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## The Director's Column



Dr. Michael Owen

In its December 2001 budget, the Federal Government announced its commitment to support the indirect costs of research funded through the Canadian Institutes for Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. These funds "will help universities defray costs that stem from research activities but are not attributable to specific research projects." On March 27, 2002, Alan Rock, Minister of Industry, announced that Brock would receive a one-time grant of \$804,237 in partial support of these indirect costs. Moreover, Minister Rock stated "the Government of Canada will work with the universities, research hospitals and provinces on ways to provide ongoing research support that is predictable, affordable and incremental."

While these funds are welcomed, they provide only limited support to the ongoing indirect costs of research incurred by the University – Library research collections for all disciplines, information communication technologies, liability and other insurance, financial services, animal care facilities, heat, light and electricity for research laboratories, and technical and other support services, among others. Moreover, it is anticipated that universities will be expected to ensure that other sponsors of research – industry, foundations, and other provincial and federal agencies – contribute toward these indirect costs as well.

In this second issue of *Research Reporter*, Erin Kaipainen profiles the scholarship of Dr. Susan Arai, a new faculty member in Recreation and Leisure Studies, and *The Harpweaver*. Dr. Arai's research on the changing nature of volunteerism in our society demonstrates the impact that public policy has on the fabric of our communities and patterns of participation in volunteer work. Erin's report on *The Harpweaver* highlights a significant scholarly and creative collaboration between faculty members and students and the contributions these individuals make to our intellectual and cultural life.

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## The energy, savvy and collaborative efforts behind *The Harpweaver*

*The Harpweaver* is the product of student and faculty collaboration within the Department of English Language and Literature at Brock University. For several years, the two groups have worked together to produce a professional and competitive literary magazine that sells at Chapters-Indigo stores nationwide, and also has some international distribution.

*The Harpweaver* publishes work from all over the world. Professor Angus Somerville, the editor of the magazine, explains that the authors' identities are never a criterion in deciding which works are published. In fact, the student editorial boards rarely know whose work they are evaluating. As a result, *The Harpweaver* has published works from previously unpublished writers as well as more familiar names within literary circles, including James Reaney and George Elliot Clarke.

The magazine has come a long way since it first appeared on the literary scene in 1994. It was a student venture from the very beginning. Former Brock student, Colleen Pielechaty, started *The Harpweaver* as a four-page supplement to the *Brock Press*. Pielechaty was later assisted by Professor Elizabeth Sauer, who helped turn the newspaper supplement into a free-standing magazine only one year later. In its infancy, the original free-standing publication was smaller than it is today. It was published once annually and circulation was limited to what could be sold by students and faculty on campus.

Sauer is currently the non-fiction editor. She describes *The Harpweaver* as "a product of Colleen's initiative, vision, energy and savvy." In the early stages of what began as a production of the English Club, Pielechaty "assumed all responsibility for fund-raising and for the journal's production and distribution." Now what began as a student venture has evolved into an ongoing

department-wide project that allows students to gain valuable skills in editing, desktop publishing and magazine production, in addition to fostering students' analytical skills. *The Harpweaver* has grown into a free-standing literary magazine published bi-annually.

"Involvement in *The Harpweaver*," Sauer explains, "certainly enriches students' university experiences. The English Department has always sought to foster the critical intelligence of students, and *The Harpweaver* now provides a forum for students' creative expression and ingenuity. It is a source of pride for the department and for all those involved, in part because it provides a way of knitting together the Brock community with the Niagara region and regions far beyond."

In addition to enhancing students' literary studies, volunteer experience with *The Harpweaver* provides students with practical skills. Professor Steven Scott, currently the faculty member on the fiction board, explains that at least one of the former volunteers on that board has gone on to study publishing at Ryerson. "This is hands-on experience, and that is always valuable," he says. According to Elizabeth Sauer, "a good number of production and editorial board members have obtained positions in the publishing industry."

The collaborative effort of students and faculty to publish the magazine makes *The Harpweaver* rather unique. It is sold alongside other professional magazines, competes with them for submissions, and has published some very reputable writers. The difference between *The Harpweaver* and many other magazines of this type, is that it is run by student volunteers. Other universities produce similar publications such as the University of New Brunswick's *Fiddlehead*,

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*The Harpweaver continued...*

and Saint Francis Xavier's *Antigonish Review*, but they have a longer history than *The Harpweaver*.

Volunteer student involvement has always been at the core of *The Harpweaver*. Somerville simply explains that this student involvement "is the whole point."

Traditionally, a student edits the magazine alongside the faculty editor, but this year the position is vacant. Somerville laments that there is no student editor this year: "There should be a student's name there on the first line along with mine," he says.

The students who comprise *The Harpweaver* editorial boards (fiction, non-fiction, drama, poetry, fine art, and reviews) make most of the decisions. One faculty member sits on each board, to give the discussions shape and ensure that the submissions get back to the editor on time.

Dr. Marilyn Rose, the current editor of the poetry board and the Chair of the English department, lists several tasks and responsibilities that students become familiar with in the production of this literary magazine. The editorial board must first establish a criterion for judging submissions and then collectively decide on a list of works suitable for publication. "During this process, students learn much about the relative quality of submissions and how to distinguish between the stronger and the weaker," says Rose. "They learn to set criteria for assessment and establish a means of handling complex tasks of this nature, where a group of individuals must coordinate their work and meet deadlines in doing so. They also learn a great deal about respecting the work of strangers who entrust us with their submissions. Students learn a great deal about what it takes to pull off a collaborative

production which is quite different from the individualistic work that most humanities students spend most of their time doing."

While experience on any one of *The Harpweaver* boards is valuable to an English Literature student, experience as a co-editor with the magazine certainly enhances a student's employability after graduation within the publishing industry. The most recent student co-editor left Brock to edit *Pulse* magazine, an entertainment weekly distributed in the Niagara region. After almost three years with *The Harpweaver*, she had developed most of the skills she required to edit a weekly publication. "Everything she learned about magazine publishing she learned at *The Harpweaver*," explains Somerville. "While students receive no formal credit for their work here, the experience they gain is invaluable." •



Dr. Susan Arai

## Investigating mandatory volunteer experience in Ontario's high schools

The interdisciplinary research of Dr. Susan Arai, an assistant professor with the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, provides evidence of her strong belief in social justice. Much of her work focuses on volunteering, community-based organizations, social change, and democracy. She explains that, "this type of work allows me to blend practice and theory." Arai finds this work rewarding because she has in the past done a lot of volunteering and consulting for volunteer organizations. "My academic work allows me to work on my personal commitments and what I do in practice reinforces what I do in theory."

Arai has a number of research projects on the go, including a timely look at recent provincial policy which has made volunteering mandatory in Ontario high schools. She is interested in discovering the impact on students' perceptions towards volunteerism after it has been turned into a mandatory component of the curriculum.

"The idea of high school students involved in volunteering has a lot of potential positive outcomes; for example, it can help students to understand their community, the issues their communities face, as well as helping students to connect with mentors." However, as Arai explains, the now mandatory nature of volunteering in high schools poses several problems. Volunteering has gone from being something students elect to do on their own accord, to being something that they have to do in order to graduate. Volunteering presents students with an opportunity to

gain job skills. However, as her previous research indicates, the same government that made volunteering mandatory also made large funding cuts to the very organizations where students are now volunteering their time. Arai worries that these cuts will compromise the students' experiences.

"These organizations have lost funding and staff. Cuts to program dollars cannot be separated from the students' impression of their volunteer experiences." Arai explains that these cuts raise serious questions as to whether or not there is going to be enough support for students in their volunteer postings, and if there is not, "will students have a negative experience and how will this change his/her perception of volunteering in his/her community."

Arai has interviewed many volunteers. From these, she has concluded that those who are most passionate about volunteering "are those who have been involved in an organization in which a staff member has helped them to understand what the organization does and how the individual contributes to that goal." Positive remembrances of volunteer experiences lead to greater citizenship and social responsibility, and according to Arai, all this takes "is support from someone within the organization." However, with the Ontario government's cuts to social services, Arai worries that under times of strain, the kind of support available for student volunteers will diminish. Arai asks, "are they becoming

true citizens or are they just becoming cheap labour for cash-strapped organizations?" This, among other things, is what Arai seeks to discover. The results of her study have implications for Ontario high school students and volunteers in general. Mandatory volunteer experience in high schools now begs the question, "does a student's involvement come from passion and commitment or is it because s/he needs the credit?"

Arai shows that this research is important in light of government policy regarding high school volunteerism because "perceptions of volunteering will last a lifetime. Their experience has huge implications for volunteerism. It will determine whether or not they will continue to volunteer, or whether they will donate money to volunteer organizations, or whether they will encourage their own children to volunteer."

Arai is also a member of a research team, along with Dr. Peggy Hutchison (Brock University) and Dr. Alison Pedlar (University of Waterloo) that focuses on individuals with developmental disabilities and human services. Their project, which was recently granted SSHRC funding, will focus on voluntary and non-profit organizations and the roles they play in new social movements and in creating social change. Specifically, this study focuses on the disability movement and the advancements made in supporting individuals with developmental disabilities in communities.

Arai describes her work as eclectic, but coalescing around some central themes. She attributes this to both her background in interdisciplinary studies and to a growing importance of such studies in today's society. Arai explains that "social justice and social change are complex issues so unless we approach them from different perspectives, we are never going to fully understand what is going on or how to fix it." •

