THE SENIOR COLLEGE MESSENGER

Issue 14: December, 2022

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 .

PETER RUSSELL UNDERGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP

Senior College is instituting the *Peter Russell Undergraduate Scholarship in Life-course, Aging, and Retirement* in honour of its Founding Principal. This is a program sponsored by the Department of Health and Society at UTSC. Preference will be given to students in financial need.

This wishing to make a donation may visit the website Peter Russell Scholarship.

IS DEMOCRACY THE BEST FORM OF GOVERNANCE?

A report of the colloquium of November 17.

The colloquium, chaired by Peter Russell, addressed the question *Is democracy the best form of governance? If so, how can we strengthen its positive features and minimize its weaknesses?* The discussion covered many topics, first, the value of the government as reflecting the will of the people, and secondly, the advantages and disadvantages of a minority government. On the one hand, a minority government would be prevented from monopolizing power and becoming authoritarian; it would have to discuss its decisions with other parties and compromise. On the other hand, it could be toppled at any time. We discussed the problem of states with proportional representation in which parties have to scramble to form coalitions and will sometimes choose allies with completely different positical programs. The discussion then moved to the character of politicians, who are often seen as corrupt, greedy and ambitions. We agreed that though there are some bad apples, on the whole, politicians are honest and hard working. Finally we discussed the concept of deliberative democratic theory, based on "deliberation", described by Simone Chambers as "debate and discussion aimed at producing reasonable well-informed opinion, in which participants are willing to revise preferences in the light of discussion." *Giuliana Katz*

SENIOR COLLEGE COMMUNICATIONS CONSORTIUM

What is it? What does it do?

Senior College is a large, and somewhat complex, organization that offers a variety of programs and services to its membership. Communication of information about its programs, services, activities and achievements to the membership, the University Administration, and the broader university community is essential to its successful operation. In 2017, then Principal Harold Atwood established the Communications Consortium to oversee how Senior College communicates with its membership and the wider community. Initially, the Consortium consisted of the editor of the *Senior College Bulletin* (now the *Messenger*) (Ed Barbeau), the person in charge of overseeing the web page (Jonathan Dostrovsky), and the editor of the *Senior College Encyclopedia* (now the *Senior College Record*) (Sandy Gregor), with Jim Gurd as Communications Coordinator. The editor of the *Senior College Annual* (currently Dan Lang), a member-at-large (currently Giuliana Katz), the Principal, and Vice-Principal Academic were quickly added to this group.

Since its inception, the Consortium has met at least twice a year, in the fall and winter (on Zoom during Covid), to discuss matters related to the College's various communication platforms. Examples of issues that the Consortium has addressed include: coordination of the collection and publication of the information about members who have passed away in the *Messenger*, on the web page and in the *Senior College Record*; the transition from the *Senior College Bulletin* to the *Messenger*; communications channels with CURAC (a link to the *Messenger* and other Senior College publications is now available on the CURAC web site and a link to CURAC has been added to the College web page); the most efficacious ways of notifying members of upcoming College events (these include: weekly notices from the Senior College administrator, monthly listing of events in the *Messenger*, and posting of dates and times on the web page); dealing with the ongoing requirements for updating and correcting the College web site. All of this takes time and effort and the members of the Consortium are to be thanked for their dedication and contributions. Ideas for the improvement of communications of the College with its membership are welcome. Please contact any of the above listed members of the Consortium with your suggestions. *Jim Gurd*

IN MEMORIAM

Trevor Levere (March 21, 1944 - November 1, 2022)
    Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology

Monique Nemni (March 27, 1936 - November 2, 2022) External Fellow (UQAM)

LINKS FOR THE 17th SYMPOSIUM

Recordings of the talks are now available on *YouTube* under the title "Playlist: 17th Annual Senior College Symposium": SC Symposium talks.

The co-chairs of the Symposium Committee would be pleased to receive suggestions for future symposia. Their coordinates are margaret.procter@utoronto.ca and williamlogan@rogers.com.

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 am

Talks will take place at the Faculty Club **and** on Zoom.

November 30: Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Understanding Iran's protests*

December 2: Larry LeDuc, *After the mid-terms – the next cycle of American politics*

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

December 8: How can we better protect our environment? (Chairs: Guiliana Katz, John Yeomans)

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

December 5: Yascha Mounk, *The great experiment: why diverse democracies fall apart and how they can endure* (Leader: Max Nemni)

January 9: Maggie O'Farrell, *Hamnet* (Leader: Molly Wills)

February 6: Erna Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies and history* (Leader: Jeffrey Dvorkin)

March 6: Scott Weidensaul, *A world on the wing: the global odyssey of migratory birds* (Leader: Sara Shettleworth)

April 3: Thomas Savage, *The power of the dog (1967)* (Leaders: Mary Jane Ashley, Linda Hutcheon)

May 1: Kyle Harper, *From shame to sin: the Christian transformation of sexual morality in late Antiquity* (Leader: David Milne)

June 5: Steven Johnson, *The ghost map: the story of London's most terrifying epidemic – and how it changed science, cities and the modern world* (Leader: William Logan)

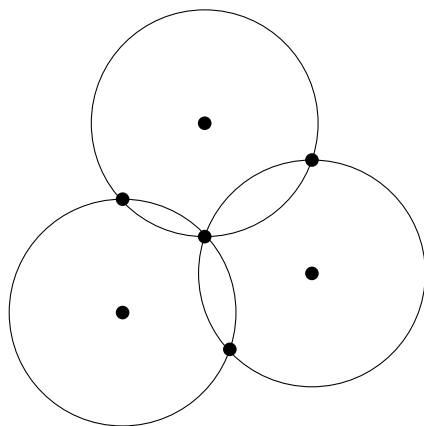July 3: Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince (1532)* (Leader: David Milne)

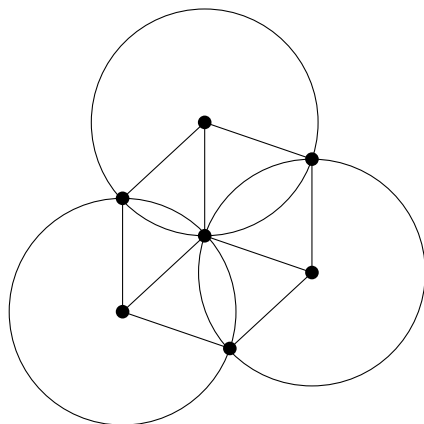*Virtual Coffee Club: Tuesdays at 2pm*

December 6

Aftermath

In his recent talk on visual peception of images, Charles Maurer mentioned how one's ability to interpret an image is conditioned by cultural factors. When he discussed how a two-dimensional diagram could be interpreted as a representation of a cube, it brought to mind how this could be exploited to solve the beer mug problem.

In baldest terms, you are given three circles whose radii are equal and whose circumferences have a common point. There are three other points where the circumferences intersect in pairs.

The problem is to show that these three points lie on the circumference of a circle exactly the same size as each of the three given circle. The name of the problem comes from its formulation in terms of a sweating beer mug placed three times, just so, on a bar, so that the moist rings they leave intersect in a single point. The mug can be placed a fourth time so that its circumference passes through the pairwise intersection points of the three rings. You can try this at home.

It is easy to tie yourself in knots trying to solve this in a technical way. However, the path forward is seen if you join all pairs of points which you know to be radii of one of the circles. This gives you what appear to be nine edges of the skeleton of a cube. It is as though you are looking down the cube from above and are able to see seven of its eight vertices.

The trick is to complete the representation of the cube to show the eighth vertex. It turns out that this is the location of the centre of the circle whose circumference passes through the intersection points of the pairs of the circles. Briefly, to check this circle has the same size is to look at the quadrilaterals whose sides are bounded by radii of the circles; these quadrilaterals, having all sides equal, are rhombi and so their opposite sides are parallel. When we determine the position of the eighth vertex of the cube, it is the fourth point of a rhombus two of whose sides are radii and whose opposite sides are parallel.