Relax and hoist a pint to new initiatives in 2014

» DOUG PEERS, Dean of Arts

I derive a certain if occasionally perverse pleasure from the annual end of year and end of term happenings on campus. The sense of closure is marked by piles of exam scripts and final essays to mark and these are accompanied often by letters from irate editors for overdue manuscripts or reviews. And then there is the often frustrating search for the few open food or coffee vendors that do not require a long walk through dropping temperatures. We take heart however from the fact that so many in our community have done well over the past year – a number of whom we were fortunate to celebrate at our first and definitely not our last Arts Awards Celebration. I am grateful to all who attended and helped us recognize excellence in teaching, service and research.

This past month we have had the added excitement of new initiatives being thrown at us by Queen’s Park. The government’s shift towards a policy of differentiation within the higher education sector, a policy that is apparently aimed at trying a new path to balance accessibility with research excellence has pushed universities to develop in short order new Strategic Mandate Agreements. It appears that these new SMAs are intended to prod universities into defining their own distinctive contributions to higher education in such a way as to provide the foundation for future decisions on enrolment targets for each university as well as the basis upon which approvals will be given for universities to launch new graduate and undergraduate programs. It is very clear that ‘strategic’ in these Strategic Mandate Agreements will need to be carefully considered.

The university’s Strategic Plan is obviously a key plank in what we are preparing. So too is our...
own Faculty Strategic Plan—which, in its emphasis on defining and delivering what we feel to be the unique characteristics of our degrees and programs, could not be timed better. While there are certainly some implicit signs of what makes us distinctive—co-op and other experiential opportunities, and an ability to combine rigour in a discipline with other programs, including some unique minors—we are currently looking at how we can make these characteristics more explicit and accessible to students. By doing so, our hopes are that we can articulate something that is truly distinctive about Arts@Waterloo.

There are also rumours that we may find purse strings being loosened for new capital projects, with the possibility of federal and provincial elections being called in the next 12 to 24 months. With that in mind, we have begun to plan for a new Arts building. Such a building will allow us to better accommodate researchers and students and complements our current investment in new social and study space with the construction of an atrium off Hagey Hall. The want of useful and appealing space has easily become one of our largest constraints, not to mention irritants, for faculty, students and staff alike.

Over the next couple of months, we will be presenting through town halls, our website and other venues the results of our strategic planning and I hope everyone will participate in discussions as to how best we can move forward on the many initiatives that have come out of the hard work of the many groups who participated in planning. It’s going to be a busy winter term and I wish you all a pleasant and relaxing holiday. For my part, I am indulging in my annual bout of archival therapy—a week in the British Library which is probably appreciated as much by our office staff as by me. I shall, however, take time to hoist a pint of the amber nectar to all your good health.

GAINING A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF what makes or breaks undergraduate learning and post-graduation prospects is now a familiar theme in both Arts’ and the University’s strategic plans. Comments from our extensive strategic planning consultation meetings, as well as from General Group (department chairs and the dean’s group), have made clear that we, faculty and staff, need to be more conversant on the education-career trajectory of Arts graduates. Here we share another glimpse of what Arts alumni tell us about how their experience ‘in here counts out there’ (credit to Conestoga College’s smart bus shelter campaign for that paraphrase).

For the University’s Fall Open House, Amy Meredith and Nga Tran (Arts’ undergraduate recruitment) worked with Patti Cook (Sr. Alumni Officer) to organize an Arts alumni panel featuring: Wendi Campbell (Speech Communication, ‘93), Executive Director, Waterloo Region Food Bank; Yen Ho (French Studies, ‘13), Digital Events Marketing Manager, Microsoft Canada; Jon Lucas (Liberal Studies, ‘12), Co-founder, Arc Media; Andrew Askes (Economics, ‘11), Co-founder, Arc Media; and, Bradley Moggach (Political Science, ‘12), Partner Development Associate, Google Canada.

Extra-curricular is also experiential learning

The alumni panelists made it clear: broad engagement with student life as part of experiential learning plays a big part in post-graduation success. Co-op can be extremely valuable, they told us, but the panel members talked more about student-driven extra-curricular experiences than formal program components. Yen Ho credits her co-op terms for allowing her to discover where here professional interests do and don’t lie. Yet she, like each of the other panelists, stated that extra-curricular (student government, clubs, part-time employment) were vital aspects of the undergraduate experience and contributed in tangible ways to their professional development. Wendi Campbell said that, as an employer, she bases final hiring decisions on ‘that third page’ of the resume, on what unpaid (or sometimes paid) initiatives applicants have taken on top of their formal schooling.

Study whatever sparks real passion

An implicit message from this panel was that, regardless of
the discipline Arts students chose as a major, it is how they apply their developing knowledge and intellectual skills in experiential activities that completes and adds tangible value to the degree. What’s important about classroom education, they explicitly told us, is that the field of inquiry sparks real passion in order for students to learn effectively – and that taking the time to explore academic options to find that passion is entirely worthwhile.

Lessons learned and lived

Jon Lucas explored many disciplines during his undergraduate studies and in the process developed what he considers his most important skill: research. He and partner Andrew Askes honed a range of vital skills as student researchers in REAP (Research Entrepreneurs Accelerating Prosperity) – an extra-curricular program in Arts. As videographers who work from concept to final cut, often for start-up companies (BufferBox, Thalmic Labs), they are constantly challenged to make something complex understandable - to find engaging ways to create content that communicates the value of new digital products. Jon says this work always begins with research.

Bradley Moggach’s extensive involvement in student government (he became president of FEDS) certainly gave him opportunities to leverage his learning, but it also meant he worked closely with students from other faculties. This is how he met the Engineering students behind BufferBox, who asked him to join the start-up as their business and marketing manager. His emphatic message to new and prospective students attending the panel was that an undergraduate degree will be what students make of it, that success at university means engaging with new and unexpected opportunities -- certainly in the classroom, and definitely outside it as well.

The Fall Open House Arts Alumni Panel discussion was video-recorded and will be available on the Arts YouTube channel.
Fiona McAlister, Religious Studies

What is your idea of happiness? Wandering aimlessly in a new city or neighbourhood.

What is your idea of misery? Standing in line for free food.

Are you a dog person, cat person, or other? Dog - although I don’t usually like other people’s dogs.

What is your favourite food or drink? Peanut butter cookies. I would advise you to never stand between me and a tray of warm peanut butter cookies.

What is the best book you’ve recently read? Non fiction: *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* by Katherine Boo; Fiction: *Barney’s Version* by Mordecai Richler

What is your favorite holiday tradition or activity? My husband is Dutch so we celebrate St. Nicholas day on December 6. The kids leave their boots out and they get filled with treats.

What natural talent would you most like to possess? Responding well in a crisis -- you know those stupid people in horror movies who shriek and do stupid things that get everyone else endangered? That would be me. You give me time to think and plan and I’ve got your back, but if the building is burning down, I will likely trip you in my haste to flee the building. Sorry! P.S., I am a fire marshal for my area of PAS :)

Sherilee Diebold-Cooze, Dean of Arts Office

What is your idea of happiness? Hugging my doggies and burying my face in their fur. The freedom of wide open spaces.

What is your idea of misery? The absence of love and friendship in my life.

Are you a dog person, cat person, or other? Dog and horse person.

What is your favourite food or drink? Tuna Fish sandwiches and butter tarts… ever since I was pregnant with my first son LOL. The craving never went away.

What is the best book you’ve recently read? *Adventures in Yarn Farming and Four Seasons on a New England Fiber Farm* by Barbara Parry. I know, I’m weird, but I’m not the only one; this is a book shared by a co-worker, not mentioning names, you know who you are, and it’s a FABULOUS book.

What is your favorite holiday tradition or activity? Hanging out with family and being force fed wine by my mother-in-law (OK, maybe not so much force is needed).

What natural talent would you most like to possess? I would love to possess the talent to draw or paint things that touch my heart. Photos just don’t do them justice.

Kathleen StLaurent, French Studies

What is your idea of happiness? Being with family and friends. It’s hard to be unhappy when you have so many good people in your life.

What is your idea of misery? Not being able to see the good in something.
Are you a dog person, cat person, or other? Cat person.

What is your favourite food or drink? I love cheese and desserts.

What is the best book you've recently read? The Glass Castle by Jeanette Walls.

What is your favourite holiday tradition or activity? Getting a Christmas tree with my dad. No matter how old I am, this is always our happy tradition.

What is your favourite motto? “You gotta do what you gotta do when you gotta do it.”

Ode to Carolyn

ON THE OCCASION OF CAROLYN NELSON’S RETIREMENT after 43 years working in the Faculty of Arts, David John, Professor Emeritus of Germanic and Slavic Studies, composed the following tribute, which was presented in a dramatic reading by Doug Peers at Carolyn’s recent retirement celebration.

From humble beginnings she came here to stay
From a field of tomatoes down Leamington way
A quiet young thing who had learned much through sermons
She never thought then she’d get mixed up with Germans.

But that’s what she chose at the start, as we know
And just four years hence, with new husband in tow
No one had suspected, she’d soon have defected
And in a few years would be running the show.

Ah those early years with Bill Dyck and the Russians
But what’s worse, there was even a boatload of Prussians
Yet young Carolina soon learned what to say
“Achtung” and “Nastrovya”. “Shut up” and “Obey”!

Dr. Dyck was the founder, and then at the ready
To lead the rough band there appeared one Fast Eddie
In him all the colleagues first placed their full trust
Fine scholar was he, but as Chairman a bust.

So she did more and more in her manner royal
In all of her dealings she was always so loyal
She gained in respect and soon had a say
She showed them the light, the administrative way.

There followed then Richter, John, Hoefert and more,
All who relied on the strength of her core,
She made better people out of them all
Who’d expect such great wonders from a package so small?
Then up, up and away, though never ambitious,
She soared to new heights of positions auspicious,
Her talents were called for by none other than deans,
They recognized early her place among queens.

Dean Banks and Dean Hendley, Deans Kerton and Coates
All were in a muddle after faculty votes,
Some muddled more and some muddled less
But generally speaking would have all made a mess.

Had it not been for stalwarts like Queen Carolina
And others when these deans had scarcely a clue,
These deans would have only got meana and meana
She came to the rescue and knew what to do.

Jake Willms with his files stacked made us all quit smoking
Brenda Smith calmed things down when the deans started croaking
Steady Gail kept the books, Deb the key to each door
And Ester Kipp -- from one person who could ever ask more?
And of course there was Betsy, the mother of mothers,
A friend to all students like sisters and brothers.

Queen Carolina ranks high with such workers,
Helped Associate Deans too with their many tear jerkers
Gary Griffin, with desk always clean as a pin,
Mary Gerhardstein's desk rather like a dust bin,
With mountains of memos and dense fields of text
It was Carolyn ever who said what to do next.

And then on to grad office - she did two jobs at once!
There found an even more disorganized bunch.
Haworth and George, both deans philosophical,
She needed to keep them on points much more topical.

Then Sandra and Heather, the two mighty ladies
Watch out if you're sexist, they'd send you to Hades!

And some more men too, Nordic Slethaug for example
The teaching he needed was certainly ample.

Next there came Bruce, a favourite of all,
Who despite budget cuts also answered the call,
And finally Linda, but too bad for her,
For good queen Carolina is gone ever mere.

If only Queen C had become President,
She just lacked the moustache for that precedent,
Still, even that might come with ripe age,
But in terms of wisdom, she's already a sage.

And so comes an end to our dear friend,
Our Queen Carolina, "Hail!"
We pledge our troth, men, women both,
May kind winds swell your sail;
And I, Decanus, Douglas Magnanimus
One final task have I,
To bestow upon you this great honour true:

CAROLINA REGINA, ADMINISTRIX SUPREMA
DISTINGUISHED EMERITAE.

(At this point Decanus Douglas Magnanimus places a crown on Queen Carolina's head.)
We publish five issues of Inside Arts per year.
We'd love to receive your feedback. Send comments and ideas to wphilpott@uwaterloo.ca.

All the best for a wonderful holiday season – and a honking Happy New Year!