

THE SENIOR COLLEGE MESSENGER

Issue 29: March, 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 .

19th SENIOR COLLEGE SYMPOSIUM: APRIL 17, 2024

Disappearing Discourses? New Perspectives on Canadian Journalism and Literature

You are invited to another blockbuster Symposium this year. Mark off *Wednesday, April 17* for a day of talks and conversations about the many ways journalists and authors strive to maintain and renew the power of public discourse. Is print journalism really faltering, or just finding different ways to reach readers? Why do we need investigative journalism? How do literary authors reflect and shape Canadian culture? What changes are reshaping those fields and should we try to keep up with them? Come to explore questions like those and hear how current writers are working out answers.

Speakers will include names you may recognize (such as Jonathan Kay, Ian Brown, and Drew Hayden Taylor) and others more likely to be new to you (such as early-career writers Rhythm Sachdeva and Thea Lim). A panel will bring together a bookseller (Joanne Saul of Type Books) and a publisher (Dan Wells of Biblioasis Press), and the program will conclude with a roundtable of lively and diverse authors.

The Faculty Club will again provide a handsome venue, with excellent food and refreshments. Registration fees are still modest. Watch for further details in the Senior College e-newsletters and on our website. Register soon for either in-person or Zoom participation.

SENIOR COLLEGE RESEARCH GRANT REPORT:

TRANS ATHLETES' RESISTANCE

Helen Jefferson Lenskyi, Professor Emerita, OISEUT

My colleague and research assistant, Ali Greey, and I were very pleased to receive a Senior College Research Grant in 2023 to be applied to an anthology titled *Trans Athletes' Resistance: the Struggle for Justice in Sport*, Emerald Publishing, 2024 (10 chapters, 155 pages). This is a sequel to our 2023 anthology, *Justice for Trans Athletes: Challengers and Struggles*. Ali and I edited these books and co-authored the Introduction and Conclusion. The books are part of the ten-book series, *Emerald Studies in Sport and Gender*, which I have edited since 2018.

The grant was applied to research and editorial work completed by Ali Greey, and to conference expenses for Ali's attendance and presentations at the annual conference of the North American Society for Sport Sociology (NASSS), New Orleans, November 1-4, 2023. Further dissemination of our research included the Sport Professional Knowledge Network podcast, "Justice for LGBTQ+ Athletes" in June, and a joint public lecture, "Trans Athletes: Challenges and Resistance", at St. Francis Xavier University in October. Two future podcasts are scheduled, with Daniel Ridge, Emerald Acquisitions Editor, and with Toby Miller, Cultural Studies Professor.

Contributors to *Trans Athletes' Resistance* include a number of trans and nonbinary scholars who took an auto-ethnographic approach. Overall, authors applied an intersectional analysis, by examining how multiple identities, including gender, sexuality, ethnicity, social class and ability, intersect to pose barriers to inclusion in sport. With sports representing one of the last bastions of binary thinking, trans and nonbinary athletes face formidable hurdles in their struggles for inclusion, acceptance, and freedom. The book documents and analysis individual and collective resistance initiated by trans and nonbinary athletes and their allies across a range of social-cultural and geopolitical contexts, from community sport to high-performance competition. Challenging policy-makers' binary definitions of males and females, the dominance of the achievement model, and toxic masculinity within sporting subcultures, the book explores how trans and nonbinary athletes not only resist transphobic policies and practices but also create new models of inclusive sport.

REMEMBERING GEORGE LUSTE (1940-2015): SYMPOSIUM FOUNDER

The symposium in question is not what you might have thought. It represents another dimension of a man many remember well: George Luste, Professor of Physics, and former President of UTFA. He rose to notoriety through his pungent well documented criticisms of our Pension Plan investments. A fervent support of the interests of retirees, he was one of the founders of RALUT. He was an avid outdoor enthusiast. An active member of the Wilderness Canoe Association, he is remembered particularly for his founding of the Wilderness Canoe Symposium. When Senior College received this memorial from Aleks Gusev, his successor as symposium organizer, it seemed to be a good time to recall to mind this sometimes controversial but always convivial former colleague.

It is at this time that memories of George are especially vivid and lively. Next year will mark ten years of his passing. A decade, and yet it seems like we were planning the 2015 Symposium yesterday. Up and down the basement stairs at 139 Albany a million times, shuffling books, tables, lamps, cables, boxes of previous year name labels (remember those?) and other stuff that made the Symposium tick. Linda would have all books neatly labelled and in ready-to-go piles all over the living room floor, and smell of pancakes would permeate the air. And a constant worry that audio-visual people would screw up something about the big screen.

I know how fondly you remember our conversations with him, his self-deprecating sense of humour, his enormous passion for wilderness and canoeing, his love for Linda and his family. Did I mention his passion for books?

It was with those thoughts in mind that I remembered a document I created from many of your emails and letters that you asked me to share with Linda and family. As I read them again, I'm overwhelmed by deep respect and admiration for this wonderful man, a friend, a mentor, a wilderness paddler. And I feel strengthened in my resolve to continue on the Symposium journey that George started, until I, too, find someone to carry the torch.

So many of you have written to express your gratitude to George, your support for Linda and family and your memories of the time you spent with George. I believe you'll enjoy reading those words again, almost ten years since you wrote them. They are a true testament to a life well lived.

Memorable George Luste Quotations:

When running a long set of rapids, George was inclined to sit very high up on the stern of the canoe to improve his view of the water. Worried about stability, a fellow tripper asked George, "don't you ever kneel in the canoe?" to which George replied, "Only when I am afraid."

When George was asked to paddle a fine northern river for the second time, he declined: "So many rivers, too little time," he said.

Once, when George was paddling a long solo trip up north, a friend asked Linda if she worried about George's safety. "I don't worry," she said, "because I know that George will never hesitate to put his feet in the water (and step out of the boat)."

CURAC

This note is a reminder that Senior College is an adhering organization to the *Colleges and Universities Retiree Associations of Canada (CURAC)*. Members and Fellows are eligible to participate in its annual conference, usually held in the latter part of May and take advantage of its member benefits. In particular, there are a number of deals on insurance available, in particular, against travel cancellation that is not tied to medical insurance. You can visit its website <https://curac.ca>.

OLD HISTORY AND NEW REALITIES

On January 8, the Senior College Book Club met to discuss The avoidable war: the dangers of a catastrophic conflict between the US and Xi Jonpings's China, by Kevin Rudd, former prime minister of Australia and an expert on China. Shortly before this, I found a copy of a slim volume, American diplomacy: 1900-1950, by the American diplomat George F. Kennan (1904-2005). This contains the transcripts of six lectures he delivered at the University of Chicago along with two articles written for Foreign Affairs on the Soviet Union, where he served briefly with the diplomatic mission in Moscow at the end of World War II. His views on American diplomacy and on how to engage with the USSR are worth revisiting, as there are many similarities between the Western competition with the USSR in 1951 and with China now. In both countries, the leadership has the conviction that history is on its side and their ultimate dominance is inevitable. Therefore neither

Russia in the 1950s or China in the 2020s are minded to reach a new accommodation through compromise, and that both collaborate internationally tactically to serve their own interests.

Kennan took a realistic approach to diplomacy and saw its role as balancing the legitimate interests of various powers. He criticised American diplomacy as putting too much emphasis on a legalistic and moralistic approach within a particular construct, rather than on understanding the history, culture and interests of other nations. It is not that he denied the universality of human yearnings for democracy, justice, fairness and opportunity, but that these could be manifested in different ways. However, as the following excerpts from one of his lectures indicates, the ability of our democracy to face its challenges depends on the abilities of its citizens to avoid being stampeded into facile counterproductive actions.

It may be true, and I suspect it is, that the mass of people everywhere are normally peace-loving and would accept many restraints and sacrifices in preference to the monstrous calamities of war. But I also suspect that what appears to be public opinion in most countries that consider themselves to have popular governments is often not really the consensus of the feelings of the mass of the people at all but rather the expression of the interests of special highly vocal minorities – politicians, commentators, and publicity-seekers of all sorts: people who live by their ability to draw attention to themselves and die, like fish out of water, if they are compelled to remain silent. These people take refuge in the past and chauvinistic slogans because they are incapable of understanding any others, because these slogans are safer from the standpoint of short-term gain, because the truth is sometimes a poor competitor in the market place of ideas – complicated, unsatisfying, always vulnerable to misinterpretation and abuse. The counsels of impatience and hatred can always be supported by the crudest and cheapest symbols; for the counsels of moderation, the reasons are often intricate, rather than emotional, and difficult to explain. And so the chauvinists of all times and places go their appointed way: plucking the easy fruits, reaping the little triumphs of the day at the expense of someone else tomorrow, deluging in noise and filth anyone who gets in their way, dancing their reckless dance on the prospects for human progress, drawing the shadow of a great doubt over the validity of democratic institutions. And until people learn to spot the fanning of mass emotions and the sowing of bitterness, suspicion, and intolerance as crimes in themselves – perhaps the greatest disservice that can be done to the cause of popular government – this sort of thing will continue to occur.

If you say that mistakes of the past were unavoidable because they are explicable in terms of our domestic predilections and habits of thought, you are saying that what stopped us from being more effective was democracy, as practised in this country. And, if that is true, let us recognize it and measure the full seriousness of it – and find something to do about it. A nation that excuses its own failures by the sacred untouchableness of its own behaviour can excuse itself into complete disaster. I said in the first of these lectures that the margin in which it is given to us to commit blunders has been drastically narrowed in the last fifty years. If it was the workings of our democracy that were inadequate in the past, let us say so. Whoever thinks the future is going to be easier than the past is certainly mad. And the system under which we are going to have to continue to conduct foreign policy is, I hope and pray, the system of democracy.

George F. Kennan: The Charles R. Walgreen Foundation Lectures “American diplomacy 1900-1950” delivered in 1950. Extracts from Lecture IV: World War I.¹

¹George F. Kennan: *American diplomacy 1900-1950*, University of Chicago Press, 1951.

IN MEMORIAM

Hugh Gunz (June 28, 1945 – January 18, 2024)
 Professor of Organizational Behaviour at Rotman School of Management

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: *Disappearing discourses? New perspectives on Canadian journalism and literature.*

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

March 6: Morgan Barensen, *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)

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)

March 4: Ed Yong, *An immense world: how animal senses reveal the hidden realms around us* (2022) (Leader: Sara Shettleworth)

April 1: William 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

In June, 1742, Christian Goldbach, a Prussian mathematician, in a letter to Leonard Euler made a conjecture that has since become notorious: *Every even integer greater than 2 can be written as the sum of two prime integers.* At the time, the statement seemed reasonably innocuous; as Euler put it, “halte ich für ein ganz gewisses theorema, ungeachtet ich dasselbe nicht demonstrieren kann.”²

However, during the next two and a half centuries, this conjecture entered into the Pantheon of one of the great unsolved mathematical problems. Through sophisticated mathematical developments and great effort, partial results were obtained: every even number exceeding 2 is the sum of at most six primes (1995); every even number larger than some fixed value is either the sum of two primes or the sum of a prime and a product of two primes (1973). The conjecture has been checked on a computer for all even numbers up to 4×10^{18} .

The non-mathematician can get an excellent view into the world of this problem through a thirty-year old novel that tells the story of one man’s obsession with it, namely Apostolos Doxiadis, *Uncle Petros and Goldbach’s Conjecture*. Faber and Faber, 1992 (Greek), 2000 (English)

[Click here for a synopsis of the plot.](#)

The title character was brought up in a Greek business family in the early twentieth century. Early recognition of his precocity by his tolerant family led to graduate studies and a career in Germany, with a brief intermission in Cambridge. It was a time not only of the development of new and deep techniques in number theory, but also of a revolution in the foundations of mathematics itself. In the novel, we meet some of the real historical characters involved.

It is the situation of Uncle Petros himself that is the core of the novel. What happens to a man who knows his talent and recognizes that he may be destined for a place in history by meeting one of his subject’s signal challenges? What energy and time should he invest in it? What if he fails? How much can he, must he, collaborate with others, who might then vault ahead? Such a quest must be an absolute priority, with, at the end of Petros’ life, the Gödel nightmare looming that the problem may not just be hard to solve, but that it might be true but technically unsolvable. A good read.

²I regard this as a completely certain theorem, although I cannot prove it.