

FACULTY CIRCUIT

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER of ACIFA • September 2006



Photo by Rita Long

ACIFA Spring Conference delegates are entertained by their more musically inclined colleagues, who broke out in song in a spontaneously arranged acoustic set.

ACIFA conference a hit

By Brett Bergie

This past spring, over two hundred academic staff members from around the province descended upon the mountainous resort town of Jasper, Alberta, to attend the annual ACIFA Spring Conference. The annual conference is designed to provide

an abundance of opportunities for academic staff to attend sessions and workshops to learn from their colleagues about teaching techniques, professional development initiatives, and academic staff labour issues. The

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Advanced education report released

By Brett Bergie

This past spring, the Alberta government released its long anticipated strategic plan for the post-secondary education system. The strategy was initiated

a year earlier by then Advanced Education Minister Dave Hancock, and it was coordinated by a group of government appointed individuals, who

formed the A Learning Alberta Steering Committee.

Through strategic discussions with a host of post-secondary

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past spring conference featured a full program: Thirty-five sessions, three keynote speakers, and daily opportunities for attendees to socialize and network with their peers.

The conference sessions covered a vast array of topics. In one session, Carolyn Miller presented strategies to deal with difficult people and approaches for increasing one's sense of personal power. Another session, titled “Creativity: how to recognize and encourage it in your classroom,” introduced strategies to foster the learning process and to stimulate creative thought. Presenters Karla Kordyban and Dianne McDonald also explored novel ways to develop independent thinkers in the classroom.

Attendees of other sessions received valuable information on current and ongoing government policy changes that are impacting the post-secondary education system. In one of these sessions, presenters Don Fisher and

David Hyttenrauch explored the ramifications of the government's recent changes to the *Post-Secondary Learning Act*, which affects academic governance at some of the province's colleges and technical institutes.

Conference participants were also invited to unwind and explore Jasper by foot and canoe. In one such session, author and outdoors enthusiast, Ben Gadd took delegates out along some of Jasper's finest hiking trails. Gadd, one of the conference's keynote speakers, spoke beforehand about his passion for spending time in nature. During his talk, he detailed some of his encounters with Jasper's wildlife, including a few close encounters with grizzly bears. Surprisingly, his vivid descriptions about the “swish of grizzly paws in the tall grass” dissuaded no one from attending the hike.

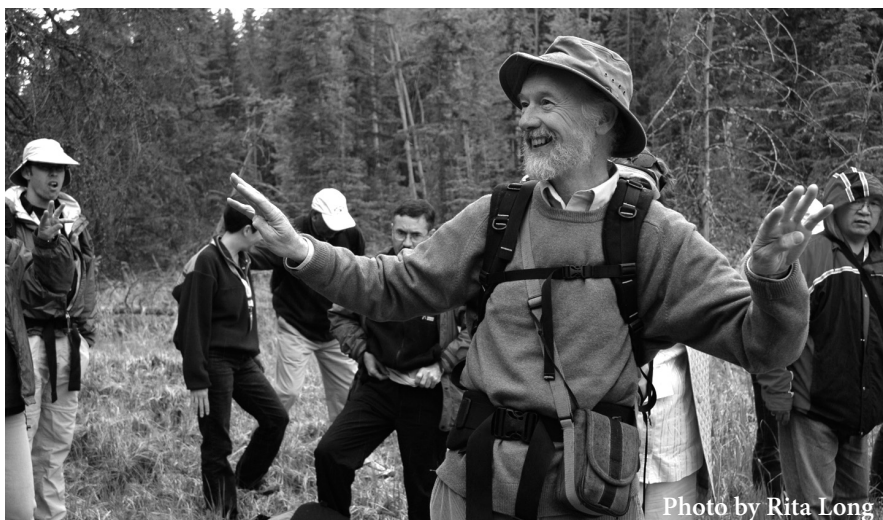
An account of the conference would not be complete without also mentioning those times of good, frivolous fun. In one instance, a conference participant spontaneously performed a

handstand in a canoe while her peers gazed with amazement. In another instance, several faculty members hastily arranged an impromptu acoustic, musical performance that featured guitars, horns, a harp, and several vocalists. This performance is captured in a photograph on the front page of this newsletter.

One of the social events—a barbeque—was hosted at the Pyramid Riding Stables. There, colleagues assembled either under a huge tent, or they were situated around an open, crackling fire inside a grand gazebo. As evening hours passed by, most delegates were engaged in steady conversation while others bravely took to the stage to entertain their colleagues with their own karaoke renditions of musical classics from the eighties.

ACIFA received much positive feedback from participants on the spring conference. ACIFA thanks the staff and executive from the Keyano College Faculty Association, in particular, who hosted the conference with great enthusiasm and energy. ACIFA's own Lynn Devlin must also be recognized for her hard work and dedication toward ensuring a smooth-functioning and successful conference.

The 2007 ACIFA Spring Conference will be hosted by the Lethbridge Community College Faculty Association in Canmore, Alberta, from May 27 to May 30. Please watch the ACIFA website, and editions of this newsletter, in the winter months for more details. The Annual Spring Conference is open to all faculty members and their guests.



Ben Gadd, author and outdoors enthusiast, leads a group of faculty members in the Jasper wilderness.

From the President's desk

Greetings ACIFA members

By David Purkis

As many of you will have heard by now, I was elected president of ACIFA at the annual general meeting held in Jasper, Alberta, last May. I took office July first, but outside of a meeting with the Minister of Advanced Education, I have not had an opportunity to

do much yet.

I am trying hard to familiarize myself with the many issues ACIFA is concerned with, and in future issues of this column, I hope to address some of them. If any of you have concerns or ideas for the executive, you can reach

me through the ACIFA office or at 780-849-8649.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the people who nominated and elected me, and I will work hard to justify your faith in me. So long for now.

ACIFA EXECUTIVE

2006-2007

(Following elections at the ACIFA Annual General Meeting in May)

President

Past President

VP Negotiations

VP Professional Affairs

Treasurer

Secretary

David Purkis (Northern Lakes College)

David Milner (Grant MacEwan College)

Mike Durbenuik (Medicine Hat College)

Glen van't Wout (Keyano College)

Doug Frattini (Grande Prairie Regional College)

Dale McCarthy (Bow Valley College)

Contact the executive through the ACIFA office



ARTA Retiree Benefits Available

ACIFA has an arrangement with the Alberta Retired Teachers' Association (ARTA), which enables retired ACIFA member college and institute instructors to purchase group benefits through ARTA.

Benefit features include: extended health, dental, life, travel, and hospitalization insurance.

Retirees, or those considering retirement, can obtain a comprehensive information package by contacting the ACIFA office at:

780-423-4440 or email devlinl@acifa.ca

Further questions about specific details of the benefit plan may be directed to the contacts provided in the information package.

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education stakeholders and limited consultations with the public, the Steering Committee devised a series of recommendations to guide the advancement of the post-secondary education system. ACIFA participated fully in the *Learning Alberta* review process; the documents ACIFA submitted to the Steering Committee are each available on ACIFA’s website: www.acifa.ca.

The major shortcoming of the report—“The Final Report of the Steering Committee”—is that it offers a highly general vision, and it lacks a clear plan to meet the policy goals set out in its vision. In the absence of a clear plan, the report’s objectives and goals, however worthy, are effectively weakened.

The major shortcoming of the report—“The Final Report of the Steering Committee”—is that it offers a highly general vision, and it lacks a clear plan to meet the policy goals set out in its vision.

The report outlines six key goals:

- Over 90% of Albertans will score in the upper tiers of international adult literacy measures. Today, 60% of adult Albertans are at this level in reading, and just over half of adults are at this level in performing mathematical functions;

- Alberta will have the highest participation rate in post-secondary studies. Today Alberta has the third lowest participation rate among other provinces and ranks below the national average;

- Alberta will have the highest participation rate in lifelong learning. Today we rank fourth in the country;

- Alberta must be one of the top two jurisdictions for research activity in the natural and physical sciences as well as social sciences/humanities. Currently, Alberta institutions rank in the middle among their peers in research and monetary awards;

- Alberta must have the best support programs for graduate students. Today we lag behind other jurisdictions;

- Alberta’s public post-secondary institutions will rank within the best in their class nationally. This will require investing in talent by

attracting and retaining outstanding faculty, staff, and students to enable world-class research, knowledge creation and innovation.

These six key objectives set the tone of the Steering Committee’s report. Many of the recommendations contained within are equally ambitious and worthy, but they must be placed in the context of the report’s final statement: “...Alberta, the land of opportunity, is well positioned with the right citizens

and the right incentives to work together to accomplish these recommendations by 2025.”

ACIFA has expressed its qualified support for the report’s major goals. In a letter to Advanced Education Minister Denis Herard, ACIFA’s president, David Purkis, wrote, “The report identifies six key goals, each of which articulates the appropriate values and objectives that a modern, world-class post-secondary education system ought to be striving to achieve.” The letter went on to say, however, “ACIFA is concerned that the important and creative input brought to bear by the public, stakeholders, and others on key policy questions might be compromised in the absence of a clearer policy framework. ACIFA believes that a critical requirement for the review’s success is to create clear policy outcomes and an action plan to meet the objectives, recommendations and goals articulated in the report...”

On the matter of tuition, ACIFA achieved some significant policy objectives. Throughout the system review process, ACIFA advocated for the uncoupling of tuition revenues and the net operating expenditures of the post-secondary education institutions as a measure of determining rates of tuition growth. ACIFA also advocated that the provision of tuition relief to students must also oblige the government to fully compensate institutions with new, ongoing, public funding to ensure rising operating costs can be met without scaling back operations and adversely affecting the overall quality of the system.

On tuition, the Steering Committee recommended that “fees be rolled back to the level set by institutions prior to the tuition rebates and any future increases should be linked to a more moderate level of growth (i.e. Consumer Price Index).” This recommendation includes the critically important proviso that “[a]ccommodating annual inflationary cost pressures experienced by post-secondary institutions should be met through government funding rather than student tuition fees.” Additionally, the Steering

Committee recognized the relationship between enhancing public funding levels to the system to safeguard and promote quality. The report outlines that government funding is critical to “provide stability and encourage strategic planning.”

The report also calls for increased post-secondary education participation of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people, rural populations, and people with disabilities. Some emphasis is placed on increasing spaces and supports for graduate students, attracting and retaining top

faculty, and increasing applied research capacity.

Again, ACIFA believes that the Steering Committee’s report articulates the appropriate values and objectives to foster the advancement of the post-secondary education system. However, the plan to meet these goals is ambiguous. Since the report’s release, ACIFA has been advocating for the establishment of a clear action plan with a more meaningful timeline to guide the development of post-secondary education policy in this province.

The “Final Report of the Steering Committee” and its supporting documents can be obtained at:
<http://www.advancededucation.gov.ab.ca/learningalberta/>



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Members' feedback drives introduction of *Faculty Circuit* online edition

By Brett Bergie

Late last year, ACIFA redesigned the layout of its *Faculty Circuit* newsletter. This new format features more creative elements and graphics to balance with columns of text, and it introduces more top copy on the front page, which requires readers to turn to subsequent pages to read onward. While this new layout works well for those readers who handle the print copy, others found that reading the electronic file from a computer screen was an arduous task.

In response, ACIFA has worked over the summer months to create a new, innovative tool to address the expressed readability concerns as well as to make the

newsletter more easily accessible to individual members. ACIFA is very pleased then to introduce its new, online edition of the *Faculty Circuit* newsletter.

The new, online format will not replace the print edition. Rather, the *Faculty Circuit* Online will expand upon the copy included in the print edition by also publishing special, exclusive web-only content and features. ACIFA will continue to create and distribute print editions of the newsletter to each of the local associations during the first week of each month from September through to May; the website will be updated according to the same schedule. Members can navigate

to the online ACIFA newsletter by pointing their Internet browsers to www.acifa.ca and clicking on the appropriate link.

ACIFA hopes that members find the news items included in both the newsletter's print and online editions to be of interest, and informative of the association's activities. As always, ACIFA welcomes any comments and suggestions from the members on this new web resource (and the print edition). Contacting the *Faculty Circuit* has never been easier: a new e-mail link is embedded in the navigation menu bar on the right side of the new *Faculty Circuit* website.



Introducing...

Faculty Circuit
Online Edition

Available

Anytime • Anywhere

www.acifa.ca/newsletter.htm

ACIFA Award for Innovation in Teaching

By Brett Bergie, with files provided by Portage College Faculty Association

On an annual basis, ACIFA recognizes creative and effective teaching practices by awarding an instructor, or a team of instructors, with the ACIFA Award for Innovation in Teaching, sponsored by Johnson Inc. The Award was established to recognize and encourage the use of innovative and creative teaching methods that lead to improved and engaged student learning. Member faculty associations undertake their own selection processes and nominate an individual or team for consideration by the ACIFA Awards Committee, which makes the final selection.

The Award, which is accompanied by a cheque for \$1,500, was presented at this year's ACIFA Spring Conference in Jasper to Calvin Leckie and Cathy MacGillivray, both of whom teach at Portage College. A further \$500 was awarded to the recipients' faculty association, which brought forward the winning submission.

ACIFA recognized Calvin Leckie and Cathy MacGillivray for the work they perform with Portage College's Academic Foundations 4 (AF4) program. The AF4 program is a combination of academic study and personal and career development. The program is primarily designed for mature adults, who come from a range of academic preparedness for post-secondary education study.

One of the central themes in the

career development portion of the AF4 program is looking at, and appreciating, the students' career goals. Once students identify and establish career goals, they respond positively to learning that will help them reach their goals. The programs' success, however, can in part be attributed to the steady focus on the individual learner, and building an atmosphere in which the student can trust.

Developing a welcoming atmosphere involves providing coffee for students, coordinating introductory activities, introducing students to one another, and offering instructor biographies. One technique that individual instructors employ to meet the individual needs of students is the use of personal interviews, which are conducted during the first month of classes.

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ACIFA Award for Innovation and Teaching recipients (from left), Calvin Leckie and Cathy MacGillivray. Cathy Short, of Johnson Inc. was on hand to present the Award.

“award”

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Each student meets with both of his or her AF4 instructors. The use of personal interviews, while time consuming, allows students to really open up in what for many is a safer, more secure environment than the classroom. These instructors use this opportunity to appreciate where the student is coming from, where he or she is headed in life, and what barriers the student may be up against—academically and personally. This information is also gathered so that instructors can better tailor instruction toward the needs of the student.

Individual counselling sessions with instructors may follow personal interviews. Instructors draw on a number of resources—AADAC, Mental Health Services, daycare organizations, Legal Aid, and the RCMP—to resolve what are often very serious problems.

Speaking from experience, and with consideration on how students benefit, one AF4 instructor describes the program this way: “By coming into the Academic Foundations 4 class, it gave them a chance to sort of work things out, and just get back into the groove of going back to school. They also find that their self-confidence really improves. For a lot of them, they had really negative experiences in school in the past, and when they come back here they so often think that that’s the way it is. Once they’ve been here for a while, they discover that, nope, it’s not, and they do have potential, and they can do well if they want to.”

Important Dates

2006

September

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Executive Council

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Presidents’ Council

November

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Executive Council

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Professional Affairs Committee

Negotiations Advisory Committee

Editorial

The views expressed in Faculty Circuit are those of individuals and do not necessarily reflect ACIFA’s policies and positions.

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