

ACCUTE Newsletter June Edition 2009



ACCUTE's current home in the historic Jackman Building at 170 St. George St



President : Heather Murray

Secretary Treasurer: Craig Patterson

Office Coordinator: Pam Coles

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ACCUTE's Mandate: To promote the interests of those teaching and studying English language and literatures in Canadian colleges and universities by facilitating the dissemination and exchange of research and the exploration of professional issues, by organizing scholarly and professional meetings, by seeking to improve work conditions, by representing the interests of members before provincial and federal decision-making bodies, and by supporting the interests and aspirations of members entering the profession.



This year's plenary speakers: Steve Heigh-ton, Wai Chee Dimock and David Jarraway.



President's Column

As reported elsewhere in this newsletter, the ACCUTE AGM in May had the great pleasure of bestowing the title of "honorary member" on the association's three members of longest standing: Professors Ron Baker, James Gray, and Walter Swayze, all of whom were present at the founding meeting in Ottawa fifty-two years ago.

But ACCUTE (then ACUTE) did not spring into being in Ottawa in 1957 simply through the impulse of eighty-two individuals discovering they were of like mind. Some five years of organizing, letter-writing, fund-raising, and strategizing preceded this definitive meeting. As detailed "In the ACCUTE Archives" in this newsletter, a first small gathering in 1952 failed to reconvene as planned in 1955 when grants were not secured. The slog of searching elsewhere for funds recommenced, along with pleas to universities to renew their promises of support, as evidenced in letters penned by

Roy Daniells (copies kindly provided by Sandra Djwa). "I regret to inform you," Daniells wrote to Desmond Pacey of UNB in the spring of 1956 "that the proposed second conference of university teachers of English cannot be held this year after all, the needed matching grant not being available from the resources of the Foundations approached. It is hoped that this will mean only a postponement."

Daniells must have sent many such letters. It is worth noting that, in recognition of these and other efforts, he was made an honorary member of ACUTE in 1978. Only at the eleventh hour, in March of 1957, did a Canada Foundation grant come through, permitting the conference in May of that year.

Elected as first president, Millar MacLure also began writing to departments and individuals across the country, bringing ACUTE to a healthy total of 172 members. A.S.P. Woodhouse canvassed Ottawa organizations, securing \$1500 for the new associa-

tion “first by getting HRC [Humanities Research Council] to approach the Canada Council, and secondly by speaking on its behalf in the Executive of the HRC.” While Woodhouse expected the grant to continue, he wrote to Daniells that “further funds are necessary, as you and I, who have organized conferences in the past, will know.” Woodhouse also argued strongly for a graduated fee, thinking it “extremely desirable that all members of the University teaching body, and all prospective members (that is, graduate students) should belong to the Association and feel that they have a part in it.” The letters in the Daniells collection, and other documents of the day, testify to the heavy lifting that was needed to put into place the new scholarly organizations and the funding and agencies that supported them. Members such as Ron Baker, James Gray, and Walter Swayze would take their turns in continuing these efforts.

Associations and conferences are built

by many hands, a fact made abundantly clear not only by ACCUTE’s own history, but by this year’s Ottawa conference. More than three hundred and thirty attended, and it would be difficult to run down the registration list and find the name of someone who had not contributed to the conference in one way or multiple ways: as an organizer, chair, or presenter, as a campus rep or committee member, as a discussant in sessions or an animator of social events, and sometimes with several hats. It is this sense of collective endeavour that makes the ACCUTE conference always feel like a disciplinary homecoming week. Throughout this newsletter you will find news reports from the conference, including accounts of two of the very fine professional skills sessions, for readers who were unable to make the conference. You will also find the beginnings of planning for 2010 in Montréal. The ACCUTE inbox is already receiving ideas, suggestions, and proposals for sessions, and

we hope to hear from you, keeping our “virtual” community alive until we reconvene next year.

- Heather Murray

ACCUTE conference fun fact: Proposals for this year’s conference were assessed by 102 voters and the acceptance rate for submissions was 63%.

ACCUTE News

ACCUTE Executive, Old and New

Jason Haslam (Dalhousie) and Lisa Vargo (Saskatchewan) were both elected to the ACCUTE executive at the AGM in May, and the AGM also confirmed the selection of Jamie Paris (UBC) as the President of the Graduate Student Caucus, meaning that he will now begin a one year executive term. Welcome to all three of them... and a sad farewell to past-president Steven Bruhm (UWO) and member-at-large Paul Stevens (Toronto), each of whom brought to the executive a strong knowledge of academic institutions and a refreshingly

acerbic attitude to the academic life, and to Michael Brisbois, who has done a wonderful job of representing the far-flung graduate student constituency this year. Eleanor Ty (WLU), finishing her term as president of CACE – Canadian Association of Chairs of English – now gives her ex officio seat on the executive to Mary O’Connor (McMaster). Eleanor is especially to be thanked for her work redesigning and revitalizing the CACE/ACCUTE hiring survey, which appears in this issue. Nicola Nixon (Concordia) remains on the executive wearing a different hat; no longer a member-at-large, she has now taken on the position of President-Elect.

Last fall, there were 165 submissions to the general CFP, 85 submissions to the member-organized CFPs and more than 100 submissions to the various “joint-organized” CFPs.

2010 in Montréal

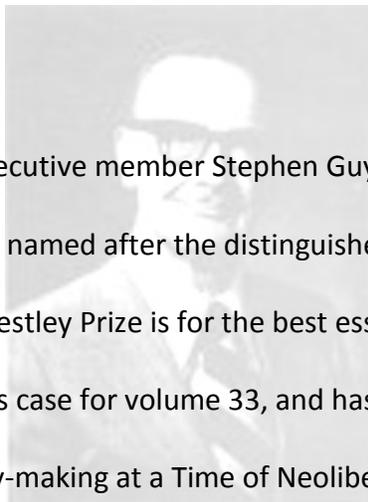
The 2010 Congress will be in Montréal, hosted by Concordia University, and you will want to make a note of ACCUTE's dates (considerably later than they were this year): May 28, 29, 30, and 31.

It seems, at the moment, a long way in the future, but planning for the 2010 conference has already begun. Kevin Pask of Concordia has agreed to take on the task of Local Arrangements Co-ordinator, a crucial role in conference planning. The executive is considering potential plenary speakers, and of course it is necessary to grab a suitable venue for the all-important wine and cheese/disco night! Please be aware of one important deadline, which can easily be missed during the summer months: August 15 is the deadline for member-organized session CFPs, and for CFPs for sessions proposed by joint associations.

This year, we will be imposing a format and word limit on the CFPs, details of which will be available on the ACCUTE website closer to the deadline. In the interim, please see the hints on putting together a successful member-organized session, which will appear on the website in the next few weeks.

Priestley Prize

At the AGM in Ottawa, executive member Stephen Guy-Bray (UBC) announced the winner of this year's Priestley Prize, named after the distinguished scholar and long-time ACCUTE member F.E.L. Priestley. The Priestley Prize is for the best essay in the most recent volume of *English Studies in Canada*, in this case for volume 33, and has been given to Sabine Milz for her essay "Canadian Cultural Policy-making at a Time of Neoliberal Globalization" (issue 1-2, vol.



33).

A PhD from McMaster, who recently completed her postdoctoral work at the University of Alberta, Sabine Milz is currently teaching at Fanshawe College, London. If you have not yet had a chance to catch up with your ESC back issues this summer, do take the time to read her sophisticated and timely analysis, which provides – among other things – a fresh assessment of the relationship between nationalist cultural policy and economic policy, both in the formative post-Massey Commission moment, and in our own day.

Special thanks goes to Stephen Guy-Bray and to the two other judges – Gwynn Dujardin (Queen's) and Lewis MacLeod (Trent) – for their adjudication work this year.

Honorary Members

A wonderful moment at the 2009 ACCUTE conference occurred when the assembled members at the AGM unanimously voted to bestow the title of “honorary member” on ACCUTE's three members of longest-standing. Professors Ronald Baker (SFU), Walter Swayze (Winnipeg) and James Gray (Dalhousie) are all distinguished scholars, and over the course of many years all have been important contributors to the discipline of English, and to the humanities, in Canada. All have served ACCUTE or ESC in a variety of capacities over the years. But the AGM wished to honour them this year for a very specific reason: all three were present at the founding conference of our association in Ottawa in 1952, and have maintained their membership ever since. We are delighted to excuse them from the payment of any further dues, to hang up their sweaters in the ACCUTE rafters, and to think of them henceforth as “honorary” members. See “From the ACCUTE Archives” elsewhere in this newsletter for a

glimpse of the founding conference fifty—two years ago.

Report on the Professional Concerns

Panel on Graduate Supervision

One of two professional concerns panels held at Congress this year dealt with the “Pleasures and Perils of Graduate Supervision.” Jennifer Andrews (UNB) and Lorraine York (McMaster) brought their considerable experience to the panel, to which Jamie Paris (UBC) provided his perspective as a graduate student. The panel was well attended and sparked both formal discussion during the question period and numerous informal chats over the duration of the conference (and no doubt some since!). In the weeks since the panel, several of the presenters’ points have become even more resonant, as I consider my own interactions with my supervisor and within my own teaching. In preparing this report, I spoke with the panellists and reflected upon the conversation their papers began.

What follows is a summary of several (though not all) of the panel’s most salient points:

If there was a keyword that arose from the session, it was “person.” From this simple word, the panellists stressed the personal dynamic of the Supervisor-Supervised relationship, as well as the need for both Professors and the institutional structures around them to recognize the personhood of the student. Acknowledging the effects of non-academic demands, as well as the relevance of these demands as intellectual inspirations and hurdles creates a more dynamic and connected relationship.

Jamie demonstrated that the reality of graduate school is not always clearly reflected in the policies our faculties of graduate studies’ handbooks understand them to be. The financial strain of graduate school does not make teaching assistantships as optional as they might be; the small job market available to new scholars also creates unrecognized de-

mands, such as publication and specialized conference experience. These factors for success, however realistic or necessary a student may feel them to be, are simply not found in the requirements for an MA or PhD.

Personhood also relates to the need to recognize achievements as well the vast inequities of class and power that exist between the supervisor and supervisee. These gulfs can be widened by the background of the student, and supervisors should consider these factors in their role. Providing a clear, consistent set of working parameters can allay some of the anxieties that the imbalanced nature of the relationship can cause. Lorraine suggested that a meeting structured around collaborative models—holding meetings with a mix of graduate students of varying years—is one way of breaking down the supervisor-student dyad. These meetings provide a student with multiple perspectives, peer examples, and, perhaps most importantly, help to combat the

isolating nature of graduate work after courses are finished.

In closing, I want to turn to a point Jennifer made early in the panel: as students and supervisors we must focus on listening. In a profession that is based on debate, authority, and, well, professing (a verb that seems to immediately conjure a feeling of speaking), we need to take the time to listen rather than simply speaking. Providing a space in which it is safe to stumble, and where ones opinions are made relevant hinge on the practice of listening.

-Michael J. Brisbois

This year's conference had:
 1 invited-author reading
 2 plenary speakers
 6 professional skills and issues sessions
 32 "general" and executive-organized sessions
 18 "member-organized" sessions
 13 "joint-association organized" sessions
 and 7 sessions for the Christianity and Literature Study Group.

Report on the Professional Skills Session “How to Vet”

The issue of vetting was brought to the Campus Representatives meeting at last year’s ACCUTE conference at UBC. Members asked representatives to express their concern about the focus and purpose of reader’s reports and about the tone that some of those reports took. While the members were talking specifically about the issue of vetting conference proposals, the resulting “How to Vet” session at this year’s conference also addressed vetting articles for scholarly journals and book manuscripts. My examples here will focus primarily on the vetting process for conference papers, but, as the session made clear, the elements that constitute good vetting traverse academic genres.

To begin, the tone of vettors’ reports is more important than many readers think. Whatever the vettor might think privately about the proposal, the report should be a professional document that focuses on the academic qualities of the work being assessed, on the details that the author provides, and on the work’s relation to the field with which it is engaged. In short, all criticism should be constructive and provide scholarly justification of the ranking and assessment of the submission. This is not to suggest that vettors’ reports should be an exercise in convoluted positive reinforcement (of the “you’ve clearly tried very hard here and that’s an interesting idea...I’m just wondering if you’ve thought about how having a thesis might make this even stronger...” variety). Both the organizers/editors and the authors need and want concrete, rigorous critique. Feedback of this type can and should be presented in a constructive, professional way.

With all vetting, it is important to consider what, exactly, we expect from the finished work. A scholarly article assumes a specific scope, audience, and level of presentation.

It is assumed to be self-contained and complete. The conference proposal, on the other hand, is a snapshot of a work that will be presented as a twenty minute oral presentation. Because most conferences ask only for proposals, authors should be careful to make it clear that their proposal is not a series of ruminations on a topic but that it is a solid outline of a scholarly argument. The vector needs to be able to assess the proposal's focus, structure, scholarship, and method. In short, the primary question that both the author and the vector need to answer in relation to the conference paper is "Is there a paper here?" Answering this question involves looking at whether the proposed argument can be made in twenty minutes, for example, whether there is a clear thesis, and if the author has positioned her argument in relation to existing scholarship in the field. Vectors aren't expected to act as editors or mentors, but suggestions and comments addressed to the author are a legitimate and welcomed inclusion in the report.

Vectors' expertise is invaluable in helping editors and conference organizers to assess and choose papers that will result in a successful, productive publication or conference. It is possible to reduce vetting to a formula, but I'm avoiding that here because the best vetting is a balance of rigour, creativity, and constructive suggestions. Good, productive vetting is an engaged conversation with the author about his or her work; a conversation that reflects the integrity of the ideas that are being presented and respects them enough to provide honest and thoughtful critiques that will aid both the author and the editors/organizers as they continue with their part of the process in disseminating our colleagues' scholarship.

– Karen Macfarlane

ACCUTE GSC Report:

For those who attended the Graduate Student meeting at Congress 2009, thank you so much for voicing your experience and concerns. We had students from both coasts and many of the regions in between. There was a lot of good news to be heard. Several students found the 2008 Survey of Graduate Student Life an important way to situate themselves in comparison to other schools, and reported that this had led to improvements in their departments. Many thanks to Richard Cassidy (Montréal) who worked very hard last year to produce the survey.

We discussed the findings of the survey review committee and the survey will be slightly restructured next year. At the recommendation of the committee, we will be adding an interactive component to the survey, allowing graduate student reps the opportunity to flesh out the reasons or realities behind the numbers, as well as expand on areas related to professionalization and job-seeking support.

I'm also pleased to introduce a new GSC President who will take over in July: Jamie Paris (UBC) will be assuming the mantle as President. Lynne Evans (Dalhousie) has volunteered to be President-elect. Hajer Trablesi (Montreal) will continue as information officer and to collect the data for next years survey. Jayne Hildebrand (McGill) will be serving as secretary, as I will be staying on to serve as webmaster for the caucus.

This is my last report as GSC president and before I hurry away to write the ever-pressing dissertation, I wanted to thank both the ACCUTE executive and this year's graduate student caucus—Richard Cassidy, Hajer Trablesi, and Mary Elizabeth Curtin (Toronto) for their support and insight. This has proven a valuable and important experience in my life.

- Michael J. Brisbois

CACE/ ACCUTE Hiring Survey, 2008-09

As of mid-June, thirty-two institutions had sent in their survey (compared to 27 in 2007-08, and 22 in 2006-07). A number of departments are still in the process of completing their limited-term hiring.

Most of the surveys were completed by chairs whose departments had advertised positions since the primary aim of the survey was to collect information about hiring. The department statistics is therefore more of a snapshot of selected universities rather than an accurate survey of all institutions in Canada.

Department Statistics:

Of the 32 institutions who responded, 12 (62%) reported stable faculty numbers as compared to last year, 6 (19%) reported an increase, while 6 (19%) reported shrinking numbers in their full-time faculty. One or two noted that their numbers were “stable” only because of amalgamation with another department/program, or because their cuts came a few years earlier. Many departments who anticipated retirements in the next year or two were uncertain about replacement positions at this point.

Tenure Track Hiring:

Of 34 tenure track positions reported in our survey (compared to 29 last year), 26 indicated completed searches, 2 were still in progress, 3 did not hire, while 2 were cancelled. Of the 26 completed searches, 17 (65%) hired Canadians, 8 (31%) hired Americans, while 1 (4%) hired someone from another country. Of the 17 Canadians hired, 4 had degrees from American or European universities. 13 (50%) females and 13 (50%) males were appointed. Three positions were offered to visible minorities.

Tenure track position received anywhere from 7 to 221 applications, with 20th-century Literature and Culture positions receiving the most applications. The average number of applications works out to 57.5; however, factors such as the field of expertise, location and size of the university greatly determine the number of applicants.

Of the 26 candidates appointed to TT positions, 10 (39%) held tenure-track appointments previously, 4 (15%) held LTAs, 7 (27%) held postdoctoral fellowships, 2 (7.5%) held sessional positions, while 2 (7.5%) were hired straight from their PhD program. One (4%) had no information reported.

Limited Term Appointments:

Limited term appointments ranged in duration from eight to twelve months with an average term of 9.75 months. All the LTAs hired except one were Canadians, six of them having received degrees from American and British universities. The number of applicants to each position ranged from three to 28, with an average of 11.2 applicants per job.

Of the 26 positions appointed, 8 (31%) were renewals, 2 (8%) held LTAs previously, 10 (38%) held sessional/ part-time positions, 5 (19%) were students, and one (4%) held a tenure-track position. Of the 26 positions, 14 were given to females, and 12 to males. There were no positions offered to individuals from under-represented groups as reported.

Approximately 4-5 LTA appointments are in progress. Last year, there were 24 LTA positions reported.

PhD Programs:

This table includes data collected from past years by Dan O’Donnel . N.B.: Last year, two of the largest universities in Canada did not report statistics.

Placement Summary Year of Graduation	2008	2009			
Cohort	72 (100%)	32 (100%)			
Tenure Track Job	18 (25%)	4 (13%)			
CLTA	8 (11%)	3 (9%)			
Post Doc	7 (10%)	6 (19%)			
Non Academic Teaching	7+ 2 (13%)	3 (9%)			
Other Academic Positions	19 (26%)	11 (34%)			
Unemployed	3 (9%)				
Unknown	11 (15%)	1 (3%)			

- Eleanor Ty

FROM THE ACCUTE ARCHIVES: The First ACUTE

Since the most recent conference took place in Ottawa, it is an opportune moment to reflect on the first ACCUTE gathering, which was held in the national capital fifty-two years ago. Of course, the organization wasn’t ACCUTE then – or even, at that point, ACUTE. In earlier years, there had been several attempts to form organizations where the study and teaching of English literature could be discussed. The Modern Language Association of Ontario (1886-1919), a sister organization to the MLA of the United States, was an important forum for the propagation of new theories and methods. Branches of the English Association were active in Canada, especially in the 1920s. Also in the 1920s, as the scholar Watson Kirkconnell reminisced in his memoir *A Slice of Canada*, some “Prairie scholars” set in motion an annual “English Conference” first held in Saskatoon in 1926, in Edmonton in 1927, and in Toronto in 1928, with the Toronto conference more national in scope. These conferences were a great success, with

their blend of critical and pedagogic discussions, but could not survive the crash of '29. There was another short-lived attempt after the war, initiated when three Canadian delegates to the International Conference of University Professors of English, meeting at Oxford, revived the idea of a Canadian conference. A.S.P. Woodhouse (Toronto), F.M. Salter (Alberta), and H.J. Alexander (Queen's) organized a conference for the spring of 1952, funded in large part by a Rockefeller Foundation grant and held at the University of Toronto. Again, this was well-attended, and an organizing committee was struck to put the event on a continuing basis. However, further external funding was not forthcoming and the planned follow-up conference for 1955 could not take place.

In facing the problems of geographic distance, lack of professional cohesion, and an absence of stable funding, Canadian teachers of English found themselves in the same boat with scholars in other disciplines, as well as artists, writers, musicians, and cultural workers of all types. It was exactly this situation, and the need for new infrastructures and funding, that was addressed by the Massey Commission (the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences) whose report was issued in 1951. By the mid-1950s, the underpinnings for some of these new academic and cultural structures were already in place, and the English professors' organizing committee, assisted by the Humanities Research Council and a grant from the Canada Foundation, was able to set up a meeting in conjunction with the Learned Societies in Ottawa for June of 1957.

Marjorie Garson has described this initial meeting in her history *ACUTE: The First Twenty-Five Years 1957-1982*. Eighty-two academics attended the conference, hearing a variety of papers including an address by Northrop Frye (Victoria College, Toronto) that situated this

founding moment in relation to the larger currents of critical development, speaking – as Garson writes – “of the emergence of such an organization at that particular point in history, when literary criticism was beginning to be recognized as a field of study in its own right, and when creative writers too were tending to reflect in their work a sense of the underlying structures of literature” (3). The time was right to put the association on a permanent basis, which the assembled members voted to do. During the next academic year founding- president Millar MacLure (Victoria College, Toronto) began to collect membership forms and fees – then, a dollar! – and to plan the conference program for the Learned Societies meeting in Edmonton for 1958.

The presenters at this year’s conference were:
19% Professors
17% Associate Professors
21% Assistant Professors and sessional instructor/lecturers
37% graduate students
6% “other” including post-doctoral fellows.

Presenters came from Canada as well as
Australia
Denmark
New Zealand
Scotland
Switzerland
Taiwan