

VCTA NEWSLETTER

Vanier College Teachers' Association

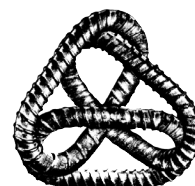
Vol. 27, No. 1

September 2009



Into the future with:

fneeq



CSN

Dear Readers:

Welcome to Volume 27 of the VCTA Newsletter. A lot has changed at Vanier since I first went around this block, circa 1986-88 and even since my second stint as editor, 2004-2006 (when I asked for release time to revive the Newsletter which had floundered and lay dormant for a few years). There have been many changes in our profession; many retirements; many new faces in all areas and employee groups in the College.

And some things haven't changed at all: renovations that never quite get done before the semester starts; the excitement and optimism of a brand new school year; the goals of the VCTA Newsletter.

The VCTA Newsletter aims to

- inform members about the importance of the union—the collective agreement, our new federation FNEEQ and the CSN—and what it means to be a union member;
- provide a forum for teachers, new and seasoned, to exchange views and debate issues;
- acquaint new teachers with Vanier culture at the same time that it reflects the changes taking place in that culture;
- present an image of who we are and a sense of the syndical, pedagogical and social issues that matter to us collectively;
- build union solidarity and pride in who we are and what we do best: teaching.

(Note: Here I am both quoting and paraphrasing myself, *Newsletter*, Vol. 23, No. 7, May 2006, p.2.)

These are rather lofty goals. Reaching them depends on you, dear readers: your ideas, articles, suggestions, cartoons, photographs, poetry, drawings, letters, stories, reviews—ALL SUBMISSIONS ARE WELCOME!

I look forward to hearing from you.

Shirley Pettifer

Deadline for Submissions to the next issue is October 23, 2009

All Contributions Welcome!

Send contributions to shirley.pettifer@vaniercollege.qc.ca

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Monday **Janice Paquette**
11:30 am – 2:00 pm

Fred Andrews
2:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Tuesday **Shirley Pettifer**
2:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Wed. **Janice Paquette**
9:00 am – 10:30 am

Thursday **Kim Matthews**
10:00 am – 2:00 pm

Shirley Pettifer
2:00 – 4:00 pm

Friday **Fred Andrews**
10:00 – 12:00 Noon

Or by appointment (gladly!)

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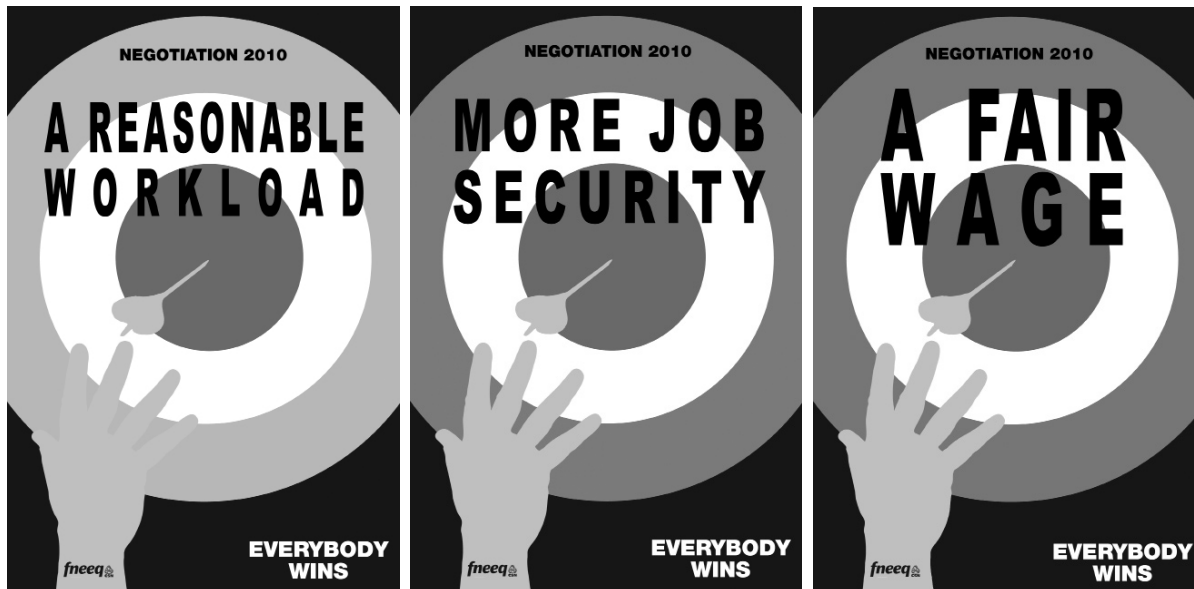
Fri. 8:30 am – 3:30 pm

Closed for Lunch from 12 – 1 pm

Negotiations 2009-2010

Cegep Teachers are Preparing

Our Demands for a New Collective Agreement



VCTA General Assembly:

Tues. Oct. 13 • Have your say!

Vanier teachers will vote on our sectoral demands. Our new federation, FNEEQ, will deposit these with the Government on Nov. 1, 2009.



the life-long learning process. This year, World Teachers' Day will focus on the role of teachers within the context of the global financial and economic crisis and the need to invest in teachers now as a means to secure post-crisis regeneration.

Building the Future

5 October is a day to celebrate teachers and the central role they play in guiding children, youths & adults through

It is critical, during these difficult times, to seek mechanisms that protect the teaching profession. It is also crucial, despite the crisis, to ensure that investment in teachers is sufficient and proportionate to the demands made upon them. It is the teaching force with its knowledge, experience and foresight which can bring new insights to global solutions. Join us in celebrating this!

<http://www.ei-ie.org/worldteachersday2009/>

Celebrate World Teachers' Day: Monday, Oct. 5, 11:00 am – 2:00 pm.
Drop by the VCTA Office C101 for a sandwich, a coffee and some conversation.

The Global Economic Crisis: Possible Effects on Vanier College

Moses Tiepoh



Discussions about the current global economic crisis usually center on its macroeconomic dimensions at national and international levels. Its effects on local communities and institutions, at meso and micro levels such as households, families, social networks and organizations are hardly emphasized in conventional economic analysis.

This neglect of the social effects of the crisis is not unintentional but a well-defined historical product of a process of intellectual 'balkanization' that occurred in the mid-19th century, when inquiry into the nature and varieties of human existence split into separate specialties and disciplines. As argued by Eric Wolf (1982), in *Europe and the People Without History*, early sociologists accomplished this separation by "severing the field of social relations from the political economy," while "economics abandoned its concern with how socially organized populations produce to supply their polities and became instead a study of how demand creates markets."

Young college students'... academic successes are likely to be greatly influenced by the types of economic issues within their families and social relationships.

While the preoccupation with macro-economic variables is consistent with the established intellectual specialization of disciplines, it does not generate a comprehensive understanding of the effects of our continuing economic crisis at micro levels. Such an understanding is extremely critical, however, for those of us who are required to effectively educate young college students whose academic successes are likely to be greatly influenced by the types of economic issues within their families and social relationships. This piece is therefore an attempt to explain some of the social mechanisms through which the present economic crisis may be affecting the performances of students at Vanier College and to highlight the need for us, as teachers, to remain mindful of these possible influences.

The Economic Crisis: International and National Dimensions

Currently, the global economy is beginning to pull out of a deep recession that most economists projected as the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s. For instance, last spring, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecast global growth in 2009 to fall to 0.5 percent when measured in purchasing power

parity terms and to turn negative when measured in terms of market exchange rates. This would be the lowest growth rate since World War II!

In the 30 member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) area, which includes developed economies like Canada, economic activity was expected to plummet by an average 4.3 percent in 2009. And although the crisis originated in the United States and other advanced economies, it quickly spread to major emerging markets such as China, India, and Brazil where growth was forecast to be very slow compared with recent historical trends. Moreover, it also hit the world's poorest and most vulnerable economies in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

While the crisis appears now to be abating, recovery is expected to be sluggish. Global growth is still projected to see only a modest recovery next year, assuming the effectiveness of strong stimulus packages and more stable financial and housing markets.

Growth during 2009-10 is now re-forecast to be about only ½ percentage points higher than previously predicted by the IMF. Even then the US would still qualify for having experienced the longest recession since the 1930s. This is because only two of the 10 previous post-Depression downturns (i.e. November 1973 to March 1975 and July 1981 to November 1982) lasted as long as a full year. The US economy has been in recession since December 2007, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER).

By far the most important measure of any economic downturn is its impact on jobs. According to the latest statistics from the Global Employment Trends report of the International Labour Office (ILO), the current crisis is expected to lead to a dramatic increase in global unemployment from 5.7 percent in 2008 to 6.5 percent in 2009, in the most optimistic scenario. For the first time since the early 1990s, unemployment rates in many OECD countries are projected to reach double-digit figures by the end of 2010, according to a recent *OECD's Economic Outlook Interim Report*.

In Canada the economic picture has not been much better. The slowdown that started in late 2007 through declining exports became a full-fledged recession in the fall of 2008. While real GDP fell at an annual rate of 3.4 percent in the last quarter of that year, it fell at an even faster pace in the first months of 2009. According to Statistics Canada reports, Canadian employment has fallen more rapidly during this recession than in the previous downturns of the 1980s and 1990s. During July alone, 45,000 jobs were lost, in both full- and part-time work, pushing the national unemployment rate up to 8.6 percent—the highest rate in 11 years. Since last October, employment has fallen each month, with net losses now totaling 414,000. Table 1 provides a snapshot of the unemployment problem in Canada.

Table 1: Unemployment in seven Canadian provinces, July 2009

	Quebec	Ontario	New Brunswick	Manitoba	Alberta	Newfoundland	British Columbia
Unemployment (thousands)	379.2	665.1	378	33.1	153.9	43.8	188.9
Unemployment rate (%)	9.0	9.3	9.4	5.2	7.2	17.1	7.8

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (August, 2009)

Social Effects of Unemployment and Economic Hardship

The full depth of this continuing crisis can only be grasped by assessing both its direct impacts on families as well as extended effects on the behaviours and capacities of individuals operating within broader social-organizational and institutional settings. This is because when unemployment and economic hardship impacts a country, they often produce rippling effects on how individuals behave and perform at their places of work, learning, worship and other social arenas. Thus there is a need for a comprehensive analysis that links both the micro- and meso-level effects of the crisis we face.

Such an approach may be useful in helping us understand and assess the quality of academic performance of some of our students here at Vanier. Given the diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of these students, it is likely that the various economic situations they experience at home will affect their performances differently at the College.

Unemployment and economic hardship often produce rippling effects on how individuals behave and perform at their places of work, learning, worship...

There are many economic, social, and psychological channels through which the current recession can possibly impact the academic achievements of our students. Four of these are briefly discussed here.

First, parental unemployment can negatively affect a family's income security, which may be reflected in reduced family expenditures on purchasing the goods and services (e.g., food, housing, and health) necessary for a successful learning environment. Not only can the level of family income be reduced during a job loss, but the source of that income often shifts to increased reliance on public assistance in the form of welfare income. Research indicates that such increased dependence on welfare is associated with children's lower academic achievement, perhaps due to stigma.

Second, unemployment is psychologically stressful for parents, which in turn inhibits their emotional warmth and engagement with their children. Such job loss-induced stress can also negatively affect marital relationships and increase the likelihood of divorce. Ineffective parenting due to these factors can lead to poorer adjustment in young adults and hamper their academic productivity.

Third, parental unemployment may generate adverse 'role model' effects on emerging adults. Research suggests that children's

observations of their parents' work experiences can influence how they view their own future economic opportunities and potential. While some children who witness their parent's job loss may be motivated to stay in school in order to secure better employment outcomes than their parents, others may perceive such experiences pessimistically and become de-motivated in school. Their belief in the Protestant work ethic (i.e. hard work is inherently good and can overcome any obstacles to success) may be seriously undermined by these experiences.

Finally, unemployment and economic hardship can undermine social networks and cohesion among friends, families, and groups. Higher unemployment leads to income inequality which, as suggested in the 'social capital' literature, can negatively affect social cohesion. One pathway through which this might occur is found in the notion that social stratification functions to encourage hostility, suspicion and distrust among the various segments of society, and this limits the possibilities of extensive social integration. Parental job loss may inhibit young adults' relationships with their peers through its negative income effect. Lower income support from parents implies fewer opportunities for social interactions with friends. Moreover, some students whose parents rely on welfare income may reduce their interactions with friends in order to avoid the stigma associated with such dependence.



Conclusions and Some Quasi Evidence at Vanier College

I was profoundly shocked by their personal economic stories...

Last winter, I assigned to my two macroeconomics classes the research topic, "Why Unemployment is a Personal Tragedy and a National Waste." Students were required to argue why this statement is true. Of the 76 papers submitted, 10 students illustrated their analyses of the 'personal tragedy' dimension of the argument, using their own real family economic situations. To be frank, I was profoundly shocked by their personal economic stories which, to a large extent, confirmed some of the above effects of unemployment and economic hardship. Some of the students explained how job loss in their families had endangered the marital stability of their parents and the

possible consequences for their own school performances. Others talked about how the loss of jobs in their families had caused drastic reduction in their monthly stipends, and this was affecting their social activities. One student mentioned how the loss of his father's job brought about a separation of the family, because the father was re-assigned a new job in a different country.

The above-mentioned preliminary evidence indicates that the current global economic crisis may be affecting some of our students. While these observations are not based on any serious research, they point to the need for the analysis of the crisis to be inclusive of meso- and micro-level social variables. They also provide a hint for us, as teachers, to remain mindful (as usual) of these possible effects in our professional relationships with our students.

Moses Tiepoh is a development economist who has been teaching Economics at Vanier College since 2007. He has also taught Research Methods and in the Explorations Programs.

Use of Hand Sanitizers at Vanier College: Honours Students Make A Startling Discovery!

After taking an inventory of obvious and easily accessible hand sanitizers in the Old Building (A, B, C, D, E, F and K), N-Building, the Sports Complex and H-Building, the Honours Research Methods students established 20 observation posts. From Aug. 31 to Sept. 9, thirty students carried out 45.5 hours of unobtrusive observation, split into three time periods: early morning, mid-day, late afternoon.

During the 45.5 hours of observation, 12,944 persons passed by a hand sanitizer. How many stopped to use the sanitizers*? The answer is shocking and points to the need for more internal communication before the H1N1 season is upon us.

	Used Sanitizer (n=469)	Did Not Use Sanitizer (n=12,475)
Females (n=6447)	3% (n=209)	97% (n=6238)
Males (n=6486)	4% (n=254)	96% (n=6232)
Other/Not Known (n=11)	55% (n=6)	45% (n=5)

*Though almost all hand sanitizers were full, on three occasions the student researchers noticed that some were empty—particularly the one in the Old Building Caf. If the passer-by attempted to use the hand sanitizer, s/he was counted as "used sanitizer".

Ehrenreich on Poverty in America

Barbara Ehrenreich, the author of *Nickel and Dimed*, has written a series of three opinion essays in the NYTimes that discuss poverty, both new and entrenched: "Too Poor to Make the News"; "A Homespun Safety Net"; and "Is it Now a Crime to be Poor?"

Excerpt from "Too Poor to Make the News":

"In some accounts, the recession is even described as "the great leveler"... But the outlook is not so cozy when we look at the recession on a group generally omitted from all the vivid narratives of downward mobility—the already poor."

Excerpt from "Is it Now a Crime to be Poor?"

"The pattern is to curtail financing for services that might help

the poor while ramping up law enforcement: starve school and public transportation budgets, then make truancy illegal. Shut down public housing, then make it a crime to be homeless. Be sure to harass street vendors when there are few other opportunities for employment. The experience of the poor, and especially poor minorities, comes to resemble that of a rat in a cage scrambling to avoid erratically administered electric shocks."

From: <http://www.metafilter.com/84028/Barbara-Ehrenreich-onPoverty-in-America> where you can also access the full text of the three essays.

October is Women's History Month

A Great Opportunity

Maureen Jones

Women's History Month is a great opportunity to refresh and expand our knowledge of Canadian women's achievements as well as to remind ourselves of the dramatic narrative of the struggle for equality.

This semester, I presented one of my classes with a list of watershed moments in Canadian law as related to equal rights. Many of the students were shocked. Their responses were consistently incredulous: "Women weren't considered persons.... in C-a-n-a-d-a?" and "Women couldn't vote in provincial elections until 1940...in Q-u-e-b-e-c?" Rarely have I seen students so riled and impassioned.

What a great opportunity Women's History Month is to combat the stereotype that Canadian history is boring. At age 37, Laura Secord trekked by foot to warn the British of advancing American troops during the war of 1812; Emilie Carr painted the lush beauty of B.C. forests and turned out a Governor General award winning novel all while living with a pet monkey, squirrels and her beloved dogs; recall the courage of Léa Roback leading 5000 garment industry workers on a 25 day strike in Montreal; then there is Rosemary Brown who, in 1972, became the first black woman in Canada to be elected to a legislature and who continued her life-long dedication to human rights as Chief Commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission. The list of great women in our country goes on and on.

There was Canadian history in the classroom when I was growing up, but no discussion of women's history. I filled in the blanks later on as a curious university student who was fond of libraries. Around the time I was perusing library shelves, October was named Women's History month in Canada in order to raise awareness of women's contribution to our society. I consider myself lucky to work at Vanier College where, every October, the Women's Studies Program at Vanier puts up a Women's History Month display.

This year, the Women's Studies Program is collaborating with the Vanier Social Justice Committee as well as students from the

class, Alternatives for Women, to create this display. I would like to offer a big 'thank you' to all these contributors. I would also like to encourage teachers to draw their student's attention to the display in the Carrefour (Oct. 5-16th) and to use the month of October as an opportunity to open up a vibrant discussion about the great women of Canadian history. This year's theme is "Women Moving Ahead."

Maureen Jones, who teaches in the Humanities Department, is the Coordinator of the Women's Studies Programs.

Fatima Daher: Winner of the 2008-2009 Doug Miller Social Justice Award

Fatima has been involved in various social justice campaigns on campus, touching a wide range of issues. She was integral to the campaign to raise awareness about the human rights crisis in Darfur. She also tried to get a discussion group going on Middle East issues. She took part in other activities such as the Building Bridges project, sending students to the Leclerc Prison for exchanges with inmates nearing the end of their sentences.

Fatima was also a regular "staffer" at Vanier Social Justice Committee tables concerning issues of fair trade and she helped recruit many new members to the Committee.

Perhaps her biggest contribution was as editor and main writer of the Vanier Voice of Justice, the newsletter of the Vanier Social Justice Committee—work which took countless hours and much perseverance.

Kudos to Fatima and thanks to Eric Lamoureux for this information.

Employee Assistance Plan

At Vanier College, we have an Employee Assistance Plan which covers not only eligible employees but also immediate family members living at home.

The plan provides for five visits to a professional psychologist at no cost to the employee. Further consultations are at your expense but eligible expenses may be reimbursed by your group health insurance plan.

Reasons to consult this service can include substance abuse, addiction, personal family or relationship difficulties, burnout or eating disorders.

The service is provided by Group Physimed, which maintains complete confidentiality for the users of this service.

Call 1-800-667-2683 at any time or 514-747-8888 during business hours.

A Tale of Two Reforms

Jailson Lima



To paraphrase Charles Dickens: This is the best of times, this is the worst of times...to be a teacher. It is the worst of times because the majority of teachers have the perception that everything has changed for the worse since the seemingly glorious days of their years as students. We complain that students do not apply themselves as much as they should, that they know less and less and, as a result, we are forced to lower the level of our courses year after year.

The comparison between the schools we attended with today's might be skewed since the frames of reference are totally different. The lack of congruence might be traced back to the fact that the world has changed so much in the last decades, whereas the educational system seems to be somewhat frozen in time. The world might look dysfunctional through teachers' lenses.

My former students who went on to McGill tell me a similar story: since the lectures they are supposed to attend are recorded and become available the next day, they prefer studying at home by following the recorded files. They save commuting time and they can control everything: listening only when they feel like it and stopping the lecture for a coffee break or to answer the phone. From their point of view, it is a win-win situation.

After listening to their stories, I cannot help but ask myself what is the relevance of the role of the teacher in this format? McGill should hire an actor with a beautiful voice, record all the lectures once and make them permanently available. Students would have access to these lectures from home, study for their tests and write their exams. In this paradigm, teachers could become obsolete in the very near future. Of course the biggest flaw in this logic is the assumption that the transmission of factual knowledge is the most important thing going on inside the classroom.

We who have been to university know that fostering creativity and imagination are not strengths of the system, especially in the Sciences. If I had had the chance to stay home and listen to recorded lectures to study for mid-terms and finals, I would probably have done so. Wouldn't you?

The students taught under the Quebec Reform are on a collision course with the CEGEP system in the same way that a huge iceberg encountered the Titanic almost 100 years ago.

Let us now move from the reality of the university setting to another extreme: the high schools of today. The students taught under the Quebec Reform—those expecting to graduate in June, 2010—are on a collision course with the CEGEP system in the same way that a huge iceberg encountered the Titanic almost 100 years ago.

I am not here to defend the Reform, and I understand the frustration and anger created by its implementation. Many mistakes made in past reforms were committed again, namely the flawed political and technical aspects of reform implementation, insufficient teacher preparation and professional development, and the mismatch between the pedagogical goals and the assessments. We have the perception that everything was already decided long before bureaucrats pretended to take our concerns into account through a few selected committees. No wonder we feel that it was imposed on us rather than negotiated.

It is the worst of times to be a teacher. Or is it?

But nothing can be done to change the past. Decisions were made long ago and, a year from now, we are going to receive the new wave of students taught under the Reform. The forecast, according to Science teachers, is merciless: once again the Titanic will sink. Our educational system will perish. The skies are likely to fall. There will be suffering and gnashing of teeth. Armageddon is near. It is the worst of times to be a teacher. Or is it?

I personally do not think that the pedagogical model under which I was taught is intrinsically better than the one currently in use. Despite my being an exemplary student, frustration and dissatisfaction were pervasive during my school years. It was impossible for me to understand how school could be so mind-numbing while dealing with such fascinating topics in all fields of knowledge. I always wanted to understand things instead of simply knowing them. Unfortunately, dogmatism, rote memorization and mechanically solving problems were commonplace in the way I was taught.

The majority of my teachers managed to efficiently kill the joy of learning with boring, uncreative teaching strategies and predictable, pointless assessments. I can only describe my own experience as a student, but I ask you to recall your experience and honestly evaluate if the model under which you were taught was so amazing after all, and more efficient compared with today's. And since, for obvious reasons, we can't remember what we have forgotten, be aware that recollections might be eroded, idealized or skewed due to the passing of time.

We have the tendency to reproduce what we have previously experienced, and I have no shame admitting that my first years of teaching were heavily influenced by the format of my own schooling, in spite of being aware of its flaws and weaknesses. At the beginning of the career, it is hard for a teacher to think outside the box. We tend to think only in terms of the tangible and concrete, instead of giving space for subtleties and abstractions to blossom. Although I have been improving my teaching skills during the past 20 years, I am still not entirely satisfied (and actually I hope I never will be!).

Let's pull back and note that the seed for any reform is the acknowledgement of the necessity for change. As the philosopher and mathematician Alfred North Whitehead nicely stated, "A clash of doctrines is not a disaster—it is an opportunity." It is clear to me that we are living in a time of profound changes. Instead of complaining about the scarcity of strong students coming to Vanier, I recommend that we try to work with the reality that we have—not the one we wish we had.

The point I am trying to make is that since the Reform is inevitable and the new wave of students will have been taught differently, we might see this as an opportunity to reevaluate our teaching practices, experiment and come up with our own educational reform. I believe we should do this not only because it is a necessity for our survival as society but also because it will increase the level of satisfaction among teachers and students—two groups who can synergistically support each other. It might turn out to be the best of times to be a teacher.

We also need to prepare our students for the remarkably different reality of the 21st century. I have a recurring thought whenever I look at my students:

I imagine that, if the rules do not change, they will likely retire around the year 2055. What will the world look like then? What kind of knowledge will they need to succeed in that world? We cannot even predict what the world will look like in five years, let alone in fifty!

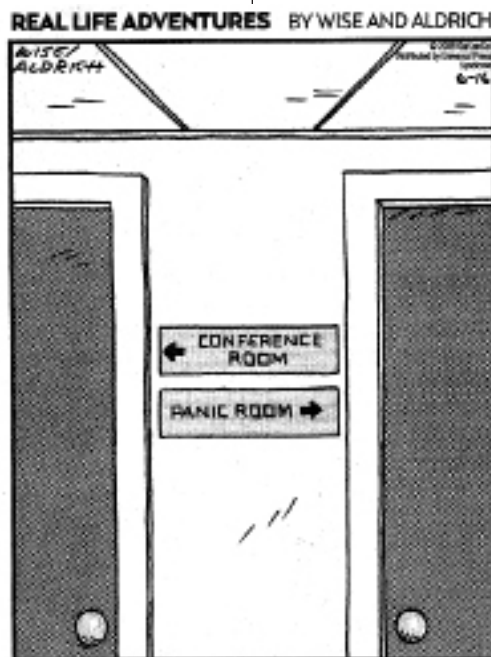
Our students are unlikely to spend their careers in a single job, or even in the same field. Most likely they will need strong interdisciplinary foundations to be able to adapt to new situations and participate in different projects. Creativity will be a key factor to succeeding in a world overloaded with information, which is processed at almost unlimited speed.

Our current pedagogy teaches standard orthodox, only "one right way" approaches to the material, loaded with unquestionable truths; the emphasis is on indoctrination and homogenization. We should, instead, encourage students to question the value and limitations of what is being taught. We should stimulate and reward creativity.

The real challenge is to reinvent science education for the 21st century. It is a task that is far from easy. It is not the work for one single person, the true revolutionary individual full of wisdom and vision. Rather, it will require a massive, cohesive collective effort in search of creative ways to engage students and improve education. It might also require a lengthy period until the innovations become widely adopted.

Although the possibilities for improvement are endless, it is fundamental to be flexible, to continually strike a delicate balance between expectations, goals and responsibilities. Strategies that successfully motivate students now may not work in the near

future. Teaching is very dynamic: we must constantly rethink, refine and reorganize our ideas. While doing research, we do not know the answers yet, only the questions. Maturity allows us to accept that mistakes, misjudgments and miscalculations are part of our profession.



In Alice in Wonderland, the Cheshire Cat says that "If you don't care where you want to get to, then it doesn't much matter which way you go." The crucial questions are: Where do we want to go? How can we transform education?

Since last semester, I have been involved with a project titled, "Developing instructional strategies to promote critical thinking across disciplines in Natural Sciences." The main idea is to disseminate information and tips about how to incorporate the knowledge of different disciplines into a conceptual framework of a more constructivist approach. Since a project of this scope can only work with the participation of teachers across departments, I would like to explore the feasibility of creating a task force of teachers interested in experimenting with alternative strategies. One of these would involve dealing with team-based learning, which supposedly is one of the

strengths of students taught under the Quebec Reform.

Since our students are more mature than high-school adolescents, the college system offers a great opportunity for teachers to try creative learning alternatives with the aim of facilitating the transition of those students to university. Moreover, college teachers have, on average, more years of schooling than high-school teachers, which can be an asset in a project like this. I am confident that we have the knowledge and skills to actively contribute to this shift in pedagogy.

I have had the chance to try out some ideas in different courses, and so far the results have surpassed all my expectations. For example, making the connections with the principles of the Quantum Theory and Magritte's paintings was so successful in the History of Science course for Liberal Arts students that I am planning to use a similar approach in regular Science courses. And for this reason I welcome the participation of Humanities and Art teachers interested in contributing to this project.

Going back to Charles Dickens, I strongly believe it is the best of times to be a teacher due to the possibilities of being part of something that has the potential to modernize our educational system and to rebuild Vanier's reputation as a top college in Quebec. Because, as I always tell my students, there are only two important things in life: one is education, and the other is not that important.

Jailson Lima has taught Chemistry at Vanier since 2001. He also teaches in the International Baccalaureate and Liberal Arts programs.

Report from the Ottawa, 2008 Conference: Canadian Association for the Prevention of Discrimination and Harassment in Higher Education (CAPDHHE)

Lisa Jorgensen

Last year I attended the annual conference for the Canadian Association for the Prevention of Discrimination and Harassment in Higher Education (CAPDHHE) in Ottawa. The conference was titled Race and Diversity in Higher Education: Finding Strength in Diversity. The CAPDHHE conference provides people working in human rights sectors in university and college settings the opportunity to exchange information, ideas, innovation and practical tips for dealing with cases of discrimination and harassment. Vanier is quite ahead in terms of human rights policies and was the only Cegep represented at the conference.

Constance Backhouse, Professor of Law at the University of Ottawa and author of *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950*, discussed what is known as "The Dr. Chun Case"; a case of a professor at the University of Toronto who filed a discrimination complaint against the university that took twenty-five years to settle (ultimately in favour of Dr. Chun). She used the example to illustrate the need to address systemic racism in universities.

She points to two problems that are barriers to dealing with systemic discrimination. The first is that many Canadians proudly think of Canada as being a non-racist society. The second is that universities promote themselves as bastions of rational thought and many within the institution think that racism is something that exists outside of the university.

As a result of these perceptions, people are reluctant to recognize discrimination in Canadian institutions of higher education. If there is inequity in the institution and someone files a complaint, colleagues often see the complainant as the problem instead of looking into systemic discrimination in the institution itself. Many people are hypersensitive about being labeled racist and so react by demonizing the complainant. Backhouse discussed how difficult it is to wage battles as individuals and insisted that we need to address the system overall to ensure that individuals aren't forced to engage in these battles, which are taken at great personal and professional cost.

Institutions that want real diversity (rather than just a sentence in a mission statement) need to take concrete action to ensure that this aim is realized.

Tina Lopes, an educator and organizational change practitioner, believes that taking on systemic discrimination needs to be a priority in our institutions. She points out that individual behaviour is often a symptom of a larger system

(such as the environment of the institution, curriculum, services and communication). Unexamined ideas, she argues, reinforce inequality.

Institutions that want real diversity (rather than just a sentence in a mission statement) need to take concrete action to ensure that this aim is realized. Equity initiatives must be built into the strategic plan, have designated funds, a timeline for implementation and people responsible for them. Across-the-board training on equity issues, bi-monthly round-tables and publicity campaigns are a few of the methods that she finds are effective in opening up a dialogue about race, gender, sexuality and disability. From this crucial starting point, the necessary action can follow.

Lopes claims that institutions should move away from the goal of simply complying to policies to focus on something broader. Unless we take action to prevent it, she argues, we are going to (or continue to) replicate oppressive systems in society.

There were several panels on institutionalized homophobia. Ranjith Kulatilake, a TA from York University, gave a presentation on his experience leading a political science tutorial. In the tutorial he brought up how the gay community was impacted by a particular political process being discussed. When the professor heard of this, he told Kulatilake that he should not have brought homosexuality into the discussion because it is a 'sensitive issue'.

Framing homosexuality as a 'sensitive issue' often occurs in academic settings. Kulatilake pointed out that this approach to teaching does little to foster the 'safe' and 'respectful' environment that most institutions aspire to provide. He questioned what the university meant by 'safety' and suggested that to the institution, safety means ensuring that students' views and/or discriminatory perceptions will not be challenged.

Not presenting a range of perspectives only serves to marginalize LGBTQ students and teachers. As teachers, we often link course material to our own experience. Many LGBTQ teachers are afraid of speaking from experience in class, thus making it an 'unsafe' environment for them.

Tim McCaskell, a well-known anti-racism activist and long-time leader in the gay community emphasized the need to present racial diversity in sexual diversity initiatives and positive space campaigns (like Vanier's Open Door Network).

Achieving the goal of equity need not be, and in fact should not be, a miserable accusatory process. There were two sessions exploring the creative use of theatre, poetry and communication techniques to address diversity, intersectionality,

and discriminatory discourse and practice. Some would be appropriate for raising awareness of human right issues among students and others would be helpful in bringing attention to these issues among faculty and staff.

Achieving the goal of equity need not be, and in fact should not be, a miserable accusatory process.

Education on these issues is key. I have information on the many ways that people have gone about raising awareness about equity issues and discrimination. I would be happy to provide more information if anyone would like to get involved.

There is a lot to be proud of here at Vanier. We have had (and continue to have) a strong presence in the CAPDHHE organization. For over twenty years we have sent representatives to the conference who then use the knowledge gained to improve human rights at Vanier. Vanier's Human Rights Policy, which was established with input from many CAPDHHE members has served as a model for Cegeps and universities in many parts of Quebec.

At Vanier we have, in addition to the Human Rights Office run by Marilyn More, a number of other organizations working

on equity and diversity initiatives including Women's Studies, the VCTA, the Open Door Network, the Social Justice Committee, the Native Awareness Group and Student Services. These groups organize talks and panel discussions, run workshops, initiate political action, screen films and generally try to raise awareness about issues that concern us all. We also have many individual teachers who are committed to equity and human rights issues and bring attention to them in their classes.

The conference reminded me that we need to be persistent in our work to ensure that we are successful in our collective task of building more humane and inclusive educational communities that value difference and see in it a source of social and intellectual strength.

Lisa Jorgensen, who is a long-time member of the Women's Studies Program and a co-founder of the Open Door Network, teaches Humanities at Vanier. She is currently taking a part-time leave to work on her PhD.



<http://www.zatoun.com/>

Greetings, friends:

My thanks to those of you who have supported the cause of Palestinian olive growers by purchasing Zatoun products in the past.

As before, I'll be happy to provide you with olive oil (@ \$18), zaatar spice packs (@ \$5) and Nablus soap (4 asst. bars @ \$15).

Let me know by email: caplan.neil@gmail.com

**Best wishes
~Neil**



Featuring

Counsellors in Student Services



Carmine Rossignoli, Adelina Rovito, Markham Mirotchnick, Gillian Bowman, Irma Mazzonna

Personal problems often seriously undermined academic success... Counselling can help students better cope with stress and depression as well as acquire more effective problem-solving, decision-making, communication and interpersonal skills... If you are concerned about a student's well-being, encourage the student to make an appointment with a counsellor: Ext. 7885, C203. (Excerpted from Student Services Web site). Sometimes it helps to accompany the student to C203 to make the first appointment.

News Flash: Trade Unionism in the Middle East

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

from ITUC OnLine: Brussels, Sept. 14, 2009

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) welcomed a statement released by its Israeli affiliate Histadrut (General Federation of Labour in Israel), reconfirming the commitment of Israel's trade union movement to peace, security and a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine.

The statement expresses concern at the effects of restrictions on Palestinians' movement and of the security wall on the lives of Palestinian workers and their families, and also calls upon the Israeli government to dismantle all illegal outposts.

Emphasizing the need for dialogue and cooperation, the statement cites the agreement between the Histadrut and the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions, which is also an ITUC affiliate, as well as initiatives to support Palestinian workers in the transport and construction

sectors with the Global Union Federations ITF and BWI. It also sets out key commitments in defending the rights of Palestinians employed by Israeli companies.

"With the urgent need for decisive movement towards an acceptable solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict, this statement by the Histadrut is an important and welcome call for dialogue and progress to achieve the objective of two states co-existing in conditions of peace and security, and full respect for the rights of all working people," said ITUC General Secretary, Guy Ryder.

The ITUC represents 170 million workers in 157 countries and has 312 national affiliates. <http://www.ituc-csi.org>

Thanks to Dr. Stephen Block , Humanities Department, for this submission.

The Thank-You Address

Big Band Benefit Concert: April 20, 2009:

A Tribute to Vanier Women: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

Arlene Steiger



I want to thank Nadia Turbide for organising this wonderful evening. I particularly like this theme that she cooked up: Vanier Women Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow because the history of Vanier College coincides with a history of significant changes in the lives of women. As I have thought about yesterday, I have been reminded that when this college opened its doors, women in Quebec society earned only slightly more than half of what men earned. Birth control had just been legalized; maternity leave was measured in days and weeks and was available in few jobs. Parental leave was a dream. Much has changed since those days but to be more accurate I want to say that people created change and women were in the vanguard.

Here at Vanier, it was women who founded the Vanier Day-care Centre, initiated the first Affirmative Action project, and developed one of the first college sexual harassment policies in the province. These efforts toward gender equality were launched by women acting out of their own experiences and needs but it must be said, as we women bask in tonight's celebration, that we have always been supported and joined by men who shared our concerns. Today, the Affirmative Action Project has grown into a comprehensive Employment Equity Policy and the Sexual Harassment Policy is part of a broad Human Rights Policy, overseen by our Office of Human Rights. We have an Open Door Network that works to end discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation. These are changes of which we can be proud; they speak to the very important notion that the struggle against gender inequality is inseparable from the struggle against other inequalities.

Women have played a crucial role in bringing issues of concern to women and the topic of gender into the

classroom. Yesterday, women were a notable absence in the curriculum. It was women who first included women's experiences as the subject matter of their courses and it was a few women who founded the Women's Studies Program over thirty years ago. In the interests of truth in reporting, I must tell you that it took some lobbying to gain recognition for this Program in those days. Today, the Women's Studies Program brochure lists over fifty courses in a wide range of disciplines, taught by men as well as women, dealing with issues of gender. The Program receives generous support from the College and the VCTA and its week long celebration of International Women's Day, mounted as a labour of love for more than 30 years, was awarded the FAC provincial award for contribution to college life in 2008.

At Vanier, we pride ourselves on being a community and tonight I want to speak for a moment about the role of women in building that community. Visit any corner of the College, walk into the offices of any of our services and Faculties, chances are it will be a woman who greets you. Women are on the frontlines and behind the scenes, the heroines, often unsung, who deal with the crises and real life dramas that a community of over 6000 people can and does produce. Women give generously of their energies and talents, not to mention formidable decorating skills, to bring us all together to celebrate awards and retirements and the occasions that are part of our collective memory. In fact, I think it was the women of Vanier who first brought staff, professionals, faculty, and administrators together to share eggs and entertainment (and a spot of champagne) at the International Women's Week Breakfast. That was twenty-five breakfasts ago and this year a man joined over one hundred women at the table. Times are changing...

And our students are growing up in these times. Our young Vanier women are more likely to pursue post-secondary education and to juggle the competing claims of job and family than any previous generation of women. They will inherit the problems that we have not resolved and face new and different challenges. They do so with a respect for the diversity of human experience and a commitment to social justice that I often find striking and that give me hope for tomorrow.

Tonight we celebrate the women of Vanier but in recognizing their contributions, we honour all people who give of themselves to build safer, more equitable, more humane places in the world. Thank you for joining us.

Arlene Steiger retired from teaching in June 2009 after many creative years teaching Humanities, the college complementary, Alternatives for Women and coordinating Women's Studies.



Glimpses of Employee Day, June 2009

