



## ASSOCIATION OF CANADIAN COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY TEACHERS OF ENGLISH WINTER NEWSLETTER 2011

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**\*NOTE\*** This is a reminder that the first draft of the program is available at:  
<http://accute.ca/2011programme.html>

### **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

**Nicola Nixon**

Here we are at the tail end of winter for this, admittedly, late winter newsletter. Although spring is definitely in the air, with all the optimism that comes with the longer days, the end of the school term, and the tentative green things poking through, there is still a certain residual winteriness—not simply the literal remaining, dirty snow but also the lingering, decidedly unspringlike chill of the on-going restructurings, rebrandings, strategic plannings, budgetary crises, and frozen hirings of the institutions in which we work and study. In an inversion of the Fat Tuesday gluttony and Ash Wednesday shrieving that symbolically underpin the move from late-winter anticipatory excess to abstemious, Lenten restraint, I would like to begin with the things that metaphorically

smear ashes on the forehead and end with the things that promise a certain drenching of sweetness and pleasure (and here in Quebec, and in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, the *cabins á sucres* are indeed about to throw open their doors to an orgy of maple stuffs).

First the ashes. In their race to compete federally, provincially, and even municipally for funding from a shrinking pool, universities and colleges in Canada and elsewhere are busy rebranding themselves, with new logos, new slogans, and new strategic plans. Such plans, for which we are solicited for input even though they are designed largely by marketers and the Boards of Governors who hire them, require us to perform certain justificatory gymnastics in

order to fit them. Indeed, English departments seem particularly vulnerable to the decisions of the increasingly interventionist Boards of Governors who shape our colleges and universities along the corporate lines with which they are accustomed, because we are seen often as a residue from an older model of liberal education, rather than something as sexy as nanotechnology. New strategic plans with their identified “signature areas” necessitate us to articulate regularly how we are special and worthy of institutional support.

In the process of rationalizing our research in light of such plans, we are cognizant of the larger threats to the Humanities at large—that departments in the Humanities will become only service departments, or worse that they will be slowly edged out. And we need only think, to make that threat more real, of the University of Toronto’s barely staved-off attempt to roll the Centre for Comparative Literature, the Centre for Diaspora Studies, and several language departments into a single amorphous entity; or the SUNY at Albany’s seemingly successful bid to “deactivate” the departments of French, Italian, Russian, Classics, and Theatre by 2012; or, Middlesex University’s closing of its Philosophy department. Given such tangible threats to our not responding vigorously to the call to justify ourselves—and I am sure that this call is more severe in smaller and mid-sized universities—we are having to argue and rationalize our relevance as never before. But we are creative. As one of my colleagues and ACCUTE member, Kevin Pask, responded at a department meeting, in which the Provost and then-President were touting Concordia’s new strategic plan and its signature areas, “well, now I know that I’ll be researching Shakespeare and nanotechnology in future.” The irony was lost on all but us. Still, as Heather Murray’s column here about the Federation affirms, we have support and strenuous advocacy at the federal level. Perhaps all we need to develop is some sort of repository of English departments’ responses to strategic plans, which seem to be generated according to a template; such a repository

would enable us to produce justifications for our on-going relevance, without having to produce them from scratch.

Now the sweet. We’re about to move into maple-sap-running time here, as we are the end of term, beginning of spring, and the ACCUTE conference in Fredericton—Fat Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday of May (28, 29, 30, 31), as it were. You have all received the link to the draft program (<http://accute.ca/2011programme.html>), and you will see that this year we have three plenaries: **Ian Baucom**, co-sponsored with CACLALS, on the first day (immediately following the Federation-sponsored, Big Thinking, event featuring Kwame Anthony Appiah); **Katie Trumpener** from Yale on the second day; and **Steven Bruhm**, a former ACCUTE President, on the third day. Along with those illuminati, we will have Graeme Gibson as one of our session participants, along with almost two hundred presenters, ranging from those who responded to general call for papers, and those who will be participating in member-organized sessions, to those who are speaking in the seventeen joint-sponsored sessions. The conference will be, as usual, rich in scope, critical engagement, and, yes, fun.

The draft program will continue to be updated, and we will advise you at points along the way that it has been altered. Please take seriously all the exhortations to book your accommodations and flights as soon as possible. Air Canada has agreed to keep on increasing the number of flights to Fredericton in response to demand up to March 31<sup>st</sup>; which doesn’t mean that they won’t add more, but only that they’ve agreed to guarantee those flight numbers to that date and will take it on advisement afterwards.

**-Nicola Nixon**



## SECRETARY'S REPORT

**John Miller**

At Congress last year, Craig Patterson invited me to sit in on a demonstration of the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Science's new automated online membership system, and since then, I've replied to many questions about ACCUTE membership with solemn assurances that the system would soon be in effect, and people would be able to take out or renew their membership in ACCUTE conveniently and electronically.

The Federation has hired a software developer to produce a program to collect the usual membership information and then link to a financial institution for processing the credit card transaction. This second phase has proved surprisingly complicated: hidden surcharges and regulatory policies have stalled our plans to adopt a system that, most of our members agree, will be a great convenience. (Members who disagree can be assured that we will continue to welcome paper membership applications and cheques.) The current obstacle is that the preferred handler for the system is restricted to working with organizations that have Canada Revenue Agency certification as being "not for profit", a designation that ACCUTE has never tried to obtain, nor has it ever had reason to do so.

Getting the Canada Revenue Agency's certification is likely to be a lengthy process, involving the professional services of an accountant and a lawyer to oversee any contract, as well as annual audits.

Since ACCUTE, one of the largest member associations of the Federation, is unlikely to be unique in not having obtained not-for-profit certification, we are in discussions about answers to this problem, hoping that the Federation can make the argument that its member associations represent a different

case from the usual charitable organizations with not-for-profit status. And it's not clear how far beyond the Humanities and Social Sciences this problem may exist.

Apart from the mechanism, we are concerned about the costs of adopting such a system. The Federation charges a significant sign-up fee as well as an annual maintenance fee, and the credit-card transactions themselves are charged to ACCUTE. The cost, in short, may be such that ACCUTE cannot absorb the cost, and we will have to devise some method fair to all members that covers the added cost of electronic transactions.

We are aware that many members have been counting on ACCUTE's implementing this online membership system immediately. At the same time, we are aware that some members prefer to manage their membership on paper, and we are committed to supporting that choice. In addition to consulting with the Federation, we are investigating other arrangements independent of the Federation's preferred system. Depending on the Federation's response and the progress we make in our enquiries, we will have a plan to present at the Annual General Meeting in Fredericton. If so, I'm sure I'm not the only one eager to get this apparently-straightforward matter settled.

Maybe then we can start thinking about reinstating the option of two- or three-year memberships, as many of you have requested.

– **John Miller**



## FEDERATION REP'S REPORT

Heather Murray

While I already was serving as ACCUTE's delegate to the General Assembly of the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, I now also have joined its Board of Directors as a representative of large scholarly associations. I'm not there to represent ACCUTE directly, but you can see how well our interests are served when you take a look at the composition of the Board. Noreen Golfman, who all will know as a past ACCUTE President, is the current President of the Federation, ACCUTE-member Stephen Slemon has a seat on the Executive as Chair of the Aid to Scholarly Publications Program Managing Board, and ACCUTE-member Gary Boire sits on the Board as a Universities and Colleges representative. This says a lot about the odd compulsion to civic duty on the part of people in our discipline, but also speaks to the very close relationship between ACCUTE and the Federation. Being on the Board is a fascinating opportunity to be more closely involved with the Federation's ongoing policy-development and lobbying work.

The CFHSS (or the Federation, or even the "Feds," as the organization is more popularly known), does much more than organize the Congress at which scores of associations, including our own, hold their annual conference. To do a quick "Federation 101" for readers who might be unfamiliar with its work: the CFHSS has the year-round task of helping to shape government policy and expenditures as these relate to the humanities and social sciences, especially in regards to research policy and research funding. (SSHRC, with which more of you probably are familiar, is a government agency, and cannot engage in advocacy work or make political interventions. When SSHRC funding stays stable, for example, as it has even in these recent turbulent economic times, we have the Federation to thank.) An umbrella organization of almost 150 universities and colleges, academic associations, and other educational

groups, the CFHSS is supported in part through dues from its member associations. A percentage of your ACCUTE membership fee goes to further its work.

Most of the day-and-a-half Board meeting in late November was devoted to discussion of the new strategic framework which has been in development for some time. A draft of the report had already been circulated to member associations and institutions, which had an opportunity to respond in the fall. This is both a "philosophical" and a practical overhaul, allowing the Federation to sharpen its mission and define its goals, at the same time permitting its very busy staff members to set work and planning priorities. After more of the email and "wiki" discussions that are ongoing now, a final report will come before the Board and the General Assembly in the spring. But there has been much else to occupy the time of Federation officers and staff, including contributing to government discussions on the "digital economy" and representing our interests as teachers and writers in (yet another) round of copyright-bill debates.

During coffee breaks, when I talked to Federation staff about planning for the 2011 Congress, they spoke with enthusiasm of the tremendous efforts being made by the host universities – the University of New Brunswick Fredericton, and St. Thomas – and by the city of Fredericton itself, to make this the best possible event. Do take a look at the Congress website, where you will also find that a number of the speakers in the Federation's "Big Thinking" series, who would be of particular interest to ACCUTE members, are scheduled for the dates we are there: Kwame Anthony Appiah, writers Antonine Maillet and David Adams Richards, and Chief Shawn Atleo of the Assembly of First Nations (on the topic of First Nations education). Personally, my favourite ACCUTE conferences are the ones held in smaller places, because people tend to stay together to talk and to socialize, and the conference builds up a wonderful *esprit de corps*. I hope as many of you as possible are planning to attend.

If any ACCUTE members have questions about the work of the Federation, or have concerns or feedback they would like to share, I'd be delighted to be contacted.

– **Heather Murray**