

THE SENIOR COLLEGE MESSENGER

Issue 38: December, 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.

COLLOQUIUM: THE PROBLEMS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The colloquium *The Problems of Social Media*, held on November 14, was organized by Phil Sullivan and was attended by nine participants. Various topics were raised: the dangers of social media, especially when used to manipulate the public with fake news and used to influence an election. It was also pointed out that social media could influence young people in a negative way, making them feel lonely and depressed and causing the more sensitive ones to be bullied or sexually attacked. School classes that would educate students from a political and social point of view were seen as a possible remedy to the problem of social media. Unfortunately the present school curriculum is sadly lacking in civic education.

The discussion then jumped to the more general topic of the difficulty of assessing the truth. It was pointed out that all newspapers belonged to one party or another and would present facts from a particular point of view. On the other hand, the task of the academic researcher would be to research the subject matter in an objective way and take into consideration the work of his/her colleagues. *Giuliana Katz*

WELCOME TO NEW FELLOWS OF THE COLLEGE

We are pleased to welcome to the Senior College roster of Fellows, **Jane Helleiner**, **Mohan Matthen**, **Aloysius Siow**, **Neil ten Kortenaar** and **Martin Wojtowicz**.

Jane Helleiner received her BA, MA and PhD in social/cultural anthropology at the University of Toronto. She taught part-time there before pursuing the remainder of her academic career at Brock University in the Department of Child and Youth Studies, and the Department of Sociology. She was Founding Director of the MA in Social Justice and Equity Studies. She conducted research in Ireland and Canada. Her two books (*Irish Travellers: Racism and the Politics of Culture* 2000 and *Borderline Canadianness: Border Crossing and Everyday Nationalism in Niagara* 2016) were published by the University of Toronto Press.

She returned to Toronto from Niagara after taking early retirement in 2021, and is delighted to have the opportunity to reengage with the University of Toronto as an External Fellow of Senior College.

Mohan Matthen joined the University Toronto at Mississauga as a Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Philosophy of Perception, a position he held from 2006 to 2020. He obtained his bachelor's and master's degrees at Delhi University in India and his PhD at

Stanford. Before arriving in Toronto, he held professorial appointments at the Universities of Alberta and British Columbia.

Professor Matthen was the principal investigator for the Network for Sensory Research, a collaborative project centred at UTM among philosophers and scientists at five institutions, including the Institute of Philosophy in London and the philosophy departments at Glasgow, MIT and Harvard. His other professional research includes the philosophical aesthetics and the philosophy of biology. He became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 2012 and retired in 2023.

Aloysius Siow “I was a professor of economics at the St. George campus and retired last year. My research was focused on the economics of the family/demography, and labour economics. Two papers of mine which I like are “Why dowries?” in the *American Economic Review* with Maristella Botticini, and “Who marries whom and why” in the *Journal of Political Economy* with Eugene Choo. I regret being too old to participate in online dating but the empirical model in my latter paper has been used to build a recommendation system for an online dating app in Taiwan.

“Currently, I am investigating the role of managers in coordinating within organizations.

“One of my interests is partaking of the different types of cuisine available in TO. I want to start an informal dinner club at Senior College. Contact me at pavalow.siow@utoronto.ca if you have ideas or just want to participate. I am also an enthusiastic mediocre golfer.”

Neil ten Kortenaar was a professor of English at UTSC and also served as director of the Centre for Comparative Literature. He wrote three books and fifty articles and book chapters about African, Caribbean, and South Asian literature, most notably about Salman Rushdie and Chinua Achebe, but also on Wole Soyinka, V.S. Naipaul, Michael Ondaatje. The focus was on how nations are imagined, the acts of writing and reading, how novels function as political philosophy, and the relation of history and fiction.

In his retirement, in addition to these interests, he is keen to look back on what he read long ago in order to better understand what his career as a reader has been and to explore intellectual trajectories that might have been his had he chosen differently, in particular literature in French, Spanish, and Dutch. He has just started learning Japanese.

Martin Wojtowicz “I officially retired in 2016 but continued research and student supervision for another two years until 2019. This was shortly before the Covid 19 pandemic struck. At that time I committed myself to full time retirement, enjoying my hobbies and activities, which were previously limited by my professional life. Acquiring a cottage in Haliburton with all its pleasures and commitments filled my days to the point where I had no time for Senior College. Time moves on and I have now reached the stage in my retirement when I would like to get back in touch with academia and most of all my university colleagues and friends.

“I graduated with a BSc in Biology/Biochemistry at Dalhousie University in Halifax from where I went on to the University of Ottawa pursuing my passion in Neuroscience, graduating with the PhD in Neurophysiology in 1978. After a couple of years of ‘obligatory’ postdoc in the USA at the University of California, San Francisco, I returned to Canada where I have stayed since 1980. Progressing from Research Associate to Assistant, Associate and finally full Professor at U of T, I grew as a researcher and educator. I still enjoy a symbolic presence in my home department, Physiology on the St. George campus.

“I am looking forward to joining the Senior College Community and getting involved in its activities.”

IN MEMORIAM

Judith (Judy) Lynn Sherk (November 28, 1942 - October 2, 2024)

One of five part-time administrators for RALUT (Retired Academics and Librarians at the University of Toronto) between 2002 and 2015.

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.

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

Meeting: Wednesday, December 4 10-12 am

Optional buffet lunch \$52

Bookings for attending on Zoom continue to be accepted; the date for in-person booking has passed.

Talks: Wednesdays 2-4 (Zoom and in person at the Faculty Club)

January 8: Elizabeth Clare *A chance to measure life on earth: the potential of airborne eDNA*

January 15: Gerry Friesen *The honourable John Norquay: indigenous premier, Canadian statesman*

January 22: Anne Urbanic *Large double double: how Tim Horton's coffee ritualizes Canadian identity*

January 29: Sharon Vattay *Toronto Massey Music Hall: Conservation in practice*

February 5: Matthew Light *Ukraine: the stakes for Canada*

February 12: Liat Margolis *Call to action #66: a land-based indigenous youth program*

February 19: Patricia Brubaker *The basic science underlying the beneficial actions of Ozempic*

February 26: Netami Stuart *The Port Lands flood protection infrastructure project: how to build a river*

March 5: Ajay Heble *The determination to care: festivals, pedagogy, community*

March 12: Madeleine Zurowski *Dark matter*

March 19: James Campbell *Music inside out*

March 26: Mark McGowan ‘Kindred spirits’ in the North: indigenous peoples in British North America and their donations to Irish famine relief

Colloquia: Thursdays 2-4 pm
Senior College Centre, 256 McCaul Street

January 16: *How do we deal with the crisis in aging?* (Organizer: Marty Klein)

February 20: *Poverty in Canada: causes, effects and solutions. Whose responsibility?* (Organizers: Bill Logan & Trevor Lloyd)

March 13: *Biological discoveries and their implication for sex and gender issues* (Organizer: Phil Sullivan)

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

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 an example of a situation in which a mathematical process can lead to a correct answer, but can be illuminated by sensitivity to the context. In the days before bank cards were regularly used, a typical cash transaction may proceed thus. The customer has purchased an item that costs 85 cents, and lays one dollar and two nickels on the counter. The cashier may think to himself, “That is 75 cents out of a dollar. Here is your quarter change.”

The 10 cents can be conceived of as a down payment on the 85 cents, leaving the remaining amount to be taken out of the dollar. However, a modern clerk, not familiar with this gambit, is likely to do one of two things. Either he will enter the \$1.10 and \$0.85 into a register to do the subtraction, find out that the change is 25 cents and just perhaps twig what the customer’s intention was. Or he may leave the 10 cents on the counter and give the customer the 15 cents change out of the dollar, leaving her with four or five coins instead of just one.