

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Tom Tomassi

SEPTEMBER IMAGES

WORKING FOR GOOD JOBS: TODAY + TOMORROW

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At left: Support Staff—members of our sister local (OPSEU 557) walk the picket line in September.

Below: The Labour Day Parade starts off September on a positive note.



Hi all and welcome back. This year has not been a normal start up, as you know our support staff colleagues were on strike to prevent erosion to their collective agreement. I know that at bargaining everyone seems to be concerned about wages. From my perspective, the support staff strike was more geared towards preserving and creating full-time jobs. Last week, Support Staff ratified their Tentative Agreement by a vote of 87%.

As you may well know, our Collective Agreement will expire on August 31, 2012. We now begin the process to address the next round of negotiations. The first thing that needs to happen is to select a Bargaining Team. On October 15th and 16th there will be a Pre-Bargaining Conference for CAAT Academic and at this meeting, the delegates will select our next Bargaining Team. At our last Local Executive Meeting, it was agreed that it is important to have a George Brown presence at the bargaining

President *cont'd* page 6



I Miss the Staff Lounge

My teaching career began in southern Ontario high schools. Offices were only needed for department heads and the school principals. If you were not in your class you were often in the staff lounge. You would meet colleagues at the start of the day and at the various break times. It was a place to eat lunch for those who did not use the staff cafeteria. You could prepare for class and grade papers. I recall getting some of the best teaching tips from other teachers there. Teachers would dialogue about the challenges of class, curriculum, specific students in their classes, and often have unplanned mini-promotion meetings. Teachers from all subject areas interacted. This daily routine nicely counterbalanced daily classroom stresses. *I miss the lounge.*

When I started at GBC we had a very large staff lounge. Support and faculty shared the facility. Unfortunately, it was downsized to build computer labs. The room was moved and downsized two

more times. Then gone completely. The downsized rooms were not used by many. My view is that the smaller rooms were uncomfortable and offered little or no privacy.

I find that our office cubicles are only good for preparing for classes and grading *if* the ambient noise in the office is not too loud. The older I get the less I can concentrate if there is background noise. We have the opportunity to interact with the few colleagues who are in our office but that's all. I recall many faculty involved in the last strike really enjoyed the picket line conversations with faculty that they normally do not get a chance to see.

I notice that many of us eat our lunch at our desk, in our cubicle. This is very efficient, but I expect it is because there is not much of an alternative.

A staff lounge would be nice.

My vision of a new lounge has a south facing wall with lots of glass. Windows are essential for the dreary winter months. Comfortable seating would be accompanied with lighting that is soothing (unlike our headache inducing classroom lighting). When the furniture is properly arranged, one could be alone to read, grade, unwind or join others in a private conversation that is not easily overheard. I dream of a coffee without a 15 minute wait at Tim's.

But who's asking me anyway?

A faculty lounge *would* be the place for me to have discussions with others. In the absence of a common area to meet daily, I have started writing short commentaries. Read them if you choose.

Also, please join me at the next General Membership Meeting:

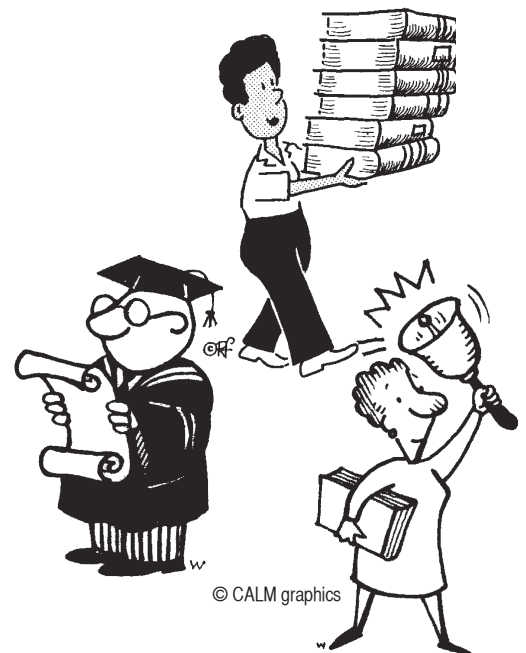
Wednesday, November 23

4 PM – 6 PM

SJA-200 King Street East, Room 128

There will be a social at Betty's afterwards. Please come and share your ideas. Also, check out: www.opseu556.org ▼

Ed Larocque



BLACK IS THE NEW GREEN

by Jill Edmondson

Star Light, Star Bright...

Public awareness of environmental concerns have increased exponentially in the last several years. People today are more mindful than ever of protecting our oceans, our forests, and the air we breathe. Conservation is now part of our regular vocabulary, as is the phrase "reduce, reuse, recycle."

But there is one aspect of the world around us that lags in our awareness and efforts to protect it: The Night Sky.

When it comes to conservation and reducing mankind's footprints, space really is the final frontier. However, in the last generation or so, people have started to recognize the value and importance of dark night skies.

Light pollution is the result of man-made outdoor lighting that isn't properly shielded, thus allowing it to project onto the night sky resulting in sky glow. Artificial light can also cause *light trespassing* when it illuminates places unintentionally, for example, when your neighbour's light shines in your backyard, or when the radiance from a store sign pours through your bedroom window. (Remember the *Kenny Rogers Roast Chicken* Seinfeld episode with a sleep-deprived Kramer?)

In 1988 the International Dark Sky Association (IDA) was established.

The organization now has more than 5000 members worldwide. The goal of the IDA is to "to preserve and protect the night-time environment and our heritage of dark skies through quality outdoor lighting."

IDA's primary aim is to raise awareness about the value of dark, star-filled night skies, and to encourage protection of them through education. Their aim is to promote friendlier outdoor lighting that creates less light pollution. To that end, the IDA supports the development of dark sky preserves. A dark sky preserve is an area that is kept free of artificial light. The purpose of a dark sky preserve is to promote astronomy and to protect the beauty and availability of star-filled nights.

The IDA also has an International Dark Sky Places (DSP) program, to recognize locations showing "exceptional commitment to and success in implementing the ideals of dark sky preservation and restoration."

In fact, there is a scale to measure how dark the night sky is. The *Bortle Scale* rates night skies from one to nine. Level one indicates the darkest night sky. At this level, regions of the Milky Way cause shadows on the ground, and it's probably too dark to see your hand in front of your face. Level nine, the brightest night sky, is completely urbanized—think of downtown Toronto. At this level, it's difficult to see stars with the naked eye.

With help from the Royal Astronomical Society, Canada has established standards

for dark sky preserves. The standards address not only the lighting within a preserve, but also address the issue of sky glow in the surrounding region. In 1999, the first Canadian dark sky preserve was established in Torrance Barrens, north of Orillia, Ontario. Torrence Barrens is comprised of almost 2000 hectares of Crown Lands, and it has a Bortle rating of three.

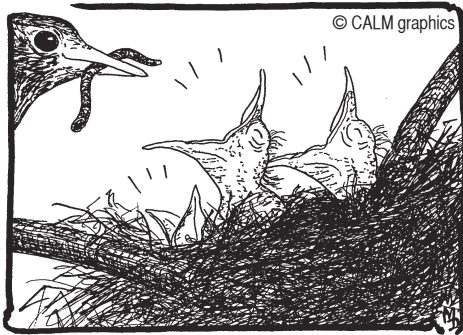
But there are much bigger and much darker areas in Canada. For instance, the Mont Megantic Observatory in Quebec (which is almost 6000 hectares) has a Bortle rating of 1.5. Then, of course, there's Jasper National Park in Alberta, which is over a million hectares, and has a night sky rating of 1.5.

The idea of preserving our night skies seems to be slowly catching on. In addition to the many dark sky preserves in Canada and the United States, there are also designated dark sky places in Hungary, Poland and Slovakia to name but a few. Perhaps in years to come... *Black will become the New Green.*

Special thanks to Damian Wiechula for giving me the idea for this article!



THE GREEN CORNER



It pays to speak out!

Bargaining 2012



Remember:
our Collective Agreement expires at the end of August 2012.

The process to address the next round of negotiations begins soon. Think about what you would like to see at the bargaining table. Come voice your opinion and ideas at our next General Membership Meeting on:

Wed. November 23
4 PM – 6 PM
SJA-200 King St. East
Room 128

The meeting will be followed by a social at Betty's on King Street E.

The Rat Race

Internet/CALM

Email has turned office workers into no more than lab rats desperately craving pellets of social interaction, a leading technology expert claims.

Increasing levels of information overload from computer and smart phone screens cause a bottleneck in the brain and prevent any deep thought, according to Nicholas Carr, former executive editor of the Harvard Business Review.

His comments add to the weight of evidence that our addiction to technology and the snippets of information it provides is damaging our ability to apply our power of thought in a meaningful way.

Carr, whose books include *The Shallows: What The Internet Is Doing To Our Brains*, said email exploits a basic human instinct to search for new infor-

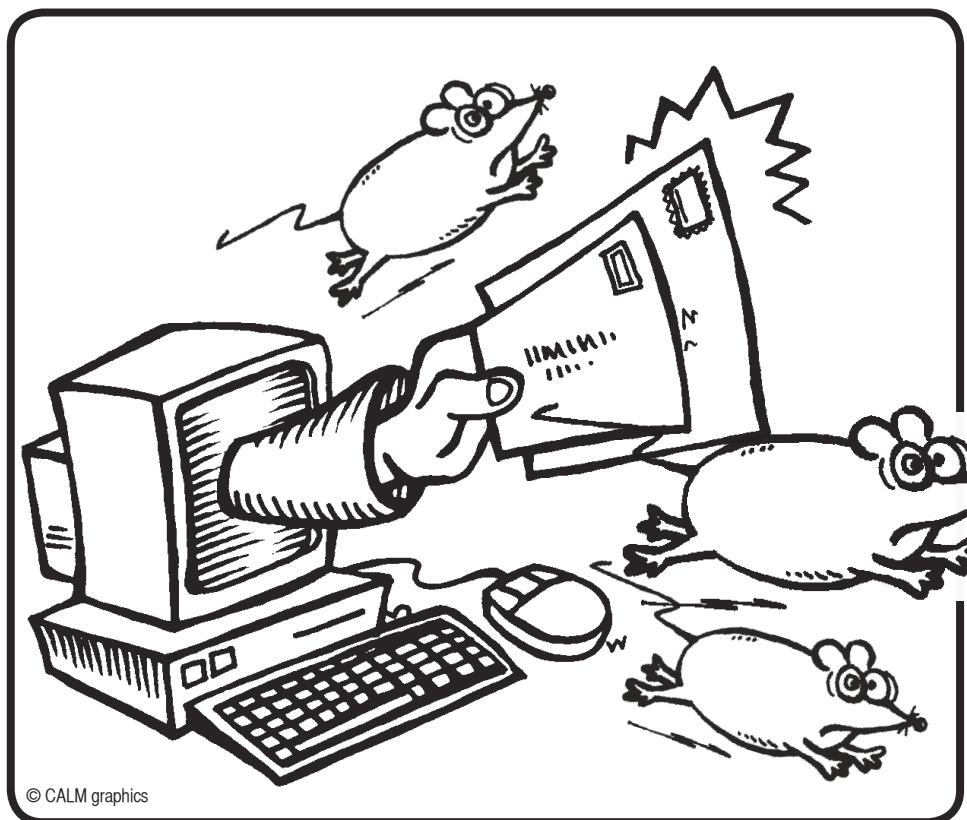
mation, causing us to become addicted to our inboxes.

A recent study found that office workers in the UK look at their email inboxes at least 30 times in an hour.

The natural impulses that helped early humans find food and avoid predators are causing us to regress to a state no more sophisticated than a rat in a laboratory, he says.

For each bit of new information we find our brain releases a dose of dopamine, a pleasure-inducing chemical which has been linked to addictive behaviour.

Carr told *Esquire* magazine, "Our gadgets have turned us into hi-tech lab rats, mindlessly pressing levers in the hope of receiving a pellet of social or intellectual nourishment." ▼



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Student Surveys and Validity

by Jill Edmondson

Many years ago, before I completely switched gears, I was a science nerd. My first “real job” was working in Research and Development for a pharmaceutical company. A few things that I learned from that life have stayed with me over the years.

Scientific experiments must be carried out according to a firm set of guidelines. Research is scrutinized to find flaws and/or weaknesses in methodology. Conclusions are tested and retested again and again and again to insure they are reliable and valid.

Reliability and validity are the key points here.

Reliability can be defined as the consistency of your measurement, or the degree to which an instrument measures the same way each time it is used under the same condition with the same subjects. Validity is the strength of the conclusions or inferences.

When I worked for Biovail, our drug study participants—males only, within a certain age and weight range—stayed on site during the testing period. For the guys, the research tests were almost like boot camp or prison. The men stayed on site, in a sort of dorm-like facility, they all ate the same foods during the study, it was lights out for everyone at 11:00 pm, the morning alarm went off at 6:30, and blood samples were taken at the same intervals for all participants. None of them was allowed to drink alcohol, or smoke, and they could not be actively using other drugs (legal or otherwise).

From this, we were able to recognize anomalies, among other things. If a participant—just one—showed an unusual result, we could probably rule out that it was because of something he had eaten,

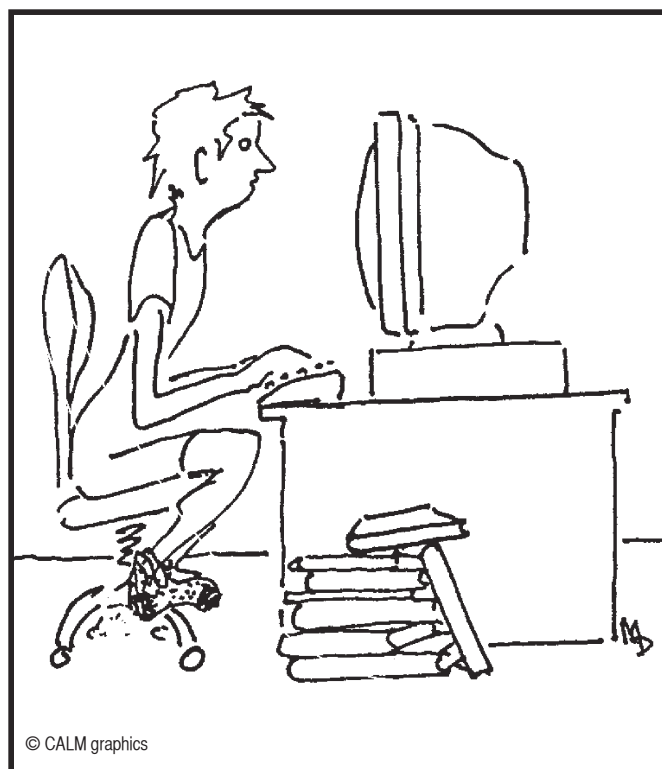
or that he hadn’t had enough sleep, or that he was hungover. When a majority of test participants displayed a certain result, we could generally conclude that the result was attributable to the medicines we were testing on them.

The point is that testing all participants under the same conditions was crucial to the research and variations in conditions would essentially invalidate the results and nullify the research.

All of this background comes to mind now that the College has changed the manner in which students do the surveys. For the record, I am glad to move away from paper questionnaires to the more eco-friendly online version. However, the online version allows students to complete the survey within a given time frame. The time frame is about three weeks.

This raises many concerns. How accurate and truly reflective of the instructor and the course can the surveys now be given the fluidity in which data is entered? Might some students complete the survey after getting back an assignment with a “D” on it? Could students post negative evaluations based on knee-jerk or emotional reactions? Is the student who just got an A+ likely to rush off to the computer and say glowing things about the instructor?

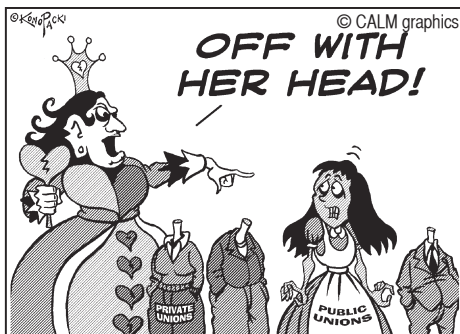
My guess is that the flexibility of reporting will be skewed towards the negative, and I am operating on the assumption that—as in the case of poor service at a restaurant, or a bad experience with a contractor, or a consumer whose new car is a lemon—the people most likely to speak up are the unhappy ones. However, I have yet to gather empirical evidence to support this hypothesis... ▼



President *cont'd from page 1*

table and we are all working very hard to make sure that happens. The next step is to develop demands and to that end, we have set up a General Membership meeting on Wednesday, November 23 from 4 PM to 6 PM at SJA-200 King Street East, Room 128. The meeting will be followed by a social at Betty's. This is the opportunity for everyone to participate. If you believe language that presently exists in the Collective Agreement needs to be changed, or new language created, come to the GMM and voice your opinion. The results of the General Membership meeting will be forwarded the Bargaining Team. Their task is to prioritize the demands from all colleges and create legal language that supports the demands.

I believe that our major focus at the Bargaining Table should be full time jobs. This demand has to be a priority, as the College is ever expanding the non full-time positions and that is strictly geared to economic reasons. At one time, the College would argue that they wanted special expertise and in order to get that special expertise, they needed the flexibility of short term, non full-time hires. That argument was flawed to begin with and it definitely makes no sense today. We need full time, good paying jobs. It is important to look at the future and unless we do something about it now, our next generation will need to work two, or three part-time jobs, just to make ends meet. We owe



Want to Progress to the **TOP STEP** on the **SALARY GRID?**

it to them to do for them what our predecessors did for us. Should you not be able to attend the meeting, please forward your concerns to us by mid-November and we will ensure that your issue(s) will be addressed.

I don't need to remind any of you of the importance of bargaining and of the consequences of failed negotiations. I also want to remind you that unless we want another contract imposed on us by the Colleges, we need to provide our Bargaining Team with the appropriate tools to move our issues forward. Our local will send out regular updates regarding negotiations and these updates will also be posted on our website at: www.opseu556.org.

By now, you also know that I have served my two terms as your faculty rep at the Board of Governors and I thank you for your support. During those two terms, my efforts were always focused on the best interests of faculty here at George Brown College. I am sure you will all join me in congratulating Julie Bulmash, who is the newly elected Faculty representative at the GBC Board of Governors. Congratulations as well, to Neil Price for his dedication and interest on our behalf. ▼

Do your current credentials prevent you from progressing to the Maximum step on the salary grid? If so, then please visit our web site at www.opseu556.org to find out more about the In-Service Teacher Training Program (ISTTP). The benefits of completing the ISTTP include:

- With 15 years or more of service, you receive an immediate step increase upon registration in the ISTTP
- With 10 years or more of post probationary service, you only have to complete Modules I and VI
- After successful completion of the ISTTP you will progress one step per year to maximum step. This currently translates to about \$2,600.00 per year.

For details about the ISTTP and other important info, check out:
opseu556.org

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