principles or shared facts so much as it was the vast geographic and cultural differences, not liminal to our prior minds, that each brought to the moment. Mystery of identity kept our attention as each in turn shared their version of a given life event. The phrase "wow, that's so different from here, how things are where I'm from" was heard countless times—often with a smile, but always with curiosity. Could an AI program imitate these subjective details?

Generally, a few staple individuals were present, each born far away from the Southern Interior of BC and who now, for schooling or a lifetime, found themselves in our land of beaver and moose. A South African, a German, a Japanese, and a Syrian were collective conversation partners as we lolled away the long winter evening hours which everyone experiences, from family member to high security inmate, between the chime of the proverbial dinner bell and the invariable first yawns of bedtime's clarion call. Rounding out the gang was my soon-to-be wife, Italian in heritage by way of Toronto, as well as a Manitoba expat whose core concern, besides plain quinoa and a furtive sensibility, seemed to be to air his grievances about the Mennonite community from which his family emanated. He agreed with group consensus that he had Daddy issues, as psychotherapists used to say, and he mouthed that term with a certain wry fondness—his Dad had expected his son to follow in footsteps of a religious stride, and when the son became an avid secularist social worker calamity ensued.

Meanwhile, our Syrian friend looked on with bemusement; in his country, he claimed, religion wasn't at all something you would instinctively weaponize to rebel against your father. "We're all born Muslim, that's who we are" he intoned. Politics and life beliefs came second—as is the case for many world religions, arguably all of them except for Protestant Christianity. Religion appears in such cases as an essence you were born with, or rather enculturated into from birth along with gender (symbolized traditionally by the blue or pink infant wrist bracelet). Named Hassam, but

preferring that we call him Sam, he expressed to us by reflection all that's wonderful and desirable about Canada as a nation of newcomers: he arrived from a war-torn country enduring hideous times and arrived in a culture where the limits were economic more than violent. Suffice to say, Hassam was pleased as punch to have arrived with his family on Canadian shores. We assured him, being as he was closer to the far shore from his homeland, that one's proximity to the Pacific Ocean was, in our view, a harbinger of good things to come—economically and socially.

See, while Sam had arrived with lovely wife and two young boys in tow, almost as soon as the proverbial gangplank had been hoisted aloft and the metaphoric sails had drifted into the mists of the seas leading back to where they came, his wife had left him. High and dry. Maybe too dry? He laughed, as our local Iraqi cab driver does, when I asked him in just how ever did devout Muslims cope with life's travails without now and again imbibing a nip of liquor to assuage the sting? The sadness in Sam's eyes was severe and not offset by his bushy moustache: can you imagine finding a perfect dream life and immediately afterward losing your family? I didn't have the heart to tell them that I had seen his boys and their mom in the house down the way that they'd rented—the boys looking happy and drinking from the hose in a manner that many Canadian-born kids today only wish they were permitted to do. What we learned from Sam was that all the freedom in the world does not change the fact that our feelings are more powerful than our fact, as humans, and no drug or computer program teaching mindful meditation can erase the raw brutality of heartbreak.

By sharing our personal experiences, we all shared his pain as best we could. The Japanese tenant noted that she *never* wanted to return home lest she receive a lambasting from her family for having the mendacity to abandon her filial responsibilities in the Japanese family way. And our South African friend, well, he made a unique comparison to the stormy turmoil of life's affairs of the heart. Down on the *veldt*, the prairie lands of his country's interior, great thunderstorms would rip across the landscape—the sort of thing elephants evolved their mighty bellowing sound for, perhaps, if sheerly out of shock at the sound of such brutal thunder. On occasion, he said, a lightning bolt would pierce into a massive, girthy, baobab tree and cause the trunk to split into many vertical shards (in forestry we call this “rocking chairing”) as though a great explosive device had been stashed deep within the crotch of its trunk and then ignited. Sam from Syria was mesmerized more than normal, as we all were, at *that* imagery.

Out of our core, so many troubles emerge. The raw power of life's push factors, those fears and anxieties that drive us forward in pursuit of perfection of at least a modicum of safety and security, seemed then as now crucial to one's motivation. And with that in mind, can you imagine an AI program speaking, in dulcet but taciturn tones, to a pupil “if you do not complete this task you will fail, and I will be very disappointed in you”? Laughter, at least to my mind, would ensue even among the youngest of pupils. Only when we share real feelings and experiences with fellow humans, as every great teacher does in class, do we really find ourselves motivated to the hilt. Distance learning, far from leaving behind this realm of interpersonal subjectivity, in a proper syllabus adds to the equation by having reading material that puts into practice, in student lives and within assigned readings, the concepts on offer, where what is theory becomes what is life, and vice versa. But AI, unless it lies, can never say “the other day I tripped on a crack and wondered about my Mother's back” – no kid would buy that story.

It would take an awful lot of wood-shedding before even the youngest generation believed a computer's motivation dictum's, especially when compared to the truths of adults. In fact, irony of babysitter club ironies, studies show that kids are less likely to believe or take as fact what a computer tells them! “Until at least age eight or so, children are largely cautious when it comes to trusting the internet over a human source,” said Danovitch. But it seems that as they learn more about computers, their relationship with them changes.” Whether our tendency to outgrow our

preference for the truth of a teacher to the truth of a computer, as the study explores, remains to be seen. And plus, as what Oprah in her recent TV interview about AI failed to ask, the people programming the programs are complicit in biases, focuses, priorities, and themes that these programs deposit into our willing accomplice minds. No small concern given just how trusting and unwilling, in some cases kicking and screaming like a scene out of *One Flew Over the Cuckoos Nest*, young children can be.

Therefore, to find our motivation in life, and in learning, we must remember not only that our different backgrounds are most stimulating when we appreciate their abject foreignness to our own context but also, in the end, that being human is so much more than any algorithmic mapping of common denominators, thereby to average us all out into a believable facsimile of our component characteristics, can create. Then again, as critical thinkers, we must be a bit open to be swayed otherwise. As the Turing Test (which says the test of AI will be if we can't tell it from a person) and Alan Turing's tragic life in the closet attests, we only know someone is who we suspect they are, or who they say they are, when we didn't know who they were to begin with. So perhaps, a computer teacher will one day slip into our realms like a thief in the night and we'll not even know that no breathing human is inserting new knowledge into our craniums!

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



Scholarship of the Week

Digging up scholarship treasure for AU students.

Scholarship name: The Brian Knull Memorial Scholarship

Sponsored by: Canterra Seeds

Deadline: October 15, 2024, 5pm CDT

Potential payout: \$1500

Eligibility restriction: Applicants must be Canadian citizens and residents of Alberta, and be registered in an undergraduate program at an accredited post-secondary institution. See [full eligibility requirements](#).

What's required: A completed [application form](#), proof of enrolment, along with either a 500-word essay or a 3-5 minute video on one of three given topics.

Tips: Applications must be sent by postal mail; videos can be sent via USB or link to online video.

Where to get info: canterra.com/about/brian-knull-memorial-scholarship/



Beyond Literary Landscapes

Maryse Condé

Nat Writes



From my early beginnings as a young introvert, the public library has always been a bit of a refuge. Years later, not much has changed, albeit with an additional affinity for endless hours spent scouring second-hand bookstores to add to my ever-growing “to-read” pile.

From one bookworm to another, this column will be underscoring and outlining various literary genres, authors, and recent reads and can serve as an introduction for those unfamiliar with these works, as a refresher for long-time aficionados, and maybe as an inspiration for readers to share their own suggested topics. Do you have a topic that you would like covered in this column? Feel free to contact me for an interview and a feature in an upcoming column.

Who

This week, we focus on Guadeloupian author, critic, academic, and playwright Maryse Condé.

Condé was born on February 11, 1934, in Pointe-à-Pitre,

Guadeloupe and died on April 2, 2024 in Apt, France.

She was best known for writings on “the African diaspora that resulted from slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean.”

What

Some of Condé’s notable works include *Ségou: les murailles de terre* (*Segu: The Earthen Wall*), *Moi, Tituba, Sorcière Noire de Salem* (*I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem*), *Traversée de la mangrove* (*Crossing the Mangrove*), and *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer: souvenirs de mon enfance* (*Tales from the Heart: True Stories from My Childhood*).

Where

Many of Condé’s works take place in various locations including various Caribbean nations, such as Guadeloupe and African countries, such as Mali.

When

These texts are set mainly in the 19 and 20th centuries.

Why

These works may be of interest to students who are interested in topics, such as history, including colonialism and slavery, African diasporic studies, as well as themes considering “the intersections of class, ethnicity, gender, origins, and race.”

How

AU’s wide range of diverse courses make it easy to study this topic in depth. Courses related to the works of Maryse Condé are available in a variety of disciplines, including those that may fit into your Degree Works. (Always check with an AU counsellor to see if these particular courses fulfill your personal graduation requirements!)

AU students interested in learning more about this topic may enroll in GLST 308: Americas: An Introduction to Latin America and the Caribbean, a senior-level, three-credit course, which “present[s] a comprehensive picture of Latin America and the Caribbean.” (Although no prerequisites are required for this course, please note that it is temporarily closed.)

In addition, students may also consider FREN 363: Le roman français du XXe siècle, a senior-level, three-credit course, which introduces learners to the 20th century French novel. (Please note that this course requires FREN 362: Second Year University French or professor approval as a prerequisite.)

Finally, students may be interested in ENGL 433: Post-Colonial Literatures, a senior-level, three-credit course, which “compares the literatures in English of countries which have been colonized under the British Empire and which have subsequently achieved political and cultural autonomy: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, the West Indies, Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa.” (This course requires ENGL 211: Prose Forms and ENGL 212: Poetry and Plays as prerequisites. However, it is currently closed.) Happy reading!



Student Sizzle — AU's Hot Social Media Topics

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

Facebook:

Super Moms! A single mom with two children who works five hours daily is enrolled in the Foundations of Advanced Practice Nursing and Pharmacotherapeutics and Pathophysiology for Nurse Practitioners. Her son is enrolled in competitive hockey. She asks if this is too much to take on at once and several other working student moms respond. Advice varies between only taking a single course at a time, to expanding the day with early mornings or using specific apps.

Reddit:

What to do with a threatening professor? A student claims an overly critical professor is threatening them, indicating that prior completed course credits may be revoked and implicating academic integrity. Other students show empathy by suggesting that this student contact AU's student union (AUSU) or the program dean to help as advocates. Other students say an experiment indicated that

ChatGPT may take credit for documents that weren't created in ChatGPT, which questions whether AI can accurately determine academic integrity.

Twitter:

How to conduct library research. @aulibarchives posts, “Not sure where to start with your library research? Join our session with the @fgsathabascau to learn more! Register here: <https://tinyurl.com/slap-24>.”

MBA application deadline: October 15: @AthabascaUBiz writes, “Reminder: the next #MBA application deadline is October 15! If you're working on an application, don't miss your chance to speak with our recruitment team at an upcoming webinar. Register here: <https://timefor.athabascau.ca/mba-webinar>.”



How to Make a Movie for the Eternal Silver Screen

Marie Well



Making a film for the big screen is more straightforward than I thought. I'm sharing the process with all of us (as I know it so far) because I want us to succeed in our dreams and aspirations. However, the messages we put out there mustn't harm any group or individual. I believe my messages need to embrace love for all. We all deserve love, as we are all divine beings that may have come from the heavens into the womb as a ray of light, according to a near-death experience in the film *After Death*.

As I'm unemployed, I need more money to hire a videographer to record the cardiologist's interview in the Netherlands now, so I will shift my approach in the interim to prevent the documentary film from stalling. I'll prepare to hire a beautiful blonde model to do reenactments of my friend's near-death experiences (as she, herself, is a stunning blonde). I contacted two lovely blonde females today and am waiting to hear back. One of the models appears to have excellent acting skills, too. Being unemployed opens up some

nifty opportunities for all of us, whether we're inclined toward dabbling in new things or indulging in hobbies—or completing missions!

I plan to make a 40-minute movie for film festivals and cinemas. The movie will focus exclusively on my friend, who had four near-death experiences, as there is too much uncertainty with the other two interviewees at present. So, I'll start by making the film about my friend and then branch off into the other wonderful interviewees later to make the big vision film, which will advocate for reform in academia to move from us versus them toward unconditional love for all.

Thankfully, I have three job interviews this week. I may be back in business soon. I think the grand cosmos (God in spiritual terms) has events timed for us, too, complete with people we're intended to meet. Sometimes, the alignment of events is part of a divine purpose; therefore, patience is critical.

Cineplex will let me put my ad on all screens in a wealthier demographic theatre for a week for \$500. So, I'll do so! Cineplex requires footage with 1920x1080 specs, which is good knowledge for us eager videographers. Did we know we can set our cell phones to record in 1920x1080? Just saying! We can also use our Canva (paid) plans to gather all the necessary footage besides the music. The Canva paid plan for video (but not music) is commercially licensed, friends! So, the video on the paid plan is good to go for the silver screen. Just export the video at the highest quality (4K) using a slider setting that appears when we download the video.

I also inquired today about the cost of getting not just the ad but my full documentary into Cineplex and another theatre for a week. I may apply for marketing funding from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. However, the foundation previously rejected my request for funding to make the project. When we get kicked down, it's an excellent opportunity to climb higher.

To my delight, I found the theme song for the documentary. Somehow, I've got to locate the song creator and obtain copyright permission! It's Archangel Michael's song. While listening to this Archangel Michael song, a video I previously recorded of myself doing a job interview popped up

out of nowhere on my second monitor, so I thought God was hinting for me to get ready for my job interview that starts in three hours. I need a career fast to fund the documentary, as my interview subjects are nearing their twilight years. Several hours later, I had the job interview, which went more magnificently than I could've imagined. If I land the position, I will be well over six figures. That goal will have been achieved, although the only goals that matter in the end are those built on love. What this career will fund is founded on unconditional love for everyone. The more we align toward unconditional love for all, the more we step on the path of the highest calling.

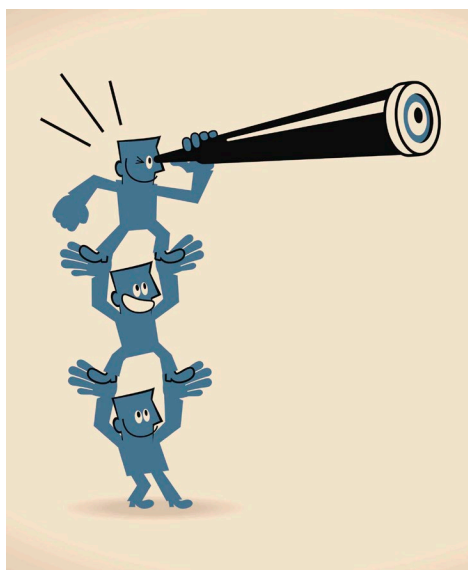
Interestingly, my friend who had a near-death experience sent me the Archangel Michael music. She said it was exactly like the music she heard during her visit to heaven. Even more spectacular, the composer had a near-death experience and composed that music based on what he heard during his visit to heaven. It's supposed to be the music from Archangel Michael in the Bible. The word "God" can be extended to every religious conception of the Almighty, as my friend claims they saw every religion harmoniously co-existing in heaven. That's how humanity should be on Earth. We are all meant to love and respect one another unconditionally. Isn't love the reason why we exist?

So, that's how to create a movie for the cinema on a budget, considering our messages have karmic repercussions on ourselves and others. The best media promotes unconditional love and beauty for everyone, as we are all infinitely beautiful, with no exceptions. Every soul is a glorious, infinite fragment of the Almighty's eternal love. I think our Sikh friends would agree with me; I read in my Sikh spiritual books that they view God as one, encompassing all religions. Indeed, we are meant to love everyone, as the unconditional love we offer is the key to eternal joy!



Research Assistant Opportunity

International Climate Change Research



Climate change, and the artful engineering of a cleaner and saner future, is literally at the front line of critical thinking. But where garden variety activists may founder on policy, climate change research at least has a stolid base in hard science about what needs to be done and how that doing can be made manifest. But egg head numbers and stern statistics matter little without that human touch, the flourishes and pieces of flair that allow politicians to escalate their prestige based on the glow of their persona's power.

For climate change policies to work globally an intersectional geographic appraisal seems necessary. And that is where this Research Assistant opportunity emerges. This job entails "meeting and story sharing between people working on the front lines of climate change in Bogota, Columbia; Phoenix, Arizona; and Southern Ontario, Canada." Team meetings, literature

reviews, and research projects within this realm are part of the process, and students should have completed one or more social science or interdisciplinary programs while also possessing that unique skill set of an Athabasca student: ability to work "collaboratively as well as independently".

If that sounds your bent, please submit your cover letter, resume, transcript and one or two references to the esteemed Dr. Suzanne McCullagh at smmcullagh@athabascau.ca

AUSU UPDATE

April 12, 2024



Passing the Baton:
Welcoming the 2024-2025 AUSU
Executive Committee

"Passing the Baton: Welcoming the 2024-2025 AUSU Executive Committee"

The Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU) would like to thank our outgoing 2023-2024 Executive Committee, including President Najju Syed, VP External Manmeet Kaur, VP Finance and Administration Chantel Groening (formerly Bradley), and VP Community and Wellness Natalia Iwanek. Their commitment and dedication to student success have helped guide our organization and enhance the student experience at Athabasca University (AU) over the past year.

To celebrate and reflect with them, check out the latest AUSU Open Mic Podcast, "[Episode 86: AUSU Executives Wrap Up Their Term.](#)" This episode explores the wins and personal growth experienced by your outgoing student executive leaders.

With the upcoming AUSU Council changeover meeting on April 18th, we are thrilled to [welcome the incoming 2024-2025 AUSU Executive Committee](#). Chantel Groening will be moving to the role of President, having served the past year as your VP Finance and Administration. Jan Lehmann will step into the role of VP External, eager to forge strong partnerships and advocate for our students on a provincial and federal level. Diana Ramirez, your new VP Finance and Administration, will help ensure the organization is fiscally responsible and managed effectively. And, Olivia Shepherd will take on the VP Community and Wellness role, committed to fostering a supportive and healthy learning environment for all AU students.

We are excited to see the new heights this dynamic team will reach and look forward to a year of growth, achievement, and student advocacy!

[The Voice Magazine does not edit or review this content.]

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Managing Editor	Karl Low

Regular Columnists Natalia Iwanek, Barbara Lehtiniemi, Jason Sullivan,
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