

THE SENIOR COLLEGE MESSENGER

Issue 37: November, 2024

This is an organ for members of Senior College to submit short articles that share news, letters to the editor, reactions to the program and anything that they feel will be of general interest. Its regular appearance will allow for an exchange of opinion of topics of interest to the members. In particular, it would be interesting to record reactions to the talks, colloquium topics, books discussed and items appearing in the Messenger.

Please submit contributions to the co-editors, Ed Barbeau at barbeau@math.utoronto.ca or Mary Finlay at booksaplenty1949@gmail.com.

WELCOME TO NEW FELLOWS OF THE COLLEGE

We are pleased to welcome to the Senior College roster of Fellows, **Kathleen McMorrow** and **Anne Urbancic**.

Kathleen McMorrow headed the U of T Music Library from 1974 to 2013, with particular responsibilities for building the recordings collection and the special collections. During her tenure, the Library holdings increased from about 100,000 to nearly 500,000 items, and were moved into a purpose-built wing of the Edward Johnson Building.

She has contributed articles to *Notes (MLA)*¹ and to *Fontes (IAML)*² and edited the *Canadian Association of Music Libraries Newsletter* for ten years. She has taught courses in music librarianship in the Faculty of Library and Information Sciences and been an executive member of several professional organizations. As an associate of the Retrospective Index to Music Periodicals project, she has prepared four Canadian titles for publication in this e-resource. She was awarded the Helmut Kallmann prize of the Canadian Association of Music Libraries in 2006.

Since 2015, she has managed the website of the Women's Musical Club of Toronto (WMCT).

Anne Urbancic joined the Department of Italian Studies at the University of Toronto in 1982, with a primary focus on foreign-language pedagogy and 19th century Italian literature. Taking early retirement from the Faculty of Arts and Science, she moved to Victoria College as the Mary Rowell Jackman Professor of Humanities, teaching in the VIC ONE First Year Program.

She continues to work in the field of 19th/20th century Italian literature with focus on the works of Niccolò Tommaseo, Annie Vivanti and Mario Pratesi, whose archival materials, found in Canada, have captivated and engaged her for many years. More recently, she has written and published about various foodscapes and

¹Music Library Association, founded 1931

²International Association of Music Libraries, founded 1949-1951 under the auspices of the UN

food issues in North America and Europe and about Italian cookbooks written before 1945. Her studies of the emigration stories of Italo-Slovenians of Toronto led to her co-founding the Canadian Slovenian Historical Society and Archives where she participated in recording and reporting on the stories of Slovenians in Canada.

“Full retirement has offered me the possibility to join more fully in Senior College. During this Fall 2024 term, I am at home recovering from surgery but joining you online and finding the activities fascinating and thought-provoking.”

COLLOQUIUM REPORT: CAMPUS TENSIONS ON WAR IN GAZA

Giuliana Katz sends this report on a recent colloquium on the topic “How to deal with tensions that have erupted on campuses as a result of the war in Gaza? In particular, that means the surge in antisemitic and islamophobic sentiments.”

Given the breadth of the themes proposed, we decided to concentrate on the occupation of U of T campus. First of all, there was a general agreement that demonstrations should not advocate violence and should not occupy private or public land, at the expense of the owner in the first case, and of the general public in the second. Some people felt that the occupation was peaceful, that there was no antisemitism and that convocation took place in an orderly and pleasant way. Others pointed out that Jewish students and teachers were afraid of going to class and that many of the occupiers of the tents were not students motivated by real commitments, but outsiders spoiling for a fight. They also found that Convocation took place in a restricted area and lacked the usual relaxed atmosphere.

It was suggested that to avoid further occupations, the campus police should intervene immediately and prevent people from coming in with their tents.

I would welcome a continuation of this discussion in the Messenger. The situation in Israel is complex, and all parties, particularly those involved in protests, need to recognize and respect that individual views may be highly nuanced. The situation is confounded by too many people assuming that the views of those in an identifiable group are homogenous and are lacking in concern or sympathy for one side or the other. EJB

COLLOQUIUM REPORT: UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

Trevor Lloyd provides a report on the October 17 colloquium on the topic “The issues about introducing a universal basic income in Canada; how to pay for and administer it”.

The fifth colloquium of 2024 was held in the large committee room at the Senior College Centre. Universal basic income was defined as regular equal payments to all members of a large general population, with the warning that such schemes often come with restrictions. Interest in proposals of this sort were reawakened by regular

payments during the Covid pandemic. To help the discussion, two approaches put forward in 2021 were presented.

A proposal by the Parliamentary Budget Office for payments of \$17,000 p.a. to everyone aged between 18 and 64 came with restrictions estimated to hold the annual cost to \$90 billion. However, it was attacked on the fact that the estimated cost would dwarf the federal budget. These calculations came with a reference to Thomas Piketty's suggestion in his *Capital in the 21st century* that a mass of new revenue could be raised by taxing the accumulated unliquidated capital gains that underlie great fortunes.

The discussion avoided any attempt to get into the financial implications of universal payment proposals: speakers who thought the idea of universal payments deserved investigation and debate pointed to the savings in bureaucratic activity over unemployment and medical distress and disturbance, while opponents of distributions of benefits without restraints and investigation pointed to the dislocation and demoralisation to be seen in San Francisco³ to the possibility that Vancouver might drift in the same direction. Attention shifted to the structure of the working population and, in particular, the fate of unskilled labour in mass-production lines displaced by mechanization and to the problems of workers who had built up positions of skill in responsibility in areas of the economy that had been undermined by changes in demand or fashion.

A very different form of maldistribution could be seen in lines of work where limited recruitment of practitioners in the past has led to present shortages that in some cases (doctors and carpenters, for example) were bound to become worse in the future because so many people in these activities were due to retire in the next few years. While retraining for workers thrown out of their old jobs would allow some flexibility in the labour market, it was unlikely to do much to help in areas where skilled and trained workers are needed now and will soon be needed even more. Some attention was paid to the specific problems of young people: there was very little sign that they were interested in schemes that provided long-term support, but it was noted they change jobs more frequently than older people and would be glad of support in these periods of transition, and that student debt is a new and heavy burden that had not been laid on members of an earlier generation.

As the discussion never took the form of a debate for or against universal payment schemes it is not possible to offer a clear resolution on the topic, but the wide range of problems mentioned in so many different forms indicates that a universal scheme would have quite a high "opportunity cost" because it would draw away money that could otherwise be applied to more specific problems.

Closer to home, we can look at the experience of the Manitoba Basic Annual Income Experiment (Mincome) which was launched for specific parts of Winnipeg and Dauphin in 1974 and ran until 1979. Then there is the unfortunate case of the

³There have been a number of pilot programs in California, and at least three in San Francisco, directed variously towards Artists (SF-GIPA from May, 2021), foster youth (November, 2023) and transgender people (GIFT). As one might expect, it seems to be the last that generated controversy.

Basic Income Pilot Project launched in 2017 in three Ontario cities by the Wynne government in 2017, only to be abruptly terminated midstream within two years by the Ford government. EJB

CALENDAR OF COMING EVENTS

Events marked with **F** are for fellows and external fellows. Advanced registration is necessary for each event. This can be done in response to a weekly email from Senior College or the Faculty Club to its members that describes the events or through the Senior College website.

Second biennial Pater Russell Discussion (Wedgewood Room, Faculty Club)

Thursday, November 7 2-4 pm

Champion of Rights: Courts and Legislatures?

Optional lunch at 12:15

Register at <https://forms.office.com/r/wpZ5fZ3V3u>

SC Council Meeting & Holiday Buffet (Zoom and in person at the Faculty Club)

Meeting: Wednesday, December 4 10-12 am

Optional buffet lunch \$52

Booking for both events required by November 15

Talks: Wednesdays 10-12 am (Zoom and in person at the Faculty Club)

October 30: Paul Stevens, *Robinson Crusoe and the slave trade: a treatise against adventure*

November 6: Mary Nyquist, *Early modern freedom, tyranny, and the rhetorical poser of 'slave'*

November 13: Yvonne Bombard, *Delivering precision genomic medicine*

November 20: Clifford Orwin, *The 2024 election result*

November 27: Franca Iacovetta, *Remembering Emma Goldman in Toronto*

Colloquia: Thursdays, 2-4 pm
Senior College Centre, 256 McCaul St. (masks advised)

November 14: *The problems of social media* (Organizer: Phil Sullivan)

Book Club: Mondays 2-4 pm (Zoom only) (F)

November 4: Jane Mayer, *Dark money: the hidden history of the billionaires behind the rise of the radical right* (2017) (Leader: John David Stewart)

December 2: Martin Puchner, *Culture: the story of us from cave-art to K Pop* (2023) (Leader: Meg Fox)

January 6: André Alexis, *Fifteen dogs* (2015) (Leader: Meg Fox)

February 3: Kenneth Miller, *The visionary scientists who unlocked the mysteries of sleep* (2023) (Leader: Daphne Maurer)

March 3: Timothy Garten Ash, *Homelands: a personal history of Europe* (2023) (Leader: David Milne)

April 7: Ursula K. Le Guin, *The dispossessed* (1974) (Leader: Molly Wills)

May 5: Emily Wilson, *The Odyssey, by Homer in the new poetic translation* (2017) (Leaders: Linda Hutcheon & Martin Revermann)

June 2: Andrew Stobo Sniderman & Douglas Sanderson (Amo Binashii), *The Valley of the Birdtail* (2022) (Leader: Janet Paterson)

July 7: Fei-Fei Li, *The worlds I see: curiosity, exploration and discovery at the dawn of AI* (2023) (Leader: Susan Pfeiffer)

Aftermath

Here is a game of strategy that you can play with someone. You are given the nine digits: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. The two competitors play alternately; the first selects a digit, and after that, each chooses a digit that has not already been picked (so there are no more than nine moves). The goal of each player is to be the first to choose any number of digits so that, among them, **three** add to fifteen.

Here is a possible trajectory of the game. The two competitors are Ann and Bob; Ann plays first.

Ann	Bob
8	5
1	6
4	7
3	

Ann wins, having selected the numbers 8, 4 and 3 adding up to 15. Note that Bob had tried to set himself up for a win. Having picked 5, 6 and 7, it was at that point that he could have won on the next move by picking either 2 or 3. Unfortunately, he was not paying much attention to Ann's prospects.

When I have introduced this game to students, I find that almost everyone is unfamiliar with it and not very comfortable getting the hang of it. However, I use it to make a very important point about mathematics.

Let me digress. About four thousand years ago, someone in China discovered what is now known as a *magic square*; it was allegedly carved into the back of a turtle who climbed out of the deep. This is a square arrangement of the numbers from 1 to 9, three to a row and three to a column, such that the entries of each row, each column and the each diagonal have the same sum (which must be 15, one third of the sum of all nine digits). Up to symmetry, the square is

8	1	6
3	5	7
4	9	2

There are eight different ways you can select three digits to add to 15:

$$(1, 5, 9), (1, 6, 8), (2, 4, 9), (2, 5, 8), (2, 6, 7), (3, 4, 8), (3, 5, 7), (4, 5, 6).$$

Four of these triads include 5, each even digit belongs to three of them, and the remaining odd digits belong to two. Each of these triads is realized in one of the rows, columns or diagonals.

We note that the game under discussion has exactly the same structure as noughts-and-crosses (tic-tac-toe). Let Ann pretend that she is playing the latter game. Suppose she begins by putting X in the upper left corner. Consulting the magic square, she translates that into a choice of 8. Bob responds by putting O in the centre cell, and translates this into 5. And so they proceed. The game described above is equivalent to

X	X	O
X	O	O
X		

A particular strength of mathematics is the capacity to see beneath superficial differences to see a common structure. Often the ability to understand and establish results is enhanced by finding an environment that is familiar and tractable. Theorems applicable in many different settings can be subsumed within some abstract structure.

Noughts-and-crosses was referred to briefly in the Aftermath of April, 2024. There is a clever argument that the second player does not have a winning strategy (*i.e.* can win no matter what the opponent does). It is a proof by contradiction. Suppose that such a player has a winning strategy \mathfrak{S} . This means, in particular, that no matter where the first player puts X, the second player can win. However, if we reframe the game so that the second player is the first player in another game where he becomes the first player but is forbidden to use a particular cell (the first move of the previous first player). The player then follows strategy \mathfrak{S} .

If a player can win without access to one of the cells, then *a fortiori*, that player can win the original game.

This just in: A new record for the largest known prime number was discovered on October 11, 2024. The number is $2^{136279841} - 1$, with over 41 million digits.