



THE VOICE

Vol 32 Issue 45 - 2024-11-15

Rhyme of the Anxious Writer

A Poem for the AU Student

How I Strive to Be Anti-Racist

Non- is not enough.

Our Thoughts Fill Our Web of Dreams

Advice of the Relentless Optimist

Plus:

*Music Review: Georgie Benz
Up the Ante Every Second
and much more!*



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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

The Unexpected Unexpected

Karl Low



This week, our featured article, is, to my great surprise, a poem.

Since I included some poetry recently, it was no surprise that this week there was another poem in my in-box. That's a bit of what I was afraid of happening, that including any poetry would open the floodgates, and before I knew it, I'd be swimming through rafts of angst-ridden free verse, all of such personal and subjective value to the authors but inscrutable for the majority of Voice readers. And then having to tell these would-be poets that baring their soul just isn't right for the Voice. I'm sure nobody likes crushing dreams.

So, when I saw it in my inbox, I was thinking "Oh no. Here we go." But what I opened in the attached file was not free verse. True, it was somewhat angst ridden, but for good reason (as you'll see when you read it). More to the point, it directly connects to AU students and is likely something every student has either experienced, or at least imagined they might experience.

So, yeah. This week, believe it or not, I'm featuring a poem by Blythe Appleby. Let me know what you think. I think it's a pretty good read.

The next feature is by a new writer who comes forward with some strong words toward how to be anti-racist. Aside from the advice provided, what caught my attention was the sentence "Today, being non-racist is no longer sufficient; we must proactively work toward being anti-racist ..." What struck me was how much that statement could be generalized, "Today, being non- anything, is no longer sufficient; we must proactively work toward ..." and it could apply to everything from whatever social cause you favor to involvement in politics, whether for post-secondary education, the U.S. election, or some other cause that has meaning or could affect you. With people and politics being so polarized, non-involvement is its own type of involvement—involvement for the arguments and ideologies you don't want. Because you can be sure those that do want it are getting angrier and more involved.

The third feature is a little uplifting article by Marie Well. Her, let's say "relentless", optimism in the face of situations that would normally lead to anything but, is, I think, a good balance for my cynicism here in the Voice Magazine. And at the moment, I feel like we all need a bit of uplifting. I know I certainly do.

But beyond the features, this week also has a good selection of columns and articles, with a brand new music review, a look at the world of collectibles, another research assistant opportunity if you want to start to get in good with AU (especially important if you intend to seek a graduate degree), a consideration of laughter as an academic action, as well as our usual selection of scholarships, events, and more.

And who knows, maybe things won't turn out as bad as I expect. One thing about being a cynic, I'm usually happier when I'm wrong. So let's hope for the unexpected.

Enjoy the read!

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

The Rhyme of the Anxious Essay Writer

Blythe Appleby

I'd managed to forget about it
(For a week at least),
But now it's here, it's back again,
That truly scary beast.

Such a harmless-looking message,
It's in my inbox now:
"Your Assignment has been Marked!
Click Here, Review it Now!"

I didn't understand them well
(The essay options given),
And now I'm sure the price I'll pay
Is the low mark I'll be given.

I hardly dare to click the link.
I know just what I'll see:
A great big fat whole minus D
Will be staring back at me.

I know my tutor hates me;
That's been made quite clear
By the other middling, not-great marks
I've had so far this year.

I thought I'd like this course at first
When I saw the summary,
And only winced a little bit
When I had to pay the fee.

But now I've nothing but regrets
And a lowered GPA
To show for what I paid AU
When I registered that day.

A pounding heart and shallow breath
And gritted teeth have I
As I click the link and type the code
And promise not to cry.

It's nothing really, nothing much;
It matters not a bit;
I really don't care if I fail—
I won't throw a fit.

My heart's not set on scholarships,
And 100's not my aim;



A degree's still a degree
No matter what score I gain.

I'm on the page. I must scroll down.
I must face what I see.
I'm sure I've got a crummy C,
Or even a lowly D.

My eyes skip over comments made
By the tutor I didn't like.
I'll come back when my eyes are dry
To see what she doesn't like.

The final breath—my insides roil—
I see it now. Hooray!
I really did enjoy this course,
Don't listen to what I say!
For what do I see
In front of me
But a shining, glowing,
A!



Blythe Appleby is an AU graduate, historic interpreter, period clothing specialist, gourmet, and bibliophile.



Scholarship of the Week

Digging up scholarship treasure for AU students.

Scholarship name: ServiceScape Scholarship 2024

Sponsored by: ServiceScape

Deadline: November 29, 2024

Potential payout: \$1,000 USD

Eligibility restriction: Applicants must be students attending or who will attend an accredited college, university, or trade school in 2024, and must be at least 18 years old.

What's required: An online application form with contact info, along with a 300-word essay on how writing impacts today's world.

Tips: Read the [winning entries from previous years](#) for inspiration.

Where to get info: <https://www.servicescape.com/scholarship>



How I Strive to be Anti-Racist

Daniel Akinjise



Relocating to the west from Nigeria exposed me to working on several projects in my position as a Human Resource Professional, including some about anti-racism, diversity, and inclusion. In the process of managing them, I had to ask myself if I considered myself anti-racist, knowing fully well that I have my own biases too. However, drawing from my experiences working on multiple continents, I am humbled to share practical tips on how I have managed to be anti-racist.

Today, being non-racist is no longer sufficient; we must proactively work toward being anti-racist, as Angela Davis (an American political activist, scholar, and author known for her work in the civil rights movement, prison abolition, and the fight against systemic racism) Emphasized. Racism affects us all and permeates our daily lives. Living and working in a multicultural society exposes us to individuals from diverse racial backgrounds, making it crucial to build meaningful relationships with them.

To contribute to the fight against racism and foster a more inclusive and equitable society, consider the following approaches:

First and foremost, engage in intentional learning and avoid assuming you fully understand the experiences of marginalized communities. Practice active listening, seeking to comprehend rather than to simply respond. Affirm and validate their narratives while respecting their unique perspectives. Engage in conversations challenging your worldview and exchanging stories and viewpoints with peers, friends, and colleagues. This exposure to diverse lived experiences can broaden your understanding of racial issues.

Second, challenge your biases and be cautious about making judgments based on preconceived notions or stereotypes about individuals or their race. Utilize educational resources that provide nuanced analyses from racial or ethnic perspectives. Attend workshops, events, and conferences that address race-related issues, deepening your understanding of historical and contemporary racial disparities.

Third, embrace accountability and engage in respectful conversations with friends and family when they make problematic comments. For example, imagine you're at a family gathering, and an uncle makes a stereotypical comment about a racial group. Instead of ignoring it or laughing it off, you decide to address it in a calm and respectful way. You might say something like, "Uncle, I know you didn't mean any harm, but comments like that can actually reinforce hurtful stereotypes. It's important to remember that everyone deserves to be seen as individuals, not generalized based on their race." This approach holds your uncle accountable for his words, but it also opens the door for a meaningful conversation without shaming him. By keeping it respectful, you're more likely to engage him in a way that encourages understanding and growth. This kind of dialogue can often lead to greater awareness within your family, as it helps them see the impact of their words.

Fourth, support marginalised people and recognize the lack of representation and support they face. Promote their work and acknowledge their contributions. Engage with organizations actively working within communities to uplift those disproportionately affected by racism.

In conclusion, it is crucial to avoid perpetuating harmful biases through stereotypical comments or assumptions about someone's race or ethnicity. By practicing accountability, expanding your knowledge, approaching learning with humility, and supporting people of color, you can actively contribute to dismantling racism and creating a more inclusive society.

Daniel is a licensed HR professional passionate about using technology to enhance HR practices and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. He has been recognized for his contributions to youth development, good governance, and environmental sustainability.



Our Thoughts Fill Our Web of Dreams

Marie Well



Recently, I stalled writing down my big dreams and goals every morning. However, a whole psychology happens when we write down our big dreams and then do at least five things daily to work toward each goal. When we check off our wins, it's a motivating mini-high and fuel for our dreams.

So, I just wrote down my goals, resulting in a novel idea I wouldn't have had: I will pitch my documentary film to Angel Studios with what I've got available to me right now. Just do it. I temporarily purchased Zoom, which may work for the initial interview. I'll send my interviewee friend, who had multiple near-death experiences, a green screen to upload to her Zoom. I'll send her an invitation tonight. I've got this, as my theatre ads looked beautiful on the big screen, so I know I can do this. Just an hour ago, I phoned my near-death experience friend, but she was heading into the doctor's office, so we couldn't talk. Write down our goals daily if

we want to have epiphanies that will launch us in our dreams' direction.

I will attend a physical university's Doctor of Business Administration session tonight. I also previously attended one from AU. I don't know which one I'll apply to. I also submitted my application for Metis status and will hear back in five months as to whether I'm accepted. If everything goes well, I may get enough scholarships for my education. The doctorate costs \$2000 a month, far beyond my means, so I must apply for every scholarship imaginable. However, the Dean said that if we can't afford to pay presently, we probably shouldn't apply, so that's why we must be mavericks, never succumbing to a "we can't" response, even if we're up against formidable obstacles. There are genuinely no obstacles in life, just growth opportunities. Nothing is final—not even death.

I put my first audio clip on SoundCloud, and it wants a whole song to give me exposure, which I'll have as soon as I contract out my ghost singer to perform a song written by a highly talented loved one. I think SoundCloud is amazing. It's just like YouTube but for audio. So, for any of us with musical talent, and we know we have some gifted musical AU students among us, consider trying it.

Lately, I've been spending a lot of time doing video screen captures of AI software, using free trials, and posting them on YouTube. It's like a meditative task, like knitting or quilting. I'm addicted to doing these software video screen captures. I'm unsure if it's a calling or a diversion, but it's fun. When we see something and think, "That would be neat," it's a sign it's part of our mission. I've always wanted to be a fitness instructor as a side gig, and I can't seem to let that thought go. Listen to thoughts such as these and act on them at any opportunity. These work to fulfill God's plans for us.

Tonight, I made a breakthrough with these video screen captures. I decided to learn Power BI and Azure and figured out how to perform machine learning on a database to predict how interest rates would impact stock prices. In other words, because of these screen captures, I went from being a total blank slate to being able to apply machine learning to data to create predictive models. That means I stand a chance of getting careers in marketing that require data analytics. It also means I am more likely to be considered for a CMO role. So, go gung-ho on our hobbies, because they affect our futures. That's why we're passionate about our hobbies; they're part of our missions.

Just after I made a screen capture earlier today, I looked at a photo of a deceased loved one who was nearly crying in her picture, and I swear, she was smiling broadly right at me in a way that seemed like she was physically beside me. Yes, superstition holds greater spiritual meaning than we may realize, and nothing reassures me like a smile from a deceased loved one's photo.

So, whatever we focus on, remember where our thoughts reside is where our callings reside. And what better way to nurture our dreams than to go gung-ho with our passions? However, as a disclaimer, a woman who had a near-death experience in the movie *After Death* indicated that sometimes we have missions we either don't want to do or don't know how to execute. It's all a beautiful web, where everything we weave in that web, good or bad, shapes us into that gorgeous piece of the infinite that we always have been: endless beauty and unconditional love.



The World of Collectibles

How Card and Memorabilia Grading Services Came to Be

Alek Golijanin



Once every year, Toronto and Montreal hold a four-day card and memorabilia expo that sees tens of thousands of people come out, everyone from observers interested in taking a trip down memory lane to the most fanatic of collectors. It is also one of the few times that the world's most popular grading services fly-in from America and set up shop in Canada to provide in-person grading services, with the most popular being Professional Sports Authenticators (PSA). Auction houses will also attend these expos, should someone want to offer up a rare item for consignment and have it put up for auction. Both the grading and authenticating, as well as the auctioning-off of cards and memorabilia, have their own schematics, one making more sense than the other.

Getting an item authenticated and graded is an elaborate process that sees the item verified for its authenticity, then graded, photographed, and then

recorded into a database. Depending on the rarity of an item, costs for authenticating and grading may range from \$15 to \$10,000. Having an item authenticated significantly increases the value of the item if someone decides they want to sell it, especially if it is graded a “10”. If the item is a paper-thin item or a fixed-size item, it will get encased in a hard plastic case. Otherwise, if there are no suitable cases, as is the case for many signed items, the item will receive a sticker and letter of authentication.

For some items that are extremely rare, grading services companies may not provide on-site grading and will request that the item be sent to their main offices to get examined and encased in hard plastic. If the extremely rare item is a signed item, then the item will be verified, photographed, and recorded into a database, and returned right away, but the sticker and letter of authentication will be mailed to the owner. No payment is processed in either instance until a follow-up call is scheduled sometime after the event. Despite that it may seem sketchy, this is often done when the extremely rare item that is being authenticated and graded has a fee closer to \$10,000.

Unless an item is authenticated and graded, serious collectors are unlikely to pay large sums of money, and auction houses do not like to take non-authenticated or non-graded items on consignment. Unlike the straightforward process with PSA, auction houses have an approach to doing business that is not for everyone. That process often involves an auctioneer having a one-on-one conversation with the owner of a rare collectible that sees a “realistic” price, were it to get put up for auction, be attributed to it.

Whatever that “realistic” price may be, bidding always starts at 25% of it, and only on the rarest occasions will an auction house offer to guarantee a 50% minimum payout. Once an owner signs the agreement papers to put their collectible up for auction, if the item sells for 50% or less, the owner will be out of their collectible, selling it for much less than they were led to believe that it could sell for. For such circumstances, the owner has no course of reparations. The power behind those signed agreements is why so many small-time collectors feel they have been “cheated” out of collectibles that are now selling for many times more than what they were paid when they auctioned them.

Today’s authenticating and grading services primarily came about because of deceptive and fraudulent practices including the counterfeiting of cards and signatures. These activities have been featured in Netflix documentaries, detailing how the FBI arrested and charged individuals involved in the hobby and game shop ecosystem for everything ranging from counterfeiting cards and signatures to the opening and resealing of cards packs after the rarest cards get taken out and swapped. So, it is probably not a coincidence that the story behind many mega collectors who were super lucky with the cards they pulled or purchased at a “great deal” is that they also happened to be in the hobby and game shop business.

Arguably the most famous instance of someone buying an altered card is the Honus Wagner card (1909), which was authenticated and graded an “8” (1991) – shortly after the first card grading service was established in 1991. After nearly a decade, the owner of that card, none other than Canada’s most famous son, Wayne Gretzky, who bought it in 1991, found that it was altered. Today that same card is on display in the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, referred to as the “Gretzky Wagner” or “The Holy Grail” because of who it involved and how it all transpired. As recently as 2019, more altered cards were identified, with the FBI getting involved to arrest and

charging individuals, like always, but it has also resulted in many grading card services shifting to incorporate AI to automate the authenticating and grading process.

I'll tell you what, those PSA Californians got personality, and they can joke.

What makes the Toronto card expo quite cool is that it has been organized in a way that makes it an event for everyone. Little kids get to attend at no-cost, and events are organized so that parents who might not be able to afford to buy their children anything at the card show can see their kids play trivia games and win prizes. For those seeking entertainment, occasionally collectors will gamble on opening card packs, ranging from singular packs to thousand-dollar boxes, and whoever opens the pack with the most expensive cards wins the other person's cards. Watching card collectors gamble and lose with at the thousand-dollar box challenge was different compared to seeing someone lose money at the casino because these collectors had a child-like innocence to them, and it was clear as day that they were holding back tears.

Most of the vendors are great and are happy to talk cards and memorabilia with everyone, including small children and those just taking a trip down memory lane. But the buying, selling, or trading that occurs at these tradeshow is not the same kind of light-hearted fun that someone may recall the playground as being, and everyone is looking to get the upper hand. A few of the vendors may be sketchy and may refuse to provide a price or a straight answer on specific items. One such vendor tried to pull wool over my eyes regarding a signed photo of my favourite Prime Minister, Lester B. Pearson, before I called him out for being deceitful. After detailing the item for him, he turned red and refused to give me a price for it.

My reason for attending the Toronto card expo was to have a few items be authenticated on-site by PSA, since I did not feel comfortable mailing them to the U.S.. After seeing the uniqueness of my items, two PSA staff inquired about what other items I might have had in my "vault". After naming a few items, the PSA duo was caught off-guard, and a fun chat ensued. Near the end of our fun chat, I inquired about the possibility of sending my "summer's blunt" for them to verify, as less reputable grading services were expanding what items they would grade and authenticate. The PSA heads explained that they did not grade and authenticate specific types of items and that drug paraphernalia fell into that category, nor was it likely that they would start doing so.

A point was made how grading blunts could make for a slippery slope and that there would be nothing stopping someone from potentially requesting that other kinds of drug paraphernalia, like those that belonged to "Pablo Escobar", be authenticated. I concurred, pointing out that it was a great rhetorical thought, so long as we forgot about the existence of the world's premier police service, the FBI, alongside its younger brother, the DEA, and their 99.9% conviction rate against narco-traffickers. Without missing a beat, one of heads joked, "Forget the FBI and DEA, those kinds of "goodies" would go missing on every occasion. We would have a big problem on our hands. It's California after all." We went a few more rounds and I can confirm that those PSA Californians have personality and they can joke.

Unless President Trump decides to abolish the FBI, like some of his biggest endorsers have suggested, and if he decides to pardon Silk Road founder, Ross Ulbricht, like he has suggested he will, then PSA might change their stance. Of course, if both of those outcomes occur, then we might need some eccentric, ballsy and great Canadian hackers to save the day, so long as they are mature, of course. Because Canadians are the most eccentric, ballsiest, and greatest hackers to walk the digital world (it's not even close), while also being the hackers who mature the slowest (it's also not even close).

All of it had me thinking, imagine if I had decided to follow all the digital footprints that I came across during my Lincoln-loving Harley-hating days (2010/11). I may not have been able to snatch up any memorabilia belonging to Pablo Escobar, but five-fingering a discount of something that belonged to “El Chapo” or “El Mayo” may have been a possibility. Thank goodness, however, that “teenage Alek” had just enough sense to him to realize how bad of an idea that would have been, after reaching an A2 level in Spanish, to get a summer job at one of the resorts in Mazatlán, Mexico.

Maybe I missed out on cool piece of memorabilia, I know I definitely missed out on a cool story, possibly something along the lines of Kenny Powers in Mexico (Eastbound and Down, 2009-2013). But I was a gamer and the furthest thing from being about “that life”. Oh, my teenage cyber escapades.

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



Student Sizzle — AU's Hot Social Media Topics

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

Reddit:

Program Timing. A student asks how long it takes to finish three semesters while working versus not working. Responses caution that tutors can delay returning grades, learning retention may be lower with a rapid speed of learning, and some courses mandate course progress occur after milestones, such as completion of specific assignments or midterm exams. But others suggest that a rate of 2 classes per month can lead to the completion at five months, or that working half-time and studying diligently during spare time for a month, allowed finishing three courses with A's.

Facebook:

How challenging is the graduate program? A student asks how manageable the MA-IS graduate program is, given a semester consisting of one core grouped course and an elective. A student found it manageable but had supportive people and an easy job, contributing to the success. Another student takes one course a semester, as more than that would be too much. However, this student recommends simultaneously taking one individualized study with one group study or two individualized study courses. That's because the individualized courses offer extensions and the ability to determine one's timeline.

Twitter:

Interview pointers. @AthabascaU posts, “Congratulations on landing the interview! Now it's time to show your best self. Our Counselling Services team has put together some pointers on what to do (and what not to do) during your interview to nail that job! <https://athau.ca/4hw6zpT>”

Quote on Education. @aulibarchives writes, “Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another.” G. K. Chesterton



Music Review—Georgie Benz Releases Two New Singles Out Now on All Platforms

Jessica Wilson



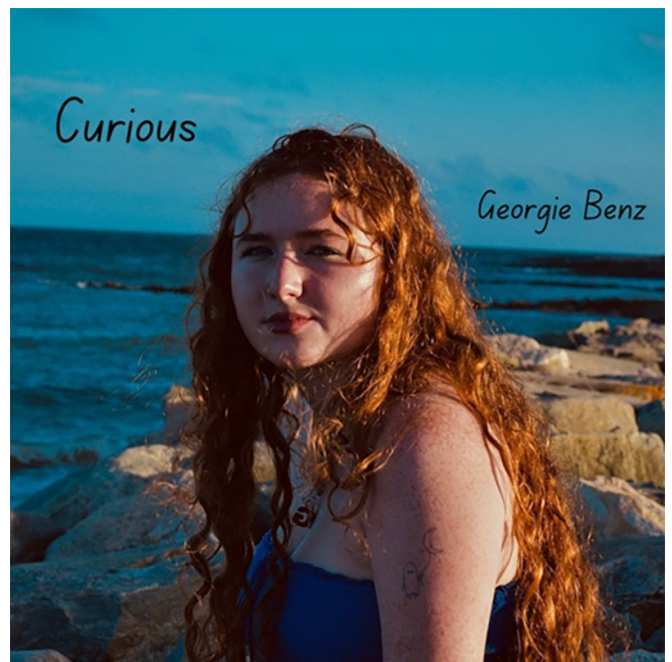
An image of Georgie Benz via Earshot Media

Artist: Georgie Benz
Singles: *Curious* and *How Did You Do It So Easily*

Georgie Benz is an up-and-coming indie artist born in London, England however, Benz is currently studying at Boston's Berklee College of Music. First releasing a single in 2023, Georgie Benz's most recent single, *How Did You Do It So Easily*, was released a few weeks ago on October 29, 2024. This song shortly followed Benz's previous single,

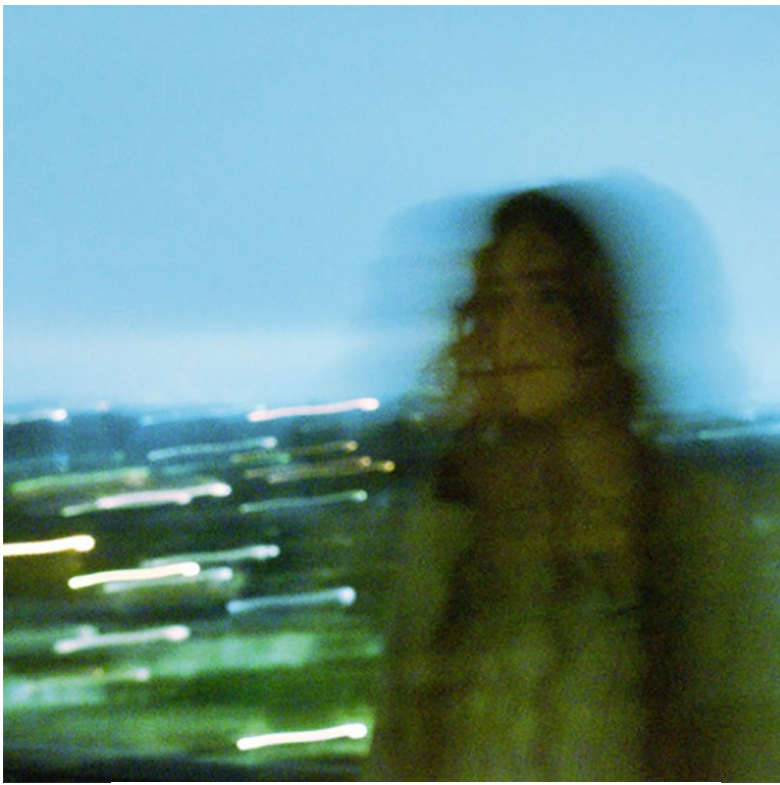
Curious, which was released on October 23, 2024. Benz performed these singles at Saint Rocke in Hermosa Beach, California on October 30, 2024. Both releases have a similar musical style and are both equally as amazingly executed.

Curious is a classic indie-style song that focuses primarily on acoustic guitar and vocal tracks, also including some drum tracks during certain more powerful verses. The song has wonderful vocal harmonies with lyrics touching on sensitive topics regarding the pain that is left when a relationship ends unexpectedly. Benz dives deeply into the concept of learning to adjust to life without someone after a difficult breakup and taking note of the ways that person may not have been the best fit in one's life. More specifically, Benz discusses how the other person in the relationship did not truly want to learn and be curious enough to ask questions. They preferred the relationship to stay casual; however, Benz's feelings for the person continued to grow. Toward the end of the song, Georgie Benz emphasizes how when leaving these relationships, it feels like a wound that will not heal. Even when the painful wound does eventually heal, there will forever be a scar in its place, altering a person's views on relationships. Overall, the composition and lyricism of this song were extremely well done. The audio mixing was perfectly balanced, and all elements of the song flowed. The sole critique



The Cover for Georgie Benz's single *Curious*

that can truly be made is that some of the lyrics did not completely flow due to a lack of rhyme or a slight break in the rhythm; however, these critiques are extremely minor and did not truly change the listening experience in any way.



The cover for Georgie Benz's most recent single
How Did You Do It So Easily

Benz's fourth and most recent release, *How Did You Do It So Easily*, follows a similar subject matter and tempo. Of the two recent releases, this one truly stood out as an exemplary single for Georgie Benz. The guitar and slow drum beat of this song feel dreamy and delicate. Throughout the lyrics of the song, Benz references Phoebe Bridgers and the inspiration is evident as the sound of this song feels reminiscent of one of Bridgers's most popular tracks: *Waiting Room*. The vocals, however, maintain the dreamy feeling that the backing track created. Georgie Benz has a soft and gentle yet powerful sound, closely similar to singers like Billie Eilish. The song revolves around a similar idea to *Curious*, describing the feeling of being left behind in a relationship as the other person moves on quickly and easily. Benz describes how ending a relationship felt like the only way to escape a negative situation even if Benz was not quite ready for the relationship to end. The lyrics also touch on how despite the other person not

seeing it coming, they seemed unbothered and emotionally distant from the breakup. This song perfectly discusses how difficult yet determined one must be to move past the grief of an ended toxic relationship. In a compelling lyric towards the end of the song, Benz describes these emotions perfectly saying; "I just couldn't understand why I felt so much, when you didn't feel the change, while I drowned in the weather, you didn't hear the rain". Overall, the content of the song feels perfectly executed. The lyrics in this song feel perfectly written, not at all following the same break of rhythm or awkward rhyming *Curious* faced at times. Benz's lyrics were incredibly well-paced, allowing time for the deeper meanings to truly soak into a listener's mind. The backing track of this song was equally strong, having a good variation of beat and changes in the guitar's chords that kept a listener engaged as the song progressed.

The music video for *How Did You Do It So Easily* can be found at this link; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtKvhsOTv8A>.

These singles were both extremely powerful and wonderfully put-together releases for Georgie Benz this month. Hopefully more equally strong singles are soon to follow. Benz's four releases are all currently available on YouTube, Apple Music, and Spotify for streaming.

Jessica resides in Canada's capital city, Ottawa, Ontario. She is currently studying full-time as an English Major at Athabasca University and hopes to pursue a career as a Legal Journalist.



Fly on the Wall—Finding Humour and Humanity In a World a Bit Haywire

Jason Sullivan



A French doctor named Rabelais in the 16th Century wrote poetry along the way of his life adventures. One line of his advice stands out above the rest, though, like a fortune cookie message magnetized to a fridge as epochs of daily life come and go.

“For all your ills, I give you laughter” he asserted.

Rabelais elaborated:

“Seeing how sorrow eats you, defeats you. I'd rather write about laughing than crying, For laughter makes men human, and courageous.”

He then added the rejoinder, to wit to woo to our lives online and at AU: “a child is a fire to be lit, not a vase to be filled”.

It's up to us the life and world we see and feel. As Viktor Frankl famously stated, we do not control what happens, but we have all the power in the world to frame how we respond

to the circumstances and stimuli we face. To light those creative and scholarly fires we might have to lighten up. Like Plato's convict who escapes the dark cave lit only by a blue screen fire of asinine video clips, true education is about going outside our normal conscious awareness.

Our little candle of awareness burns best when it burns *for* something, *for* creativity and erudition and laughter and poetry rather than *against* annoyances and pariahs using tools of cynicism and negativity. We know, each of us, that there's a certain laughability in life itself, but often we may fool our earnest beings into believing that things in our world matter so much – the better to convince ourselves that we matter. Consider a summation from Cuban media, helpfully translated into English.

“Anxious to be noticed - the only way they have found to exist - they engage in a kind of vulgar and aggressive bullying on social networks, with ramblings saturated with virulence, rage, envy, and even revenge against those who do not share their ideas. Faced with a point of view they do not share, they pounce on the person who supports it with ‘you are wrong’, instead of ‘I think differently’. As if they owned absolute truth!”

Sometimes for online ills, then, we just have to laugh.

Sure, to assent to this prescription of Rabelais that we bring levity to our spirit by way of laughter is easier said than done in that we live in a realm of wry memes, replete with bitter assessments of life's meanings, struggles, and entanglements. Yet, a cursory glance through a cross section of historical thinkers awakens us to how if we are to overcome the overbearing maw of darkness, the yawning existential gulf that seems to haunt every young generation since the dawn of modernity, we must incite a new dawning realization that, in the end, life's foibles are what elevates us above

the level of apelike beasts. (Nothing against monkeys, they are great ham actors and pratfall comics and banana snatchers! Check out Jason Armstrong's 1996 movie *Dunston Checks In*.)

Switching Gears from Computer Chair to Comedy Stage

So, let's give comedy a try—with a Dad joke like gives peas a chance. Did you hear the one about the Nun and the Mullah? Well, uhm, in the 1500s there was a Nun named Teresa whose illustrious life works arose due to several years of calamitous sickness; having entered a cloister against her Father's wishes she shortly found herself sick as a dog for several years straight. During her convalescence she focused her attention on prayer and learned to play the castanets. Now, you don't have to have attended a Mexican fiesta to know that any handheld noisemakers that you play by shaking rhythmically implies a certain kinetic energy. Teresa had a certain it, you might say. But okay, there's nothing too funny here, maybe a bit paradoxical and disconcerting given that our modern mantras tend to focus on sickness as stillness and mindfulness and gratitude rather than literal List-For-Santa prayer, let alone religious liturgy. But as the centuries after St. Teresa of Avila's life unfolded, her writings, recalling the teensy weensy number of literate humans on earth during her time thus making any remaining documents crucial to the science of history, speak volumes.

She had humor and grace—warning her fellow Nuns to get enough sleep while also pondering the highest reaches of theology. Her goals were heavenly, to be sure, and perhaps vaguely comparable to earnest idealists promulgating political beliefs in the net-o-sphere. But she knew enough to laugh along the way. To this end, Teresa wrote a wonderful fable about, perhaps, the danger of speaking too much about the literal world around us, lest that hole in our soul comes to be filled by whatever happens to be in the area. Karma doesn't only paddle or manifest as an unsplayed hound, sometimes it even hops!

“Oh, *mi padre*, what a terrible thing happened to me! While we were sitting on a haystack considering ourselves lucky to have found it, next to an inn that we were unable to enter, a large salamander or lizard got in between my tunic and bare arm, and it was the mercy of God that it didn't get in somewhere else, for I think I would have died, judging from what I felt. But my brother got hold of it at once and when he threw it away, it hit Antonio Ruiz right in the mouth.”

Perhaps peace in the middle east can begin with everyone laughing about this slithery little encounter? Less talk, more laughter. We all learn to relate, as infants do, from eye contact and shared emotion, shared affect; only later do beliefs and ideologies come into play. What we put into our minds produces what we put out, as Rabelais reminded us earlier.

Of course, not all that we absorb is fully of our own choice. Social osmosis, a concept that we all know when we spend time in the company of people who are not of our usual cultural type (hip hoppers, for instance, or sports fans if we are a sporting neophyte. Or bitter family members) comes into play here. And we have to bear difference with a grin, the better to realize how very *funny* it can be when people take things in their lives so very seriously. Laughter of the right sort is contagious, like sitting quietly and reading until your peers settle down likewise.

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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.



Featherless, But Hoping to Be Amazed [blue rare]

Oliver Moorcraft-Sykes



Emily Dickinson, one of my favourite poets, once wrote that “Hope’ is the thing with feathers”. Well, after the results of Tuesday’s U.S. election, I think there are many of us in the world who are feeling well and truly plucked, covered head-to-toe in goose flesh, with the cold November winds howling right up our nether regions.

Speaking of howling winds, I am reminded of a thing that happened earlier this autumn to a friend of mine. He was riding his bicycle through a mountain pass near Waterton National Park, when a sudden tremendous gust literally lifted him off his bike and tossed him several feet into the air and onto the shoulder of the road, where he narrowly

avoided being hit by a passing camper van. Almost miraculously, he walked away from the incident with nothing worse than a few sore ribs and an impressive, colourful collection of bruises and abrasions.

It’s quite a story, and he tells it well. The thing that haunts me about it right now, though, is what he told me about the thought that flitted through his mind as he found himself momentarily suspended between the ground and the sky. In that split second in time, he said, he had been absolutely certain that this would be it for him, and that he was about to die. And, beyond that, there had been a profound feeling of “inevitability” to this realization. A sense that, “of course” it was always bound to end this way. As if everything else in his life had somehow led inexorably to this fatal moment in time.

Well, that sense of inevitability, of foregone conclusion, is just how I felt when I woke up on Wednesday morning. Truth be told, I had already been feeling it for weeks in advance, the feathers of my hope blowing about in drifts all around me. *Of course* the American people would choose to openly embrace fascism. *Of course* they would turn their backs on the possibility of progress.

After all, why should human beings in the United States be any different from the species as a whole? I find it quaintly, sadly naive when I hear about Americans who now want to emigrate to Canada, as though they can cross the border and leave that tsunami of shit behind. As if the fecal matter has not already been tracked all over the shag carpet of our Canadian home-sweet-home, by the likes of Danielle Smith, Doug Ford, and Pierre Pollièvre, and the cowards, collaborators, and right wing media who support them.

It has been tracked, in fact, across pretty much every corner of the globe. Throughout the world, cynical billionaires and demagogues have managed to tap into a deep, rich septic field of ignorance, anger, religious zealotry, blind fear, self-interest, apathy, and thuggish cruelty, and use it for their own purposes.

Years and years ago, a former partner of mine, exasperated by something I had done, or possibly failed to do, gave me an epically theatrical eye roll, and exclaimed, with resignation and profound

sadness, “You never seem to amaze me”. I am sure that their pique against me was well deserved. I think what they meant to say, though, was that I had never ceased to amaze them. At least, I hope so. I mean, who wants to be that predictable? Who doesn't want to be capable of generating, from time to time at least, a surprise or two? Perhaps even a bright flash of amazement.

So, I guess that feeling of surprise is what I'm desperately longing for, in this world that seems, right now, utterly featherless and cold. I want to be startled by compassion, bedazzled by logic, upended by wise choices and acts of beneficence that none of us saw coming. I want to be amazed by the soulful beauty of my fellow women and men, so we can grow some fine plumage, fly above the drowning sewage, and take to the skies once again. I want to be absolutely gobsmacked by the unprecedented way we prioritize fairness, equality, rationality, and love for our planet.

Here's hoping.



Beyond Literary Landscapes

Edgar Allen Poe

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

Just a few days past Halloween, we consider the works of spooky US author Edgar Allan Poe.

Poe was born on January 19, 1809, in Boston, Massachusetts and died on October 7, 1849, in Baltimore, Maryland.

The author is best known for his short stories and poems.

Fans of Poe may also enjoy the works of Roald Dahl, Raymond Carver, Ray Bradbury, and Ernest Hemingway.

What

Some of Poe's famous short stories include “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” “The Fall of the House of Usher,” “The Masque of the Red Death,” “The Cask of Amontillado,” “The Gold Bug,” and “The Pit and the Pendulum.”

Examples of his notable poems include “The Raven,” “Annabelle Lee,” and “Lenore.”

Where

Most of Poe's works take place in a variety of locations including old houses, squalid dungeons, and seaside manors.

When

These works are predominantly set in the 19th century.

Why

Poe's works may be of interest to AU students who enjoy spooky literature, which evokes feelings of mystery, of foreboding, and of terror.

How

AU's wide range of diverse courses make it easy to study this topic in depth. Courses related to the works of Edgar Allan Poe 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 [ENGL 212: Poetry and Plays](#), a junior-level, three-credit course, which "introduces forms of poetry, with a wide variety of examples from Shakespeare to Atwood, examining themes, structure, style, and imagery." (Although no prerequisites are required, [ENGL 211: Prose Forms](#) is strongly recommended.)

Students may also be interested in [ENGL 344: American Literature I](#), a senior-level, three-credit course, which "introduces students to American literature, its history and development, and its rich variety of forms and techniques." (Students should note that this course requires [ENGL 211: Prose Forms](#) and [ENGL 212: Poetry and Prose](#) as prerequisites.) Be sure to also check out [ENGL 345: American Literature II](#)! Happy reading!



Clam Harvesting in Nanaimo

Cassandra Wang



Clam harvesting is such a unique experience. This Fall, I had a chance to visit Nanaimo to do some clam digging. Located on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Nanaimo is well known for its beautiful coastal scenery. Last week I had the chance to indulge in some outdoor activities including clam digging. It's considered a popular and rewarding experience that allows locals and visitors to harvest their own seafood. There is an abundance of clam species near the coast and the area near Nanaimo is a great place to connect with nature, enjoy local seafood, and learn about sustainable clam harvesting.

Clam harvesting dates back thousands of years before European settlers arrived. The First Nations, including the Snuneymuxw people, have relied on shellfish as a vital part of their diet. Clams and other marine life such as oysters and salmon are harvested with respect to sustainability.

Nanaimo is ideal for clam digging because of its sandy beaches, sheltered bays and intertidal zones where clams thrive. The water is nutrient rich and has various species that

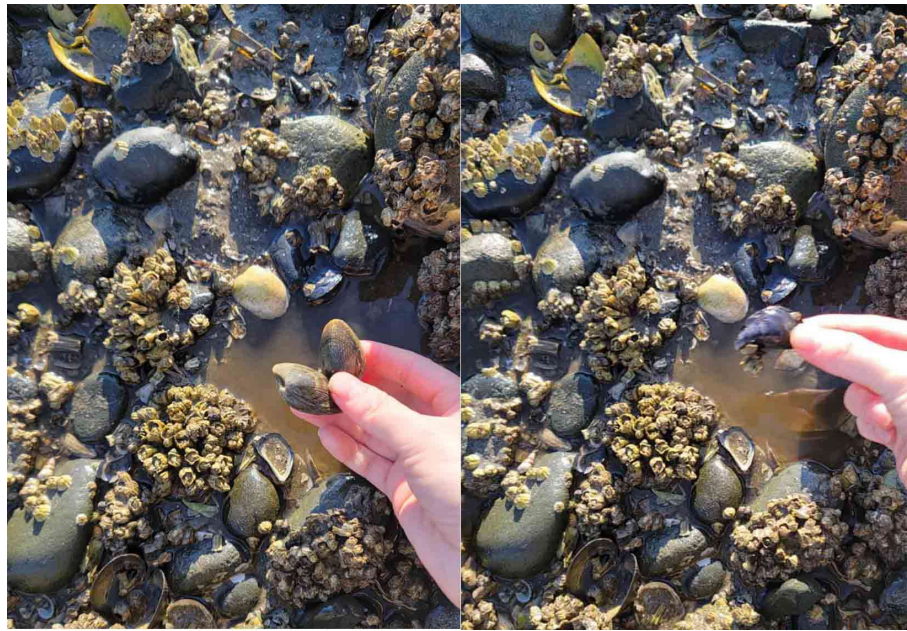
make it a prime spot for recreational harvesting. You can also find other shellfish along the beach, including oysters, which may appeal to some tourists and locals.

Types of clams we found:

Manila clams - these species are small and sweet. They are found in the intertidal zone and are recognizable because of its distinctive radiating ridges on the shell.

Butter clams: these are larger than Manila clams and have a robust texture with meaty interior.

The Clam Harvesting process involves waiting for low tide season where the intertidal zone is exposed. Many families had equipment including shovels, rakes, and spatulas to dig into the sandy and muddy substrate where the clams are located.



I was initially surprised that it did not appear as if there were clams in the bay, however after following some locals around, I discovered that they were buried in the mud. Once gathered, they were often muddy and required cleaning. I also looked into some local measures to preserve sustainability in the area, including licensing and daily limits. The recreational harvesters must have a valid tidal waters sports fishing license issued by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO). Commercial harvesters require permits and licenses as well. Furthermore, there are also limits to how many clams can be collected in a single day; this may depend on the species and measured by weight. They help protect the area from becoming overharvested.

The locals also informed me that there is Red Tide Monitoring where harmful algae blooms, known as red tide, that produces toxins that are dangerously concentrated in the shellfish.

Overall, this time-honored tradition was such a joy to experience. Whether you're a local, a tourist, or someone interested in sustainable seafood, Nanaimo's clam harvesting process may be a great visit to learn and be part of a dynamic ecosystem.

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



Up the Ante Every Second

Marie Well



We must keep upping the ante. Why can't we become IBM's Chief Marketing Officer, President, or Chief Technology Officer? We can! Circumstances can't stop us if we are in a wheelchair—I've met a transgender woman in a wheelchair in an executive role, making big coin—and it can't stop us if we have Down syndrome—I've heard of a woman with Down syndrome becoming a lawyer. Nothing can stop us, regardless of our circumstances. We've got the power, rooted in unconditional love, for that's who we truly are.

I have an interview on Monday as global VP, and I need at least four years as VP or a similar top role! That's because I want to, one day, maybe in ten or so years, become the CEO of a company like Starbucks or Chipotle or turn a company into a global conglomerate. We should all aspire to great things because they change how we think about what we do. Just the simple act of setting giant goals, larger than life, changes our thoughts, decisions, and processes. Goals force us to approach the world differently—better, significantly better.

I just interviewed for the vice president role, but the role was changed. I have a high probability of

accessing the role. I'd accept a lower salary because I know how to propel the company toward global leadership, especially with the introduction of technology to create systems for their processes. That excites me! But if considered, I'll try to negotiate the VP title. If ever we have a choice between hot dogs and steak, go for the ribeye. That's because we get what we ask for if our tone, intentions, and timing are right.

The Huru.ai app worked when I recorded practice interviews, but I couldn't upload job descriptions for the app to generate AI-generated questions based on them. Despite this, the Huru.ai recorded interviews helped me a lot because, during the live interview, I knew when to stop and how to present confidently. Otherwise, I would have been long-winded, which undermines credibility. It's worth considering getting an app like this to practice our interviewing performance, as one missed step can cost us the role of a lifetime.

Despite having limited agency experience, I'm figuring out how to take over an agency with ten thousand accounts. I have the passion and drive and would love the challenge. I know what is needed to take the company to global leadership. So, it may seem like a long shot, but at least I have a shot at the prize. We can achieve anything imaginable, even if it seems light years away, for it is all culminating, ideally in this life or unquestionably during the afterlife.

Whatever goals we set, stretch them to the sky because the more magnificent we make them, the more they inspire. Also, when we focus on our goals, we realize, "Hey, I've got it in me." Yes, we are all superstars, regardless of culture, disability, religion, or walk of life. No exceptions. We can all clutch the stars as they whisk us even higher!

I've learned that all the good and bad we endure holds secret treasures. When we don't get what we want, it's likely because God needed that seemingly negative to happen so we could pivot toward the people we are meant to meet, the people we have soul contracts with, and the missions we are here to complete. For instance, the Jewish CEO I met with may have crossed paths with me because I needed to have the spiritual discussion with her that took place. She was magnificent, and I feel like there was a karmic reason for our brief meeting. Everything we experience has relevance. It's all we came here for; even the traumas are sculpting us, like metaphorical knives against our bones, shaping us into beautiful masterpieces, chiseled to fulfill missions we chose before birth. And the polish, where our souls fully crystallize, occurs once we express only unconditional love toward everyone. That's when our souls pierce every corner of the universe with splendor.



Learning Languages From Non-Speaker to Proficient in French

Aleksander Golijanin



Picking up a language is often made to seem a lot harder than it is, but with a little bit of structure anyone at any age can do it. For a language like French, a person can achieve a level of fluency where they can function independently in under a year, and it becomes even easier once a person understands what the baseline measure for “fluency”. Understanding how a person’s French-speaking abilities are ranked makes the learning experience tangible. Starting with three letters, “A”, “B”, and “C”, each letter has an upper level (1) and a lower level (2). Then understanding what each numbered letter signifies is a good starting point for understanding what it takes for someone to be “fluent” in French.

Understanding the “A 1/2”, “B 1/2”, and “C” levels of French.

The A1 level in French is the starting level and achieving it takes between 50-100 hours of studying, a vocabulary of 500-700 words, and between 1-3 months of consistent study. This level is where a person develops basic abilities for everyday interactions, but still require assistance with French. They can understand simple expressions related to greetings, personal descriptions, and asking for simple information, and can read and

understand some words and basic sentences. They can also write basic sentences and fill out forms with personal details.

The A2 level in French is the level just before someone is considered independent in French and requires somewhere between 150-200 hours, a vocabulary of 1000 to 1500 words, and between 3-6 months of consistent study. This level is best viewed as an elementary level of French where a person can handle slightly structured conversations and can write simple sentences. They can

understand the most common phrases and expressions related to everyday life like personal and family information, shopping, and employment. They can engage in simple French exchanges on familiar topics and can handle exchanges even if they do not understand the entirety of a sentence. They can write short sentences and messages related to immediate needs.

Next is the B1 level in French: the level of French where someone is considered independent and fluent enough to function in a French environment. This level takes between 350-400 hours, around 2,000-2,500 words, and between 6-12 months of consistent study. This is viewed as an intermediate level of French speaking where a person can handle everyday situations, express their opinions, and speak about things with a degree of fluency. They can understand main points on familiar matters and activities like work, school, and leisure, and can follow straightforward conversations and instructions. They can also read and understand straightforward text on topics related to personal interests and can pick out the main ideas in different texts. They can handle travelling to French-speaking areas and unforeseen situations like asking for directions.

The B2 level in French is the level before someone is considered advanced and proficient in French and it approximately takes between 500-600 hours, a vocabulary of around 4,000 words and between 1-2 years of consistent study. This is the “upper-intermediate” level of French speaking where a person has significant independence with the language and can discuss and understand more complex and abstract topics. They can understand longer speeches and lectures and most French programs and television as well as longer and more complex French texts. Speaking with a degree of fluency without much strain, they can give clear arguments and can discuss a wide range of subjects ranging from personal to professional interests.

The C level of French also has two levels, C1 and C2. Both levels require close to 1000 hours, a vocabulary of around 10,000 words, and around 3 years of consistent study. This level of French is viewed as being a native French-speaking level where a person can adapt to any situation and understand all the French they come across.

AU-thentic Events

Upcoming AU Related Events

Developing Your Research How to APA 7

November 18, 2024 1:00 p.m.

Online

Hosted by AU Faculty of Business

Register at the [Event Link](#)

Faculty of Business Undergraduate Program Orientation for New Students

November 20, 2024: 12:00 p.m.

Online

Hosted by AU Faculty of Business

Register at the [Event Link](#)

The Forge of Forgetting: Finding The Lost Language of Black Cowboys

November 20, 2024: 3:00 p.m.

Online

Hosted by AU Writer in Residence

Bertrand Bickersteth

Register at the [Event Link](#)

AUSU Council Meeting

November 21, 2024 6:00 p.m.

Online

Hosted by AUSU

Register by emailing

governance@ausu.org

All events are free unless otherwise noted.

Leveraging the world's biggest library and AI-powered tutoring.

One of the greatest advantages of learning in 2024, compared to the decade prior, is that tools like YouTube and ChatGPT have morphed into digital post-secondary institutions and like PhD-level educators on some topics. Both tools are available to everyone and at little to no cost. YouTube provides an avenue for subject matter experts to share their expertise and knowledge through the platform, and they often end up interacting with their audience in the comment section – replicating some of the post-secondary learning experience. ChatGPT is arguably the most knowledgeable educator and mentor the digital world has brought into existence. Although some critics have pointed out that ChatGPT can err with some of the information it provides, that is only an issue if someone is using the tool as a starting point for the learning experience and has no familiarity on a topic.

For example, on the topic of foreign aid, ChatGPT once wrongly suggested that US President John F. Kennedy had given a speech on how the former Yugoslavia was the recipient of six times the amount of foreign aid than all of Latin America and that the speech was done to point out the need for the equal distribution of foreign aid. However, I ended up correcting ChatGPT by pointing out how President John F. Kennedy had highlighted how Yugoslavia received 15 times the amount foreign aid than was provided to all of Latin America and that this was done to decouple the country from joining the Soviet Bloc, and ChatGPT corrected itself.

Most of the complaints about ChatGPT are only limitations if someone attempts to bypass the hard work it takes to become acquainted with a topic and make themselves something they are not. Otherwise, it is probably the greatest learning support that has ever existed.

Becoming Quebecois...

Most of the French learning courses offered by organizations in Canada are being provided remotely, so learning an official language should be more accessible, yet somehow there are limitations. Whether someone qualifies for the subsidized learning opportunities that are available depends on where that person lives in Canada and that person's "status". What makes Quebec the most "French-friendly" province, besides the fact that it is a French-speaking province, is that it offers subsidized French learning courses to everyone who wants to learn French, including anglophones and other non-French speakers. Whereas other provinces tend to prioritize subsidized language learning opportunities only for newcomers to Canada (who are eligible to take both English and French learning courses), Quebec provides an equal opportunity to every Canadian who wants to learn French and lives in Quebec.

Comparing Canada to other European Union (EU) countries, who often have one official language while promoting the importance of fluency across multiple languages, those countries provide subsidized learning opportunities for anyone interested in learning the different languages that make up the EU. These languages include English, German, French, Spanish, and Italian, and it is quite common for people living in many EU countries to be fluent in at least three languages. If EU countries can provide access to language learning opportunities for a number of different languages to their residents, then Canada and its provinces should be able to do the same for the French language.

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



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

AUSU UPDATE

April 12, 2024



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 Naju 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!

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