

THE SENIOR COLLEGE MESSENGER

Issue 52: February, 2025

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 on 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.

We also welcome brief notices of important books of general interest that are worth reading and views on what should be included in a modern school curriculum from the perspective of your discipline. In particular, if you have written a book or an article in your field that would be of broad interest, please send in the details. In December, we celebrated the final volume of the Nemni trilogy on Trudeau and this month we draw your attention to a new book by Helen Lenskyj.

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

Any reader wishing a copy of this issue in larger print should contact the first co-editor.

MAiD (Medical Assistance in Dying) – past, present, and future

Senior College is holding a session on MAiD in Canada on **Wednesday, February 18** at **10:30 am** in the Senior College Centre, 256 McCaul St., 4th floor. The event is open to all Senior College Members, Fellows and External Fellows.

The session will include an outline of current MAiD law and practice in Canada and its origins. It will consider continuing, often contentious, conversations around eligibility and safeguards – including capacity, the context of dementia, and the prospect of ‘advance requests’. A generous amount of time will be devoted to questions and discussions of this complex topic.

Our speaker is **Kevin Reel**, Associate Professor in the Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy and a practising healthcare ethicist at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre where he coordinates MAiD requests. Previously, he served as a course instructor and the program director of the MHS (bioethics) in the Dalla Lana School of Public Health. Kevin is a member of the MAiD Death Review Committee within the Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario, and a director on the board of the Canadian Association of Practising Healthcare Ethicists.

We encourage you to register promptly to allow us to manage room capacity, no later than noon on Monday, February 16. The link to register is <https://forms.office.com/r/HvAni69tc6>

Kindly direct questions to the event coordinator, Michael Collins at Michael.Collins@ownvolition.com

THE ESSENCE PROJECT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

In 2023, the University of Manitoba surveyed its professors emeriti and senior scholars on their academic lives after retirement. What emerged from this was a project with called ESSENCE¹ whose goal was to foster connection, mentorship and collaboration.

This program seems designed to formalize and strengthen links between older and younger faculties, for example by providing grants to support collaboration between senior and junior faculty as well as mentorship opportunities. A recent article in *University Affairs* describes the program.

<https://universityaffairs.ca/career-advice/the-university-of-manitoba-strengthens-engagement-with-retired-academics>

KEEPING MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY FIT IN OLD AGE

Longtime Senior College Fellow **Morry Kernerman** turned 101 in January. A CBC website story,

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/superagers-centenarians-brains-second-opinion-9.7049411>), shows him happily living an active and satisfying life. He began his musical career with a recital at age 11, became an eminent professional musician, and still enjoys listening intensely to classical music, score in hand to memorize it. Despite never having been athletic, he still walks and stays fit.

On January 23, Morry Kernerman was interviewed on the radio program *The Current*: <https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-63-the-current/clip/16193809-this-101-year-old-superagers-secret-living>

He is a subject in the SuperAging Research Initiative, whose lead institution is the University of Chicago. The Canadian part of the study is directed by Angela Roberts at Western University in London.

<https://superagingcanada.uwo.ca/research/>

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS FROM AN AMERICAN EXPATRIATE

Eaton Lattman

During the past two years, I have relocated to Canada and celebrated my 85th birthday. There have been many challenges, some foreseeable and others unexpected. The most complex of the former is health care delivery, but a fine example of the latter arose when I applied for permanent residency.

One step is to submit fingerprints to the FBI, which will inform Canada about the applicant's criminal history. According to a Toronto fingerprinting service, some octogenarians have fingerprints that have effectively worn out, and, indeed, I was one who could not provide a readable sample. I had to seek out an electronic fingerprint machine in Buffalo, where the technician still had to work hard to get good samples.

My wife, Susan Pfeiffer and I married about a decade ago. She is Canadian, but we initially decided to live in the US. Missing her children and grandchildren here, she was never truly happy. Handguns and Trump did not help. So, we decided to relocate to

¹The acronym stands for Emeriti and Senior Scholars Engaged in Navigating Continued Excellence. This name suggests a version of the chicken-and-egg problem; which came first the initials or the title? It might be that the chicken and egg developed in tandem, metaphorically.

Toronto. When we moved, I remained enrolled in the US Medicare system, as I had no access to the Ontario system until I became a permanent resident. Since I require regular medication, it was impractical to travel to the US every time I needed a prescription renewal. I was rescued by a young physician at a local walk-in clinic who went far beyond its mission to come to grips with my health situation and authorize renewal of my US prescriptions at a Canadian pharmacy. He also arranged for me to be seen by a Canadian cardiologist, a critical matter. Medical expenses here are largely balanced by phasing out my US premiums.

I remember the day I received my OHIP card and was eligible to join the system. The well-documented difficulties of finding a family physician are heightened for seniors. One doctor politely informed me that a typical registry for a family physician is 1800 to 2000 patients. That comes one hour per patient per year. The needs of many older patients can impose a heavy burden on a practitioner. In the end, I joined a boutique family practice offering services beyond those provided by OHIP for an annual fee. It was a wrenching decision for me since it is clearly an option for buying one's way to greater service. I probably will not be doing it for very long.

My months as a permanent residence have been rich with new experiences. The eccentricities of parliamentary government have appeared to this American as striking as a peacock. The Liberal Party swapped out the prime minister, prorogued parliament, held an election and came into power with a new prime minister, all within a few months. The results of the election were in sharp disagreement with polling data. Parliament quickly passed what would be regarded as transformative legislation in the US, obliterating most federal regulations on inter-provincial trade. In the US, this might amount to a decade's worth of government activity. Events relating to the proposed budget are equally revealing; you can access it on your phone and professional journalists can analyze it line by line on the day it is tabled. What a rapid education in Canadian governance!

It is almost axiomatic that Canadians are nice. I have many personal experiences supporting this viewpoint. I use walking sticks; many riders have offered me their seat on mass transit. A local shop allows me to slip through their delivery entrance to shorten my walk. A few days ago, carrying a heavy laptop computer further than I could manage, I had almost reached my car when I fell. Several concerned young people surrounded me, walked me to the car, carried the laptop and made sure I was ok to drive.

Every immigrant brings costs and benefits to Canada, and clearly, a super-senior does not bring many benefits. I am deeply grateful to Canada for taking me in. I am trying hard to become knowledgeable, engaged and responsible in return. Thank you, Canada.

WELCOME TO SENIOR COLLEGE

We are pleased to welcome to the roster of Senior College External Fellows, Neil Besner, Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Winnipeg. Not mentioned in Professor Besner's introduction is that he is the author of Fishing with Tardelli: a memoir of family in time lost, a story that delves into complicated family dynamics over a half century in Rio de Janeiro and Montreal.

Although I am Canadian (a Montrealer), I grew up in Brazil, where I have often taught and lectured over the last 25 years, mainly on Canadian literature and the poet Elizabeth Bishop (who lived in Brazil from 1951 until the early 1970s).

I taught Canadian literature at the University of Winnipeg from 1987 until retirement in 2017. Other continuing teaching and research interests include translation and the short story. I write mainly on Canadian literature, with books on Mavis Gallant (1988,

and another co-edited in 2024), Alice Munro (1990), an edited collection on Carol Shields (1995), and numerous articles and reviews. I am fluent in Portuguese and have translated two books on Bishop, the first, a Brazilian biography of Elizabeth Bishop (2002) and a forthcoming book (2026), a Brazilian critical study of Bishop's work in Brazil.

In the latter part of my career at the University of Winnipeg, I worked on “the dark side” in several roles, as Dean of Humanities (2002-2004), Dean of Arts (2005-2007), Associate Vice President, International (2008-2009), Vice-President, Students (2009-2010), Vice-President, Research and International (2010-2012), and Provost and Vice-President, Academic (2012-2017).

Since 2017, I have lived in Toronto, but spend three months each summer on Lake of the Woods in northwestern Ontario near the border with Manitoba. I have sung and played guitar in several bands over the years; solo in coffeehouses across Canada; and, a long time ago, as a busker in Paris and London. I hope to busk again here in Toronto when the weather warms up. I am a keen (amateur) fisherman; in the last ten years, I have been to the Amazon region to fish seven times and have fished across Canada.

HONOURS

On October 17, 2025, **William Joseph Logan** was designated a Member of the Order of Canada by the Governor-General. Bill Logan is a Fellow of Senior College. Here is the citation:

William Logan is one of Canada's foremost leaders in pediatric neurology. Through his myriad contributions to research, academic leadership, education and patient care, he helped grow the discipline internationally. He was also among the first in his field to develop expertise in children's movement disorders and brain function investigative techniques.

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 to its members that describes the events or through the Senior College website.

Special Session on MAiD

Wednesday, February 18: 10:30 am

Senior College Centre, 4th floor, 256 McCaul Street

Save the date!

Twenty-first Annual Symposium

Canada at the Crossroads

Faculty Club: Wednesday, April 15, 2026

Talks: Wednesdays 2-3 pm (In person at the Faculty Club and on Zoom)

February 4: Jennifer DeSilva, *Women's labour in Renaissance Florence's streets and taverns*

February 11: Beatrix Dart, *Retired, not expired: the longevity economy unveiled*

February 18: Laura Hug, *Man's trash is a microbe's treasure: the microbiology of landfills*

February 25: Stephen Brooke, 'Gleaning obelisks' and 'dilapidated streets': *London in the 1980s*

March 4: Ira Wells, *On book banning: saving children from the harm of books*

March 11: Carl Knappett, *The coastal world of Minoan Palaikastro*

March 18: Jennifer Brunnell, *Place and people at the margins: a history of Toronto's Don River valley*

March 25: Nick Terpstra, *Moving targets: young people in the early modern world*

Colloquia: Thursdays 2-4 pm (In person only) (F)

February 19: *How to counter misinformation. Is it possible?* (Organizer: Daphne Maurer)

March 19: *How to deal with the problems of again* (Organizer: Marty Klein)

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

February 2: Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' war: a history of settler colonialism and resistance, 1917-2017* (2020) (Leader: David Milne)

March 2: George Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* (2017) (Leader: Lisa Steele)

April 6: Charles King, *Every valley: the desperate lives and troubled times that made Handel's "Messiah"* (2024) (Leaders: Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon)

May 4: Rachel Carson, *Silent spring* (1962) (Leader: Sara Shettleworth)

June 1: Ian Johnson, *Sparks: China's underground historians and the battle for the future* (2023) (Leader: Peter Alberti)

July 6: Susan Casey, *The underworld: journeys to the depths of the ocean* (2023) (Leader: William Logan)

Aftermath

Recently, in the United States, renewed complaints have arisen over the inadequate level of mathematical attainment by school students, as measured by standardized tests. While Canadian schools seem to be better, we are hardly immune to such complaints. While one might quarrel with exactly what the standardized tests are testing, it seems to be that innumeracy is widespread among the population. However, it is useful to put the matter into context.

One can presume that in the nineteenth century, much greater emphasis was put on memory, rote and practice in the teaching of arithmetic. Yet as Egerton Ryerson (1803-1882) pointed out in his landmark *Report on a system of public elementary instruction for Upper Canada* (1847), written subsequent to a trip to the United States, Great Britain,

France and Germany to study their education systems, there was both widespread dissatisfaction with what pupils learned along with progressive proposals to remedy the situation.

Here, for example, is what he learned from an American source: There are doubtless many exceptions; but the remarks of the Author of the *District School*, are scarcely less applicable to Canada than to the State of New York: "From this science very little is obtained in our District Common Schools, which is of any *practical use*. There is much compulsive, uncertain, and laborious study of arithmetic; but it is often in vain, from the manner in which it is taught, since the scholar gets very little in return for his labour that is valuable or practical. Those who have received nothing more than a Common School education, obtain their practical knowledge of the science of numbers, not from their instructions or study in the School, but from their own invention and the rewards of experience. There is in the country but a small part of arithmetic *in use* which came from the Schools; necessity has taught the people what they ought to have learned at School when young, and when they were wasting so much time and money to no purpose. The pupil learns nothing thoroughly; what he does not understand he feels little or no interest in; he sits with his slate before him most of the day, groping, guessing, doing nothing."

This quotation actually gets to the nub of the matter: how can we engage students? While the syllabus and classroom practice have changed over the years, the notion that there is a syllabus to be "delivered" with little regard to the interests and social environment of the students has generally not. Arithmetic primers have appeared over the last 800 years, and the more successful authors make contact with their readers either through applications of mathematics, clear explanations of why things work, or through puzzles that involve reasoning and sometimes creative imagination. One of the best examples is the compilation of Alcuin of York (735(?)-804) who was an advisor to Charlemagne. You can access a modernized version of his collection of puzzles (with anachronistic solutions), *Propositiones ad acuendos iuvenes* (Problems for the sharpening of youth) here

There is a rich tradition of puzzle problems originating from all cultures and times. New ingenious puzzles continue to be created. Liberal use of such in classrooms confers several benefits. They highlight the universality and creativity of mathematics; they sensitize students to the structure underlying mathematical processes so that they see mathematics as an ecosystem rather than simply a compilation of facts and techniques, and they highlight the power of mathematics in its capacity to provide for systematic analysis. I will give an example.

Suppose that we have three whole numbers in increasing order; the second is three times the first, and the third, five times the first. In addition, the three numbers together involve the nine nonzero digits, each appearing exactly once. What are the three numbers? This could be presented as part of a story that makes sense to the students, and could be presented as a challenge problem posted on the notice board or solved by a team.²

Let us take this apart and see how it can be approached. There are many paths; here is one possibility.

- (1) Each number must have three digits.
- (2) Since the largest is less than 1000, the smallest begins with 1.
- (3) The largest number ends in 5.
- (4) All three numbers are odd; the smaller two must end in either 3, 7 or 9.
- (5) The smallest number cannot end in 7.
- (6) The middle number, being between 300 and 600, must begin with 3 or 4.

²This is the "hymnboard" problem, referring to the observation of a choirboy, bored during a sermon, looking for diversion in the numbers of hymns for the service, a situation now not intelligible to most of today's young.

(7) Twice the largest number is ten times the smallest number, with the same digits appended by a 0.

Case 1: The smallest number ends in 3. The largest must end in 65, so the three numbers are

$$1\text{-}3, \quad 4\text{-}9, \quad \text{-}65,$$

with 2, 7, 8 still outstanding. It is quickly checked that none of these work.

Case 2: The smallest number ends in 9. The largest must end in 45, so we now have the possibilities:

$$1\text{-}9, \quad 3\text{-}7, \quad \text{-}45,$$

with 2, 6, 8 outstanding. The choice of 6 or 8 in the smallest number makes the middle number more than 500, so this forces us to

$$129, \quad 387, \quad 645,$$

which fills the bill.

Apart from the modest bit of multiplication, the pupils have to pay attention to the characteristics of the numbers and how they fit together. This contextualization lifts the problem above simple drill.