



## WINTER 2015 NEWSLETTER

President: Jason Haslam; Vice President: Lyn Bennett; Coordinator: Lynne Evans; Research Assistant: Emma Skagen  
Email: info.accute@gmail.com

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Jason Haslam

Happy New Year from the ACCUTE office in Halifax (a thoroughly snow-bound Halifax as this goes to press). As January marches on, we're looking forward to a busy but productive term as we get ready for the next conference. As I write this, we have received the vetting reports on all of the proposals, and have begun what is in some ways the most creative and enjoyable part of hosting ACCUTE: putting papers together into panels, working to develop themes and theories, alliances, and debates across the range of our varied discipline. Once this preliminary sorting is done, we will be contacting everyone who submitted a proposal, as well as all panel organizers. More on the conference below, but we will

keep you updated on its progress.

Speaking of panels, I also wanted to let you know about the suite of panels we have planned on professional issues: with panels from the Committee for Professional Concerns, member-organized panels, a CACE panel, and at least one executive-sponsored panel, we will be generating meaningful discussion of topics ranging from public intellectualism to the continuing dearth of tenure-track hiring, among many others. One plan that the ACCUTE Executive has discussed, in consultation with CACE, involves hosting a set of panels that will address some practical responses to declining institutional funding for English departments in particular and

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humanities programs more generally. Discussions of enrollment, department configuration, degree structures, and other issues are on the table for these panels. These are early plans yet, but we hope these panels will represent the initial phase of a larger discussion, leading to both advocacy statements and practical responses at the departmental and institutional levels (in terms of student recruitment, for example, something Executive member Lisa Surridge addresses in this newsletter). Many of you will be having these discussions in your own departments and institutions, and I suspect we've all had our small successes as well as ... well, not successes. What we want is to provide some space to share those discussions on a national level so that we can all benefit from each others' experiences.

Speaking of practical solutions, I have one other significant update for you. As many of you know, the past several incarnations of the ACCUTE Executive have discussed a particular set of issues involving insurance and ACCUTE's official "status," for lack of a better word, as a not-for-profit association. Below, I lay out these issues and how the current Executive has been working on them this past term. I'm going to end my "president's message" here, though, and continue that discussion under a separate heading. Suffice to sign off by saying that the Halifax office's first year at the ACCUTE helm has been and continues to be an exciting, challenging, and enjoyable one, and we look forward to celebrating it with you in Ottawa!

In the meantime, you can read more about professional issues on the ACCUTE blog at [English Matters](#).

## A MEDITATION ON ASSOCIATION, INCORPORATION, AND CONSTITUTION (OH MY!); OR, WHO'S DOING WHAT WHERE NOW? – JASON HASLAM

We all know what ACCUTE is. According to our constitution, ACCUTE's mandate is "to promote the interests of those teaching and studying English language and literatures in Canadian colleges and universities" and to do so in a variety of ways (disseminating research, discussing professional issues, and so on).

But what does it mean to be an "association"? That's the sort of deceptively simple-sounding question that leads those of us of a certain mindset down the rabbit hole of Robert's Rules for hours at a time. Clearly it's a governance and structural question, in part. But it's also a *legal* question, and that's what leads me to write this column in an attempt to define what we are now and how that existence is recognized. Consider this an ACCUTE ontology, I suppose.

**Currently, ACCUTE is an unincorporated, unregistered not-for-profit association;** that might sound like a formal designation, but the "unregistered" part has particular effects: in basic terms, it means that the association operates more or less as a group of friends, with the Executive members taking on the responsibility of handling the finances, including those of ESC, and other operations. Because of that, whenever one of us signs a contract, we're doing so personally, exposing whoever signs to certain legal risk, but also exposing all of the individuals on the Executive as well as the association's holdings, such as they are.

Now, that sounds scarier than it generally has been. Historically, executive members have undertaken this work as part of their contractually obligated professional service under the terms of

their employment at a University, or as graduate training in the case of our student rep; that means, we suspect, that most of us have been protected by our universities, unions, or faculty associations. And, indeed, when any weird and wonderful issues have arisen in the past, the ACCUTE Executive and the ESC office have been able to rely on university services, including university lawyers.

But, that relationship is less clear in these days of the **Corporate University**. As many of you who work with journals or other associations know, universities seem less willing to materially support this type of work than they once were. Moreover, not all of our executive members are protected by universities, and we may begin to see wider representation on the Executive from those members, in part because of the funding issues raised in the president's column above (we're thinking here specifically of CAF members, especially when not employed, but also members without unions or faculty associations, independent scholars, and so on).

Things have also changed at the level of ACCUTE. Gone are the days when there was very little money involved: the digital aggregators for ESC have increased our revenue substantially (thankfully, given the loss of the SSHRC travel grants). Those funds bring with them other legal responsibilities, such as the need to sign US tax forms in order **to avoid significant portions of the revenue being withheld** by the US government.

All of this means that Executive members are continually signing legal documents, ostensibly for ACCUTE, but taking on for themselves and the other Executive members the legal responsibility and liability pertaining to those contracts. This risk is more than theoretical at this point; as Heather Murray noted when she was President, some academic associations have found themselves on the wrong end of lawsuits, and ESC and ACCUTE could be named in the sorts of lawsuits taken up against digital aggregators.

Having seen some of this approaching, the ACCUTE Executive has long been discussing—since at

least the last Toronto office—the need to buy insurance, both to insure the association's continued existence and to protect the members of the Executive. The Federation has negotiated an agreement with an insurer to provide such insurance at a reasonable rate.

**But here's the rub:** in order to purchase that insurance, **ACCUTE needs to be an incorporated not-for-profit entity**, officially registered with the Canadian government and the Canada Revenue Agency. When we first raised this issue with the Federation, we were told that ACCUTE was one of only a few of the Federation's member associations that were not so incorporated.

**Long story short:** The current executive has unanimously reaffirmed our previous mandate to incorporate ACCUTE as a registered not-for-profit, and so the Halifax office has redoubled our efforts to do just that.

**What does registering as a not-for-profit mean for ACCUTE?** It's really a matter of mitigating risk and ensuring our ability to continue exactly as we have been, but it also means that we can operate in the world as an association, rather than as a collection of individuals: ACCUTE could sign contracts, rather than individual members of the Executive doing so. This ability **would make ACCUTE more autonomous**, more able to manage its own financial and other affairs, and less subject to the whims of host universities.

But, it **doesn't really change much of anything on the ground**. ACCUTE is a not-for-profit; we've just never registered as such. At the level of the general membership, **you likely won't notice a single change:** the conference, our professional activities, our journal and newsletter, our website, etc., will all continue as they are now. At the level of the Executive, we'll have a few more formal tasks each year: for example, filing forms to note changes to the Executive and to renew our status; filing a tax form if we bring in over a certain amount of revenue in a given year; and ensuring that ACCUTE and ESC provide a unified set of financial documents at the

end of the year. With the exception of the latter, all of this will be done online, or through an agent, and will take very little time and cost very little money.

Meanwhile, the Executive and ESC have been working closely together on our financial reporting. This task will involve having a third party examine our books to provide a "Notice to Reader," an unaudited statement prepared by an accountant. This is not, however, an unprecedented practice, given that third-party bookkeeping was standard operating procedure for ACCUTE in the 1980s and earlier (we're not sure when it stopped, but prior to its last stay at Dalhousie, ACCUTE reportedly used a Price Waterhouse office in Toronto to do the books). So, we will actually be returning to past practice rather than introducing something new.

Last but not least, tied to this task of incorporation is the review and revision of the current **ACCUTE Constitution**, which has also been on the table for a little while, and was put before the membership at the most recent AGM as an upcoming task. Such review and subsequent revision is necessary because the Constitution has grown somewhat "organically" over time, and so there are some outdated portions, some contradictions, and so on. But, it also turns out to be necessary as part of our incorporation to have a fully functional, properly formed Constitution. That has also been taking some time, but we hope to bring a revised Constitution to the membership for ratification at the next AGM. Again, this won't entail any changes for ACCUTE: in fact, it will bring our somewhat outdated Constitution in line with ACCUTE processes as we know them.

I've written this column for two specific reasons. First, we want to inform the membership that, sometime before the conference, we plan to circulate a revised constitution for ratification at our AGM (if things slow down due to legal or accounting bureaucracy—or unending Snowmageddon—we'll let you know). Second, we simply want to open the window to some of the... well, **rather stuffy** work we've been doing here in the office. This likely isn't

particularly exciting work from the membership's perspective, but the preparations have been a bit of a bear for both the ACCUTE and ESC offices. In fact, this task has taken up the vast majority of the office's time. From meeting with lawyers and accountants, to putting the books in an order that will be legible to the Canada Revenue Agency, this has been a busy term, and one that looks to continue for a while in this New Year. When the task is done, and we discuss it at the AGM, I'll have several thanks, **and likely drinks**, to offer to our friends and colleagues in both offices, and I hope you'll join me in doing so!

Once the task is complete (hopefully following the AGM in Ottawa), we hope to be able to recover some of this time in order to spend more effort on the types of public and professional work mentioned in my president's report—in fact, I have a long overdue update for you on events I attended concerning the "future of universities" back before this work began, not to mention some thoughts on the ongoing Dalhousie Dentistry situation and related issues of university governance, which those of you who follow me on twitter (@JazzlamHazzlam) have been hearing about. But these other "background" structural tasks have become increasingly pressing over the years, and **thanks to the work of previous offices and to the management team at ESC**, the Executive is in the best position it's been in for a few years to move on this vital issue.

As always, feel free to get in touch with me at Jason.Haslam@dal.ca or at info.accute@gmail.com with any questions or thoughts.





## VICE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Lyn Bennett

We're all excited to begin 2015, the year of "Capital Ideas" in Ottawa. Your ACCUTE office is busy putting together what is shaping up to be a truly inspiring program. As well as plenary speakers Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Mary Chapman and some exciting panels featuring members new and seasoned, this year's conference will also offer a number of sessions highlighting issues important to everyone in our discipline.

And, of course, we're all looking forward to enjoying our nation's beautiful capital in late spring. Though Tulip Festival (<http://tulipfestival.ca/>) will be officially over when Congress convenes, Ottawa's millions of tulips may still be in bloom.

Ottawa U also offers a great location close to the Byward Market, the Rideau Canal, and Canada's Parliament Buildings. You may also want to take a stroll to the eight-flight Ottawa Locks, where you can take a \$5 water taxi ride to the Museum of Civilization or hop on a water tour of the Ottawa River.

The Byward Market is also home to the Mercury Lounge, the venue we've been lucky enough to

secure for ACCUTE's renowned Dance Party. The Mercury is within easy walking distance of the University and its residences as well as Congress hotels. Before the dance, members might want to take advantage of the Market's many eating establishments, which range from Dunn's Deli (where you can get genuine Montreal-style smoked meat), to the Heart & Crown Irish Pub (where you can watch hurling on the big screen), to the Blue Cactus (home of all things Mexicana), to the cutting-edge Side Door (an elegant space featuring imaginative fusion cuisine), and everything in between.

When planning your trip, be sure also to check out the hotels Congress organizers have blocked for the event. (Find information about nearby hotel and university residence accommodation here: <http://congress2015.ca/plan-your-trip/accommodations.>)

Registration for Congress 2015 is now open, and this is an ACCUTE gathering you will not want to miss!

# COORDINATOR'S MESSAGE

Lynne Evans

We had a very busy fall at the ACCUTE office. Our introduction of online submission forms for ACCUTE's 2015 conference was very well received by our membership, and submissions are up substantially from previous years. We are currently collecting vettors' reports, and expect to advise members of the status of their submissions by the end of February. On that score, plans are well underway for a draft program, and, most importantly, our dance venue has been arranged! Conference registration is now open, and we encourage members to take advantage of early bird rates by registering prior to March 31. You can access the registration website [here](#).

We published a number of non-ACCUTE CFPs as well as job postings on our ACCUTE website this fall. You can keep up-to-date with these postings by following us on Twitter (@ACCUTEEnglish) or by subscribing to our blog (simply go to our website [ [www.accute.ca](http://www.accute.ca) ] and click on the "English Matters: The ACCUTE Blog" tab. Once on the Blog page, add your email at the bottom of the page, and click the "follow" button).

In housekeeping news, the Federation's planned upgrade to our membership database has been delayed due to unforeseen complications with their system. The Federation is working hard to get the system up and ready in the first quarter of this year. They have asked us to extend their apologies for any inconvenience experienced by our membership. We'll keep you updated as things progress. We have also spent a great deal of our time this past quarter preparing to move ACCUTE to official not-for-profit status. This process has required changes to our accounting procedures as well as the completion of certain legal documentation.

Although the process is not complete, the good news is that we are well on our way!



## HUMANITIES IN THE CRISIS ZONE

Lisa Surridge, Executive Member-at-Large

Falling numbers. Losses in the double digits, several years in a row.

No, that's not gas prices. It represented Humanities student numbers at my university between 2010 and 2012. The bottom was falling out of our enrollment numbers, and we needed to change things fast.

In 2013, we did make changes. The result? In 2014, UVic became one of the few Humanities faculties in the country with rising numbers. Here's how we achieved that.

First, we threw out assumptions—and pride. The Dean and I sat down in a closed-door meeting with UVic student recruiters. We asked them what they heard from high-school students about Humanities, what we were doing wrong, and what we needed to change. We asked them to be honest.

At that point, one of the recruiters' hands started shaking. We knew that what we were about to hear was not going to be good.



They told us that high-school students did not know how to map careers onto Humanities courses, that students did not understand our program titles (they looked for *Communications* and found *Professional Writing*, for example), and

that our requirement for a second language up to Grade 11 was driving keen Humanities-oriented students into Social Sciences. We listened. And we thanked them.

I also sat down with every chair in the Humanities, and asked them what their units were already doing to recruit and retain students.

IN 2013-14, LISA SERVED AS  
ADVISOR TO UVIC'S DEAN OF  
HUMANITIES ON ISSUES OF  
STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND  
RETENTION

Some departments had already developed excellent recruitment strategies. They held welcome events; they served pizza; they had great student-centered websites; they made posters to promote courses; they supported social networks among students in all years of their program; they invited students to represent them at all recruitment events; and they made sure their invitations were inclusive, so that the students represented the ethnic, racial, and other minority communities of BC.

Other departments simply supposed—as I myself had done for many years—that the job of faculty was to teach and do research. Student recruitment was for “someone else.”

What I learned last year was the force of collaboration: the Dean, Associate Dean, Chairs, and I threw the weight of our energy and a small recruitment budget of \$10,000 into working with recruiters. We followed the model of successful departments and shared their strategies; we identified superb teachers to model lectures for

visiting students (making sure they took an outgoing student with them); we hand-picked Humanities "student leaders" to represent UVic; we hired visual-design students to make and distribute posters for Humanities courses; we hired students to help us create social-media messaging that students could relate to; we overhauled our website; we held majors fairs; we served cookies; we held a course preview event for every department; we worked with professors whose courses were under-enrolled to raise their numbers; we worked with Co-op and Career services to provide career training and networking opportunities for Humanities students; we held career panels; we renamed *Professional Writing* as *Communications*; and—oh, yes—we dropped our Grade 11 second-language requirement, perhaps the most important move of all. (Not that we saw a second language as unimportant, but our language departments assured us that they were happy to teach students from scratch.)

I can't speak for my Dean, but the most I had hoped for was to stem the tide of losses. Just staying even would have been a win in my eyes. But we did more. Our first-year admissions from high schools rose by 20%.

I CAME TO SEE THINGS  
DIFFERENTLY. A GREAT  
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I'm not saying we did everything right or that your university should do exactly what we did. I am saying that we all need to radically rethink the

way we see our position in the university and what we think we know about recruitment.

In Louise Penny's novels, the humble but brilliant Inspector Armand Gamache teaches his young police recruits four key sentences: *I'm sorry. I was wrong. I need help. I don't know.*

In the Humanities recruitment, we needed two of them: *I don't know*, and *I need help*. We needed advice and help from students, co-op units, career advisors, and recruiters. Most of all, we needed help from our own faculty members.

Professors in the twenty-first century have to be more than great researchers and teachers. We have to be the public face of the university. I suspect that many people reading this article will resist this message. I imagine that a lot of you are thinking "*This is not my job; the administration should not download recruiting onto me; I am already overworked.*"

I came to see things differently. A great university is more than teachers, more than researchers. First and foremost, it consists of great students. I am happy to see myself as someone who could bring those students to my institution.

Last year was one of the most rewarding of my career—and the role of recruitment adviser? Simply the best job ever.



## CRUEL OPTIMISM, MEET COMPASSION FATIGUE

Erin Wunker, CAF Representative

All sorts of clichés tend to surface when I have tried to write my Contract Academic Faculty (CAF) representative column. “Preaching to the choir” and “like banging my head against a wall” are just two of the extremes. And yet, the status of Contract Academic Faculty is an integral piece of puzzle we might call “Building Sustainable Conditions for an Ethical Life in the Academy.” Admittedly, this is not a good name for a puzzle, but I think it makes my point. Talking about improving working conditions for CAF colleagues is imperative and it induces what Development Studies calls compassion fatigue. You know the feeling: you’re confronted with staggering facts about something for which you care deeply, and you are overwhelmed to the point of stasis. In a slightly different context, Lauren Berlant calls this state of entropy “cruel optimism.” You are embroiled in the machinery of cruel optimism when you maintain your present, untenable state because you’ve been conditioned to think persistence will equal forward movement. I wager most of us can conjure up examples of cruel optimism in the academy just as easily as we can point to moments of compassion fatigue.

Thoughts of cruel optimism and compassion fatigue were on my mind as I attended the MLA earlier this month. I had been invited to participate on a panel entitled “Contingent Academic Labor and Unionization,” organized by Heidi Tiedemann Darroch and the MLA Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession. When Heidi invited me to participate on the panel back in January 2014, I

was checking my email in the Mount Allison Faculty Association strike headquarters before I headed out for picket duty. I was on a 12-month contract at Mount Allison, and the invitation was so timely I couldn’t help but accept. I am usually more careful about planning my commitments. That’s one of the things you learn to do as CAF — plan ahead for whether (often not) there will be money to travel to conferences. This time, though, I didn’t plan. I said yes.

Erin reports on this year’s MLA, where she represented our CAF colleagues.

Fast forward to January 2015. I am an under-employed sessional faculty member at Dalhousie, where I teach one year-long course but get paid for only one semester. It is a team-taught course, so the rationale is that my co-teacher and I each teach only one semester when we actually attend each other’s lectures throughout the year. I am not a member of the Dalhousie Faculty Association and, because I already “did” my semester, I no longer have a pay cheque or access to travel funds. I was able to attend the MLA only because my colleagues on the ACCUTE Executive Committee decided that it was important to send me. This decision underscores ACCUTE’s renewed attention and commitment to the CAF situation, and for that I am deeply grateful. As I sat with my co-panelists at the MLA, I felt appreciation for ACCUTE’s support, and excitement for the upcoming discussion.

My paper at the MLA narrativized my experience of being a CAF member at a university on strike. My experience, though not unique, was

formative. It was also devastating. My paper received positive responses, though one in particular stands out. As I was leaving the panel, a man walked up to me, shook my hand, and said, "I hate what is happening to you. I'm so sorry. I listened to your paper and I didn't know what to say. Good luck." I relay this anecdote not because I particularly enjoy talking about my CAF status to my colleagues in a national forum, but because this response is quintessential. I feel strongly that tenured faculty members, like contract faculty, *care deeply* about the CAF crisis, and yet they too suffer from either cruel optimism or compassion fatigue. We need a plan to move us forward.

WE NEED TO ORGANIZE ON  
OUR OWN CAMPUSES AND  
COMMUNITIES, AND WE NEED  
ALSO TO COLLABORATE AT A  
NATIONAL LEVEL.

My co-panelists both work in the American system. One is a contract worker and organizer for the United Steel Workers of America, the other a full professor. What quickly emerged out of our presentations was the fundamental differences between the American and Canadian context for academic organizing, unionization, and even contingent labour. We panelists worked to try and find a common language for the different iterations of contract faculty as well as the different modes of organization. For example, the metro-organizing strategies posited by one American panelist based in a large US city are brilliant, but unfeasible in most Canadian university communities because of the sheer difference in population. In the United States there is a national faculty union and, while we have CAUT, it cannot, by definition, operate in the same way.

I left the panel with the realization that if we are going to effect real, material, systemic change for

contract faculty in Canada, we need to do so at the macro- and micro-levels. We need to organize on our own campuses and communities, and we need also to collaborate at a national level. We need to draw on the work that has already been done, though that requires a centralizing of records, documents, and action plans. Further, there needs to be sustained attention to this project, which is a tall order given that a CAF member almost always lacks the certainty to plan for the long term. The refrain I heard over and over again from audience members was "I teach at University X this year. I don't know which city/province/state/country I will be in next year, or if I will get work at all." Instability is a community issue. It affects individuals, departments, programs, universities, and the entire post-secondary education project. It is daunting to think about, exhausting to live with, and demoralizing to discuss in a public forum. And yet discuss, deal with, and address we must.

I will admit that I left the MLA not with a national action plan for Canada, but with the renewed recognition that the status of Canada's CAF is central to the project of retooling the Humanities, to borrow a phrase from Smaro Kamboureli and Daniel Coleman. As the CAF representative for ACCUTE, I welcome suggestions for moving forward in a sustainable manner. You can reach me at [erin.wunker@gmail.com](mailto:erin.wunker@gmail.com).



Your ACCUTE office sends a special thanks to **Lisa Surridge** and **Erin Wunker**, who took time from their busy schedules to write about matters important to everyone in our discipline.

As Jason mentions in his column, issues of retention, employment, and the changing role of the humanities will also be featured at Congress 2015, where the ACCUTE conference program will include a suite of panels on professional issues, including those organized by the Committee for Professional Concerns as well as a number of member-organized panels, a CACE panel, and at least one executive-sponsored panel. At Ottawa U, we will be generating meaningful discussion of topics ranging from public intellectualism to the continuing dearth of tenure-track hiring.

We hope that you'll join us for what is sure to be an inspiring meeting for us all. In the meantime, you can read about professional issues on the ACCUTE Blog at [English Matters](#).

-- Jason, Lyn, and Lynne

ACCUTE's mandate is "to promote the interests of those teaching and studying English language and literatures in Canadian colleges and universities."

### The ACCUTE Executive

Jason Haslam (President)  
Lyn Bennett (Vice-President)  
Lynne Evans (ACCUTE Coordinator)  
Stephen Slemon (Past President)  
Nico Dicecco (Grad Caucus President)  
Erin Wunker (CAF Representative)  
Lily Cho (Member-at-Large, Professional Concerns)  
Lisa Surridge (Member-at-Large, Priestley Prize)  
Joel Faflak (Member-at-large)  
Mike O'Driscoll (Co-editor, ESC)  
Mark Simpson (Co-editor, ESC)  
Bryce Traister (CACE President)

### With thanks...

The ACCUTE office runs only with the help of the ACCUTE executive and past offices, as well as members, but also with the help of colleagues, friends, family, and random strangers we accost on the street. They all deserve our thanks as we get started on our first year. We need to thank the following for financial, material, and moral support at Dalhousie:

Rob Summerby-Murray and the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
Current and recent Chairs, David McNeil and Trevor Ross, and all of our colleagues in the Department of English