With 2014 winding to a close, I am taking advantage of the relative calm between meetings to sneak in some time in my ‘happy place’, aka the British Library (BL), where I am ensconced in trial transcripts and medical topographies from mid-19th century India. All the doomsters who twitter on about the death of the humanities should visit the BL—the place is humming with students and faculty digging into the physical and electronic resources on offer. The public is also out in force with visitors coming to view a current exhibition on the Gothic imagination.

For me, these scenes of engagement make for a fitting end to an exciting year. Not only have we continued to welcome excellent new faculty, we’re also making progress to ensure Arts is uniquely poised to thrive, even in the face of trending enrolment declines across Canada. The recognition of teaching, research, and service excellence at our Arts Celebration in November was easily one of the highlights of the year for me, and I am looking forward to acknowledging more of our community at next year’s event.

Bill Chesney and the associate chairs across the Faculty have been working exceptionally hard to develop and refine an undergraduate curriculum that speaks to our strengths and responds to our students’ interests and needs. The recently-launched student portal is proving to be a hit with our students. I was delighted several weeks ago to announce that Shannon Dea has agreed to take on the directorship of our Women’s Studies program— as recent events have all too obviously confirmed, the need for such a program is just as pressing today as ever.

Arts researchers have once again led Waterloo’s top position for SSHRC funding success in Canada. And our scholarship resonates with the public as evidenced by the
growing number of colleagues called on and followed in all manner of media, and by the turnout at recent public lectures. Robert Park’s extremely engaging lecture on the Franklin ship discovery attracted a great crowd. Following on its success, we decided to take our scholarship into the wider community: two of our professors, Lorne Dawson and Veronica Kitchen, and Amarnath Amarasingam, a postdoc with close Waterloo ties, spoke on radicalization and domestic security to a packed audience at the Kitchener Public Library. We are looking forward to more such events in 2015 – suggestions always welcome.

All told, 2014 has been an eventful year - and the new year is sure to be too. A big event will be the start of construction for the Hagey Hall student space – once plans and contracts are finalized, we hope to see ground breaking this spring. We will also be preparing for the launch of the new budget model, a major change that will require us to develop better revenue and cost modelling abilities within the Faculty. No doubt I will continue to lose sleep over the province-wide enrolment forecasts, but I am at the same time confident that we are doing all we can to position ourselves for the future. In the meantime, I would like to extend to everyone best wishes for the holiday season, and for a healthy and happy new year.

Women’s Studies as crucial as ever

» SHANNON DEA, Associate Professor of Philosophy, Teaching Fellow, Director of Women’s Studies

We recently completed 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence, an international campaign that begins each year on November 25 with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, ends December 10 on International Human Rights Day, and in Canada encompasses the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women on December 6.

For many of us, the 16 Days campaign was doubly resonant this year. For much of October and November, the Canadian media was given over to reports of former CBC Radio host Jian Ghomeshi’s alleged assaults of a number of women, and to related discussions about consent and some of the reasons so few sexual assault victims ever report their assaults. 2014 also marks the 25th anniversary of the murder of fourteen women at l’École Polytechnique de Montréal. Across the country, this year’s iterations of the annual December 6 memorial (including here at Waterloo) were deeply moving as young women, whose mothers were the same age in 1989 as the Montreal Massacre victims, gather to remember.

News stories like the Ghomeshi affair and anniversaries like December 6 drive home just how crucial it is that university Women’s Studies departments continue to foster teaching about and research into gender and the role that gender plays in creating and sustaining social inequities. Indeed, one could fill a whole calendar with reasons to support strong Women’s Studies scholarship.

In April, the world watched in horror as 300 Nigerian schoolgirls were kidnapped by Boko Haram. In October, gaming and media critic Anita Sarkeesian was forced to flee her home after online misogynists issued death threats and publicized her address. In November, federal Liberal leader Justin Trudeau suspended two MPs from the Liberal caucus for alleged sexual harassment; a few days later, retired Liberal MP Sheila Copps reported having been raped and sexually assaulted during her time in office. In recent weeks, the world has reacted with shock as four decades of sexual assault
allegations against comedian Bill Cosby started to receive media attention. Just this week, Canadians learned about the “Class of DDS 2015 Gentlemen” Facebook group hosted by a number of Dalhousie University dentistry students. Posts on the group’s Facebook page joking about chloroforming bikini-clad women and inviting members to rank which of their female colleagues they most want to “hate-f***” have revived attention to the issue of a so-called “rape culture” on university campuses.

Put simply: year-round and worldwide, it is still dangerous to be a woman. This danger is exacerbated for First Nations women, trans women, and disabled women, who are disproportionately victims of violence.

Moreover, women still earn less than men, and are underrepresented in government and in positions of leadership in all sectors (including academe).

For four decades, Women’s Studies programs throughout North America (including the one at University of Waterloo) have provided students and researchers with an interdisciplinary feminist lens to train on the role that gender plays in politics, history, industry, society and culture. The methodological tools and the theoretical framework students acquire in Women’s Studies are as crucial today as ever. However, in our increasingly beleaguered post-secondary system, Women’s Studies programs are often vulnerable.

On November 16, I was appointed Director of Women’s Studies and charged with developing an innovative, sustainable “made in Waterloo” plan to keep our Women’s Studies program strong. Over the coming months, I will be consulting widely with stakeholders at Waterloo and beyond to learn how our Waterloo’s Women’s Studies program can continue to equip its students and alumni to make a difference in a world that still to a great degree judges worth by gender. I am humbled and excited to play what I hope will be a transformational role that will both honour the program’s history and chart a strong course into the future.

If you have a vision for a strong, vital Women’s Studies program attuned to Waterloo’s distinctive pragmatic character, I want to hear from you. You can reach me at sjdea@uwaterloo.ca.

Note: this article is an update of the original posted on Arts News.
What is your idea of happiness?
Wrapping my hands around a hot café mocha on the morning of an unexpected snowday—wind and snow swirling around outside; no plans, a good book, and Netflix inside.

What is your idea of misery?
When the power goes off on that snowday...

What is your favourite food or drink?
Dark chocolate. It’s good for you.

Who are your favourite fictional characters?
Aren’t all characters fictional in some way?

What natural talent would you most like to possess?
To be a dog whisperer. To know just the right word to say to get my dog to stop barking at that cat that likes to saunter around our front yard.

» ANGELA ROORDA, Research Development Officer, Faculty of Arts

What is your idea of happiness?
Being satisfied with what I’m doing.

What is your idea of misery?
Doing shopping.

What is your favourite food or drink?
Draniki (Belarusian potato pancakes), good cheese and chocolate.

Who are your favourite fictional characters?
Tintin and Erast Petrovich Fandorin.

What natural talent would you most like to possess?
I would love to be able to sing a bit better (much better, actually).

» KANSTANTSIN TSEDRYK, Continuing Lecturer in French Studies, 2014 Arts Award for Teaching recipient

What is your idea of happiness?
A quiet room and a good book.

What is your idea of misery?
Having to attend large parties.

What figures in world history do you most dislike? Joseph Stalin

Who are your favourite fictional characters?
James Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus, and Samuel Beckett’s Lucky and Pozzo.

What is your favourite food or drink?
Pizza is by far my favourite food. I am partial to gin when I am drinking.

What natural talent would you most like to possess?
A photographic memory.

» ADAM BRADLEY, PhD candidate in English/Systems Design, 2014 Arts Award for Teaching recipient

What is your idea of happiness?
Listening to Bach; any way, any time.

What is your idea of misery?
Anything to do with finance.

What is your favourite food or drink?
The menu at Desert Rose.

Who are your favourite fictional characters?
Dorothea Brooke; Eeyore.

What natural talent would you most like to possess?
The ability to play Rachmaninoff.

» LYNNE JELOKHANI-NIARAKI, Executive Officer, Faculty of Arts

What is your idea of happiness?
Do you know about the Arts Staff Advisory Council (ASAC)?

ASAC was established to foster and enhance communication between the staff and the Dean of Arts. It serves as a resource for inquiries and requests; to advise and make recommendations on existing and proposed University policies and procedures; and to ensure inclusion of staff on Faculty of Arts committees. It also provides a forum for discussing staff issues and to represent their concerns. ASAC meets monthly and consists of 13 members, one representing each of eight areas, two members-at-large, and three ex-officio members. For more information visit the ASAC webpages.

SSHRC Storytellers challenge

Through concise multi-media storytelling, your students can show how SSHRC funded research projects matter. Last year, UWaterloo English PhD candidate Steve Wilcox was one of the five winners. See Steve’s winning video and read about this year’s Storyteller’s challenge.

Inside Arts – spot on, or what?

We would like to know if Inside Arts hits the mark. Please give us your anonymous feedback in a short, three-question Inside Arts survey.

Feedback, please

We publish five issues of Inside Arts per year.
Send your comments and ideas to wphilpott@uwaterloo.ca.

Many thanks to the Department of Fine Arts for sharing student paintings shown in this issue.