

THE SENIOR COLLEGE MESSENGER

Issue 28: February, 2024

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, books discussed and items appearing in the Messenger.

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

REMEMBRANCE: PETER RUSSELL

We are very sad to learn of the death of Peter Russell in January. The community of retirees of the University of Toronto owes him a tremendous debt. Around the turn of the present century, many faculty members felt that their concerns about pensions and status were not adequately addressed by the University or UTFA. So it was proposed to set up our own organization. Thanks to the vision, persistence and networking of Peter, RALUT (Retired Academics and Librarians of the University of Toronto) was founded in 2001. It soon became apparent that the activities of the organization should extend beyond the political to the establishment of an academic home within the University where retirees can meet and engage in scholarly activities. This led to the founding of Senior College in 2009.

In due course, there were two developments. Senior College became more dominant in the life of retirees. UTFA became more amenable to the needs of retirees and established a Pensions Committee. Finally in 2015, with a standing Retiree Committee in UTFA and four seats on UTFA Council, RALUT voted at its annual general meeting on April 23, 2015 to dissolve, and the College inherited its office and scholarly programme.

During all of these years, Peter was present and active, offering his inspiration and counsel to foster the lively organization with its broad list of programmes that we see today. However, Peter's influence went far beyond the University of Toronto. He was a moving force, along with Germaine Warkentin and Ken Rea, in organizing a national conference in Toronto in 2001 that led to the establishment of CURAC (College and University Retiree Associations of Canada). He was also active in AROHE, the American Retirement Organizations in Higher Education. Peter's commitment and skills were essential components that provided a firm foundation for our organization. (Of course, such organizations need constitutions, which accessed Peter's speciality in his field of political science.)

We present three reminiscences from Merrijoy Kelner, Harold Atwood and David Milne.

Merrijoy Kelner. *Merrijoy Kelner is Professor Emerita of Behavioural Science at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, a former director of its Health Promotion Program (1986-1993) and a Fellow of Senior College.*

On an autumn day in 2008, Peter Russell asked around nine or ten of us retired academics to join him at Massey College for a short meeting. When we had assembled, Peter told us about one of his many creative ideas. “I have been thinking about how to keep intellectually active in retirement. I suggest that we form a group of retired professors and librarians that will hold weekly lectures on topics of interest.”

I replied, “but Peter, there are all kinds of lectures and seminars now available in the city. Why do you need another forum?” He replied, “Merrijoy, you are forgetting about the element of collegiality. That’s an important consideration for older people like us.”

As soon as he said that, I understood what he was talking about. We have plenty of research that demonstrates the insidious effects of loneliness on people’s mental and physical health. I immediately withdrew my opposition to his suggestion, and we began to make plans. It seemed that each of us knew people who could deliver interesting lectures followed by a discussion. We agreed that this would not present a problem.

The next step was to designate an executive body that would manage the affairs of the group. Everyone agreed that Peter should be the Principal, and others volunteered for the various jobs that were required. In no time, we had a working executive.¹

Then came the challenge of choosing a name for the project. This provoked a long and lively discussion. Finally, we settled on calling it Senior College. That was only intended to be a temporary designation. Someone likened it to the Chinese version of a ‘milk name’ that is changed when a person is old enough to choose their own name. But the name stuck and today, it seems totally appropriate.

We concluded the meeting by deciding to meet weekly at the Faculty Club, charge a modest membership fee, and to request office space from the university administration. Within just a short time, Peter’s concept had become a reality.

¹*Principal*, Peter Russell; *Vice-Principal*, Cornelia Baines; *Registrar*, Merrijoy Kelner; *Bursar*, Charles Chaffey; *Communications chair*, Ken Rea; *Program convenors*, Harold Atwood, Martin Klein, Joe Whitney; *Co-ordinator of Distance Fellows*, Neil Strauss; *Co-ordinators of Fund Raising*, John Dirks, Morris Goldner; *Co-ordinator of University Relations*, Suzanne Hidi. This line-up included some positions that later belonged to Standing Committees. Later, the Executive included the first five positions, and later still a second Vice-Principal, to bring the total to the present six.

Harold Atwood. *Harold Atwood joined the University of Toronto in 1965 and continued until his retirement in 2002 as Professor of Physiology and Zoology. He headed the Medical Sciences Research Group in Nerve Cells and Synapses. A Founding Fellow of the College, he succeeded Peter Russell as its Principal.*

My memories of Peter Russell go back to 1950, when I entered Grade 9 at University of Toronto Schools (UTS). One of the first Fall events was a meeting of the student body in the auditorium to elect the School Captain from a group of 7 Grade 13 candidates. Peter Russell was one of the selected group – clearly a leading student at UTS. However, after two ballots, one of the other students was selected. Nevertheless, Peter was highly prominent throughout the school year, serving as co-editor of the school’s annual year-book (*The Twig*) and winning several of the school’s awards: a scholarship in Classics, the prize in History for the Upper School; and the Nesbitt Prize in the Extemporaneous Public Speaking Contest. Then, upon graduation, he won two scholarships at the University of Toronto: the Edward Blake Scholarship in French and Latin awarded by the University of Toronto, and the Wellington Scholarship in Classics (founded by the first Duke of Wellington) awarded by Trinity College. This accumulation of awards is testament to Peter’s developing versatility and talents which were apparent at an early stage in his life.

The prediction of Peter’s career in the 1950 UTS year-book is brief, but highly accurate: “Five-B’s popular form captain is co-editor of ‘The Twig’ and is active in almost every other school activity. — Political Science expects him”. He must have found his direction in life leading to political science while he was a teenager, and certainly he followed it with determination from then onwards. His studies at the University of Toronto in political science led to a Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford University, and to his appointment as professor in political science at the University of Toronto. His remarkable and productive career, as an academic luminary, promoter and supporter of significant causes, and mentor to many, has been well summarized in the obituary published in the *Globe and Mail*.²

As a faculty member myself at the University of Toronto, but in a field of research very different from Peter’s, I met him only occasionally, usually in discussions about the problems of Canada’s indigenous populations for whom he was a strong advocate. It was only after I became a retiree (as required by the University’s policy of mandatory retirement at age 65) that I got to know Peter well. My colleague and friend Mladen Vranic made me aware of a discussion group for retirees, held at Massey College, where they presented general accounts of their research. This was organized by a recently formed retiree organization, *Retired Academics and Librarians of the University of Toronto (RALUT)*. In 2007, I started to attend this organization’s meetings, and presented a talk at one of them.

Peter was the President of RALUT, and prominent at these meetings, where his leadership was a guiding influence. He has written an historical account of RALUT and how Senior College emerged from it³. This book has important messages for all who are interested in what retirees can accomplish, and have accomplished at the

²Saturday, January 20, 2024; page B20

³Peter Russell: *The RALUT story: the short and fruitful life of the University of Toronto’s first retiree organization*

University of Toronto and elsewhere. The events which gave rise to RALUT initially involved the University's plan to manipulate retirees' pensions. The bureaucrats wanted to divert money away from the existing surplus in the "Defined Benefit Plan", into which faculty members had contributed towards their pensions, towards a new "Defined Contribution Plan" to attract and recruit new faculty members. The proposed new plan would allow new retirees to have more direct access to earnings from the stock markets, which at that time were performing well. To launch the plan, a chunk of money would be taken from the Defined Benefit Plan. When details of the proposed transfer of money out of the plan to which they had contributed became known, retirees rallied at meetings and opposition began to crystallize. The retirees wanted to be better represented in the negotiations about pensions between the University of Toronto Faculty Association (UTFA) and the University of Toronto's administration. However, UTFA would not agree to this. Thus, retirees decided to form their own organization and RALUT materialized. In a sense, it was a protest movement by retirees against both the University and UTFA. As Peter states in his book⁴. "RALUT ensured that the material interests of retired faculty and librarians at the University of Toronto could not be treated in a dishonourable and hurtful way by either the University's administration or the organization purporting to represent them."

As Peter relates, discussions between RALUT and UTFA led in time to reconciliation (in which Peter played a major role, along with physics professor George Luste, who was very favourable to retirees and became the next president of UTFA). Agreement led to UTFA being the negotiating agent for both employed faculty members and retirees (pensioners). We have Peter to thank for his role in the negotiations that preserved and improved the prospects for retirees at the University of Toronto.

Once the campaign for retirees' material interests had been successful, attention in RALUT became more focussed on the intellectual lives of its members, and a Senior Scholars Committee organized annual meetings at Massey College. These were multidisciplinary and featured presentations on research volunteered by prominent retirees – "to show to the U of T community the results of major scholarly work by 'retired' members"⁵. This annual gathering spurred the formation of Senior College in 2009 – an event in which I participated, and hence became a "Founding Fellow". There was no doubt about the choice of the first Principal – Peter Russell was acclaimed!

Senior College, under Peter's leadership, began to develop the academic programs we now have. I volunteered to serve in the Program Committee, together with geographer Joe Whitney, and we started the weekly program meetings at the Faculty Club. As Senior College became more successful, RALUT's reason for existence became more questionable, since its original material objectives had been largely achieved and its original academic initiatives had devolved onto Senior College. UTFA's Executive agreed to create a Standing Committee for Retired

⁴Peter Russell: *The RALUT story: the short and fruitful life of the University of Toronto's first retiree organization*.

⁵*ibid.*

Members, allowing for access to UTFA's decisions affecting retirees. RALUT's Board decided to dissolve the organization in 2015.

Peter and Joe Whitney persuaded me to become Vice Principal for Senior College in 2016, and consequently I enjoyed a close working relationship with Peter, and discussed the problems we encountered. We continued to have some disagreements with the University's administration who we felt were at times less supportive than we would have liked. As many others have testified following Peter's death, he was an excellent colleague and those with whom he worked never failed to recognize his wise leadership. Peter recognized that "thinking of retirement as a short idle period after one's working life is over does not make sense"⁶. in the light of modern improvements in life expectancy. We can hope that his vision for retirees as continuing active participants in social and intellectual endeavours will be maintained in Senior College.

David Milne. *David Milne is Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the University of Prince Edward Island and a Fellow of Senior College. In January, 2021, he was one of a trio of speakers at a Senior College Wednesday talk on "the resiliency of small islands" along with Edward Warrington of the University of Malta and Harold Atwood. (This is available on line.)*

It was the summer of 1966. A graduate seminar in modern political thought with a lively group of students awaited the arrival of the Professor. In strode Peter Russell, comfortably and informally dressed for the summer, wearing a straw hat to shield himself from the sun. He carried in his arms a bundle of course outlines, offering a smorgasbord of delights to tempt a wide range of intellectual palates. As he reviewed the menu, it was clear that here was a man of exceptionally wide interests and open mindedness. Warm and expansive, lighting up a cigarillo, he eased the class into dialogue. So it began, the finest course in my graduate education at U of T.

It was this versatility and curiosity that drew me to him. He was open to new intellectual ventures, Who else of the faculty would agree to supervise an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in architecture and political thought? Together we broke new ground. We shared an interest too in constitutional law and politics. It was Peter who recommended me to a publisher for my first book on Canada's new constitution and Charter of Rights in 1982. He was generous in offering comments in many later publications.

I have fond memories of Peter and Sue spending an idyllic summer in 1973 – oceanside picnics – during PEI's centennial celebrations when he offered a course at UPEI. We would argue and even wager on Supreme Court cases on appeal. So too in remembrance of things past, we can all recall those huge debates in the 1980's and 1990's over the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords in which academics played so active a part. Peter's voice was always one of reason, sensitivity to Quebec's needs and Canadian unity. The same qualities resonated in all his publications, so well received by his professional colleagues.

⁶Peter Russell: *The RALUT story: the short and fruitful life of the University of Toronto's first retiree organization*

Canada has lost a devoted son, distinguished champion of justice, and advocate of ‘truth and reconciliation’ with Indigenous peoples. May he rest in peace.

WHY THE WORLD IS GOING INSANE; WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

Howard Eisenberg

Howard Eisenberg is a Senior College Fellow, founder of the Center for Mind Enhancement and an occasional lecturer at the University of Toronto. On September 27, 2023, he delivered a Wednesday talk entitled “How reality works and the case for non-duality: echoes from Plato’s cave”. He is the author of the book “Dream to do it: the science and the magic”. The URL for his talk is

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uMuEsFg4Y>.

The reason humans were able to advance to become the dominant species on earth was our greater ability to learn, communicate and collaborate with others. However, our times are increasingly divided. The consequences are real and serious: widespread loneliness, distrust and uncivilized angry outbreaks.

Western science has facilitated our ability to change and create things. Do we have the wisdom to handle the consequences? The modern industrial economy and increasing materialism has led us to polluted air and water, devastating global climate disasters and increasingly-heartless dehumanization. Many societies face extinction and people all over the world have become climate refugees.

Perhaps, we have a Faustian bargain with our modern AI and electronic technology. Spending so much time online costs us both our intuitive sense and the outer warmer, face-to-face, heart-nourishing connection we vitally need. The distraction of the online world have made many feel isolated, confused, and lonely.

Feeling overwhelmed makes us feel weaker with less sense of control. When fear of being a passive victim is stirred up by events and manipulation from political actors, it stimulates the *Fight or Flight* centre in the amygdala. Once this is triggered, it takes over command centre (“amygdala hijack”), causing a reaction of overpowering fear. The literally drains the blood away from the thinking part of the brain (the pre-frontal cortex) and takes our thinking capacity “off-line”. In a state of fear, we feel weak and cannot think clearly.

By contrast, when we feel anger, we feel stronger. When self-serving opportunists stir up our fears and redirect emotional energy into anger, we feel a more desirable feeling of strength. When others join into this anger, this feeling is amplified to become intoxicatingly irresistible and can lead to the destructive power of “mob mentality”.

To properly process out emotions, we must detach ourselves and think through our feelings. As the psychiatrist Viktor Frankl insightfully noted, “between stimulus and response there is space, and in that space is our freedom to choose.”

When you experience either fear or anger, you are aware of powerful emotions. But you have a potential *choice* to think through and beyond these feelings, instead of being mindlessly controlled by them. The indigenous Cherokee *Parable of the two wolves* illustrates how to choose wisely in the face of strong emotions:

An elder Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life. “A fight is going on inside all of us,” he explains to the boy. “It is a terrible fight between two wolves. One is evil. The other is good. The same fight occurs inside you.”

The grandson thinks about it for a minute and then asks his grandfather which wolf will win. The wise elder replied, “The one you feed.”

If we humans are to survive our dystopian societal breakdown and multiple looming existential disasters, we must learn to *reconnect* with each other and take respectful care of our planet home. As the first step, be guided by the wisdom of the *Golden Rule* and intentionally choose to connect and be nice to each other for a happier life.

IN MEMORIAM

Hugh Gunz (June 28, 1945 – January 18, 2024)

Professor of Organizational Behaviour at Rotman School of Management

Peter H. Russell (November 16, 1932 - January 10, 2024)

Professor of Political Science; Principal of Innis College

Christopher Twigge-Molecey (August 21, 1947 - January 8, 2024)

Adjunct professor of Mechanical Engineering

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 through the Senior College website.

Annual Symposium: Wednesday, April 17, 2024

Location: The Faculty Club and on Zoom

Topic: *Moving forward: the future of Canadian literature and print media.*

Talks: Wednesdays 2-4 pm (Zoom and in person at the Faculty Club)

January 31: Jane Rylett, *Impacts of Canada's changing population dynamics*

February 7: James Hunter, *White collar crime: an investigator's perspective*

February 14: John Gardner, *Camino de Santiago: a pilgrim's journey*

February 21: Dan Drucker, *Changing health outcomes for diabetes or obesity*
(**Starts at 1:30**)

February 28: Celia Smith, *Arts, culture and creativity in a time of change*

March 6: Morgan Barense, *Smartphone intervention to enhance memory*

March 13: Caryl Clark, *Labours of love: resurrecting Haydn's Orfeo*

March 20: Matti Siemiaticki, *Cost overruns and delays in mega-project delivery*

March 27: Jesse Billett, *The lost chants of Anglo-Saxon England*

April 3: Raphael Newman, *The work of art in the age of neural machine translation*
(**Zoom only**)

Colloquia: Thursdays 2-4 pm (F)

February 15: Freedom of speech in academia (Organizer Pat Brubaker)

March 14: What can be done about the escalating Canadian youth mental health crisis (Organizer: Cynthia Smith)

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

February **12**: 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

Since this is the 28th issue of *the Messenger*, let us celebrate the number 28, a *perfect number*, so-called by Euclid (ca. 300 BCE), because it was equal to the sum of all of its smaller divisors:

$$28 = 1 + 2 + 4 + 7 + 14.$$

There are not many such numbers, and Euclid was able to find only four:

$$6 = 2 \times 3 = 2 \times (2^2 - 1);$$

$$28 = 4 \times 7 = 2^2 \times (2^3 - 1);$$

$$496 = 16 \times 31 = 2^4 \times (2^5 - 1);$$

$$8128 = 64 \times 127 = 2^6 \times (2^7 - 1).$$

But this was enough for him to detect a pattern. In his *Elements*, he proved that, if p is a prime number for which $2^p - 1$ is also prime, then $2^{p-1}(2^p - 1)$ is a perfect number. An Egyptian mathematician, Ismail ibn Fallus (1194-1252) found the next three greater perfect numbers

$$33550336 = 2^{12}(2^{13} - 1);$$

$$8589869056 = 2^{16}(2^{17} - 1);$$

$$137438691328 = 2^{18}(2^{19} - 1).$$

In the middle of the eighteenth century, Leonard Euler (1707-1783) proved that every even perfect number was of the form identified by Euclid. However, no odd perfect number has ever been found and it is an open question as to whether any exist.

In fact, it is not certain whether there are infinitely many even perfect numbers. Since their existence depends of finding primes p for which $2^p - 1$ is also prime (called *Mersenne primes*, after the priest and theologian Marin Mersenne (1588-1648) who was seriously interested in mathematics and corresponded widely), there is now an informal mathematical project, the *Great Internet Mersenne Prime Search*, open to anyone interested, to identify ever larger Mersenne primes. The record so far is the 51st known Mersenne prime, $2^{82589933} - 1$ with over 24 million digits found on December 7, 2018. Since working with such large numbers requires a lot of computer capacity, this project has led to important advances in computation efficiency. The Wikipedia entry for *Mersenne Prime* gives a good account.