

THE SENIOR COLLEGE MESSENGER

Issue 25: November, 2023

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 and books discussed.

Please submit contributions to the editor, Ed Barbeau at barbeau@math.utoronto.ca

UPDATING THE LIST OF FELLOWS

If you are a Fellow of Senior College, please check to see that you are included in the list of Fellows on the Senior College website at

<https://www.seniorcollege.utoronto.ca/about-us/fellows-list-2>.

You can contact the Registrar, Jonathan Dostrovsky (j.dostrovsky@utoronto.ca) to have your name added to or subtracted from the list. We also need your permission to post your email address, which I hope you will be willing to provide so colleagues can be in touch. (The email addresses in the list have already been authorized.)

If you are not a Fellow, it is very straightforward to join this august company of colleagues by getting in touch with the Registrar.

AN INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

The members of Senior College are invited to participate in a research project entitled

Testing a New Approach to Monitoring Mild Cognitive Impairment and Mental Health in Older Adults in a Community Setting

conducted by the Sheridan College Centre for Elder Research, in collaboration with the Ontario Brain Institute, Winterton Labs and Soul Machines. Directed by its Research Coordinator, Isabel Paniak, the Centre for Elder Research conducts innovative research to enhance the quality of life of older adults.

Those willing to participate should get in touch with Isabel at isabel.paniak@sheridancollege.ca (416-894-7027). You will be asked to take part in five in-person assessments at the Trafalgar Road Campus of Sheridan College over the course of a year.

CER Website
CER Facebook page

WEBINAR ON THE WORLD ALZHEIMER REPORT 2023

Alzheimer Disease International (ADI) invites you to a webinar, *Risk reduction and influencing behaviour change: delving into the World Alzheimer Report 2023*, on **Tuesday, November 7**, between 8 and 10 pm. (EST).

Leading experts will take a further look at key risk factors, including head injury, hearing loss, lack of physical activity, and brain health. This will be followed by an open Q&A period.

The webinar will be delivered by Zoom. For further information, visit the CURAC Later Life Learning Event Calendar at <https://curac.ca>.

ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ACTION

With so many urgent issues being pressed upon us, whether it be the wars in Israel or Ukraine, communities that are marginalized or abused, climate change and environmental degradation, universities are called upon to take a stand. It is not always clear when they should do this, as it is important that they be loci of free and informed debate. This is precisely the issue faced by universities over a half century ago during another turbulent time. In 1967, President George Beadle of the University of Chicago set up a committee chaired by Professor Harry Kalven (1914-1974) of the Faculty of Law to look into the matter. It seems to be a good time to bring this **Kalven Report** once again to light.

The full report can be accessed on the website
<https://provost.uchicago.edu/reports/report-universitys-role-political-and-social-action>

Here is a brief synopsis.

The mission of the university is the discovery, improvement, and dissemination of knowledge. Its domain of inquiry and scrutiny includes all aspects and all values of society. By design and by effect, it is the institution which creates discontent with the existing social arrangements and proposes new ones. In brief, a good university, like Socrates, will be upsetting.

The instrument of dissent and criticism is the individual faculty member or the individual student. The university is the home and sponsor of critics; it is not itself the critic. It is, to go back once again to the classic phrase, a community of scholars. To perform its mission in the society, a university must sustain an extraordinary environment of freedom of inquiry and maintain an independence from political fashions, passions, and pressures. A university, if it is to be true to its faith in intellectual inquiry, must embrace, be hospitable to, and encourage the widest diversity of views within its own community. It is a community but only for the limited, albeit great, purposes of teaching and research. It is not a club, it is not a trade association, it is not a lobby.

There is no mechanism by which [the university] can reach a collective position without inhibiting that full freedom of dissent on which it thrives.

The appropriate role for a public institute in its dealing with a fraught issue was raised in the Saturday, October 21 issue of *The Globe and Mail*. The Standards Editor, Sandra Martin, defended the press for not attaching the word “terrorists” to the Hamas attackers in its reportage. In the Business Section, Gus Carlson discussed the situation that saw universities threatened by their philanthropists for producing a reaction to the Israel-Hamas War that was deemed insufficient. Noting that corporations can face similar sanctions, he concluded his article with these words.

The cautionary tale amid this turmoil is becoming painfully clear. These universities would not have been in this position if they had simply kept their mouths shut on all the other matters about which they have commented. Perhaps it’s time for companies to stop bowing to the pressure of activists – internal and external – and revisit their predilection to weigh in publicly on social and political issues that have nothing to do with the product and services they sell.

Considering the financial implications of this situation, leaders in academia and the corporate world might adopt a more comprehensive policy like the one embraced by the University of Chicago: Stop commenting completely on such issues that are beyond the scope of your mandates. If you don’t, no one wants to hear you complain about pushback or plead poverty if the money stops flowing.

If you run a university, run it. . . . And leave the treacherous – and increasingly costly – world of pontificating and posturing to others.

IN MEMORIAM

George Baird (August 25, 1939 – October 17, 2023)
Dean, Faculty of Architecture

Natalie Zeeman Davis (November 8, 1928 – October 21, 2023)
Professor of History

CALENDAR OF COMING EVENTS

Events marked with **F** are for fellows and external fellows. Registration a few days ahead 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 by going on line at www.seniorcollege.utoronto.ca .

Talks: Wednesdays 10-12 am (In person & Zoom)

November 1: Sue Waddington, *In the footsteps of the group of 7 and Tom Thomson*

November 8: Marie-Hélène Budworth, *Diversity at work: uncovering barriers to inclusivity in employment*

November 15: Derek Denis, *English in multicultural Toronto*

November 22: Jacqueline Gibbons, *Spread your wings: Icarus to 1912 (Flight, the men and women)*

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

Participants may meet for lunch at 12:30 pm.

November 16: How do we recognize historical figures whose record is now seen as controversial?

(Organizers: Trevor Lloyd, Mary Finlay, Marty Klein)

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

November 6: Charles Darwin, *On the origin of species* (1859) (Leader: Sara Shettleworth)

December 4: Jennifer Raff, *Origin: a genetic history of the Americas* (2022) (Leader: Susan Pfeiffer)

January 8, 2024: Kevin Rudd, *The avoidable war: the dangers of a catastrophic conflict between US and Xi Jinping's China* (2022) (Leaders: Max Nemni, David Milne)

February 5: Alistair MacLeod, *No great mischief* (1999) (Leader: Meg Fox)

March 4: Ed Yong, *An immense world: how animal senses reveal the hidden realms around us* (2022) (Leader: Sara Shettleworth)

April 1: Willaim Carlsen, *Jungle of stone: the extraordinary journey of John L. Stephens and Frederick Catherwood and the discovery of the lost civilization of the Maya* (2017) (Leader: Jim Gurd)

May 6: Siddhartha Mukherjee, *The song of the cell: an exploration of medicine and the new human* (2022) (Leader: William Logan)

June 3: Helen Macdonald, *H is for Hawk* (2014) (Leader: Peter Alberti)

July 8: Alex Ross, *The rest is noise: listening to the twentieth century* (2007) (Leaders: Linda Hutcheon, Michael Hutcheon)

Aftermath

This is the story of the **Scottish Problems Book**. In November, 1918, Poland became a sovereign state, ending a long period when it was partitioned among the Austro-Hungarian, Russian and German empires. The mathematicians of this new country were eager to establish a strong national tradition through concentrating their research to a few areas that would yield important results and by founding journals for the dissemination of the results. Schools of research were established in Warsaw and in the eastern city of Lwów (now Lviv in western Ukraine).

During the 1930s, the Lwów chapter of the Polish Mathematical Society used to have a seminar each Saturday at the university and then adjourn to a local coffee house, the Roma Café, a few hundred yards away, for intense informal discussion. At some point, apparently due to a disagreement about credit, the Roma Café was deemed unsatisfactory, so the group moved their business next door to the Café Szkocka (the Scottish cafe). One day, Stefan Banach, one of the leaders of the group, decided that it would be useful to record the ideas that emerged in the discussion so as not to be forgotten. So he bought a large well-bound notebook, and asked that it be stored at the café to be brought out by the waiter when asked for. The first entry in the book was on July 17, 1935, and over the next six years, until May 31, 1941, 193 problems were entered into the book.

Virtually all the problems are too specialized and technical for a general audience. Here are the more intelligible ones:

Is a solid of uniform density which will float in water in every position a sphere?
Problem 19

Can one decompose a square into a finite number of squares all different? Problem 58.

Occasionally, the proposer would offer a prize for the solution, usually a bottle of wine, spirits or a few small beers. For despatching problems 117 and 118, the visiting French mathematician, Fréchet offered an original manuscript in French. For various parts of the solution to problem 152 (Nov. 6, 1936), the prize was 10 grammes of caviar, a small beer or a demitasse. The previous problem offered a “fondue” in Geneva, while the prize for problem 157 (Mar. 23, 1937) was lunch at the “Dorothy” in Cambridge. The last dozen problems were entered after the beginning of the war. Somehow the book survived the war in Banach’s possession. When Banach died in 1945, his son found it; it was copied verbatim by hand and the copy mailed in 1956 to Stanislaw Ulam who had been a student in Lwów and went to Los Alamos after the war.

Many of the problems remain unsolved or only partially solved. Some generated significant advances. But any connection with Scotland is pure happenstance. I do not know if haggis was on the menu.