



HUMANITIES AND PUBLIC LIFE CONFERENCE

OCTOBER 21-22-23

ALL TALKS WILL BE IN 5B.16

HUMANITIES AND PUBLIC LIFE: PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE

Monday, October 21

10:00-11:30 Keynote Address: *The Hidden Reality: Media Coverage and the Nursing Profession*

In this presentation, Sandy Summers, RN, MSN, MPH, will take a critical look at the nursing profession today and help us to understand how the portrayal of nursing in the media has contributed to the devaluing of nursing's unique knowledge and role within the health care system. She will propose strategies to counteract these perceptions and take action to promote the vital role of nursing within the health care system in order to strengthen nursing practice, teaching and research, and improve the health care system.

Sandra Summers is the founder of the advocacy group "The Truth About Nursing" and the author of the book *Saving Lives: Why the Media's Portrayal of Nursing Puts Us All at Risk*. **Fiona Hanley**, who will be chairing this session, teaches nursing at Dawson College.

12:00-1:00 Dating, Courting, Having Children and how the Humanities Can Help...or Hinder

In the wilderness of the animal kingdom, relationships seem to be uncomplicated; mating season arrives, instincts take over and the next generation is assured. We humans do not have it nearly so easy; human consciousness and the experience of free will stop things from being quite so simple. As a result, we often find ourselves in situations within our relationships where the correct course of action does not seem clear at all...what to do? Courses in the humanities examine issues pertaining to human behavior and thought and so it is only natural that philosophers would address the issue of relationships. It would seem, then, that the study of humanities may therefore help with some of the relationship conundrums we all face! Dating and courting today is not the same as it was in the past, however; science has changed the backdrop of the dating scene. The study of genes and breakthroughs in neuroscience has challenged some of our preconceptions regarding all things relationship: Is cheating still a choice or has it much more to do with genetics? Do chemicals released from my brain dictate my concept of romance? Is 'romance' even still a useful term? How concerned should I be regarding my potential partner's genes, especially if we want kids? If we have kids, is it ethically acceptable to 'customize' them? These are just some of the new challenges in the world of relationships that are manifesting with more to come, since science does not stop; how will the humanities respond?

Eric van der Wee teaches Humanities at Dawson College.



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1:00-2:00 **Once upon a Stereotype: a Critical Assessment of Fairy Tale Culture**

Why study fairy tales? To dismiss fairy tales as mere children's stories is to miss the fundamental role these narratives play in shaping personal identity and defining gender roles. My paper examines fairy tales' dual capacity to both mirror the values of the society producing them, and to radically subvert and transform those values. I demonstrate how fairy tale motifs have been used as a covert means of critiquing social norms by such writers as Charlotte Brontë in her 1847 novel *Jane Eyre*. I also survey the widespread nature of these motifs in modern life, and suggest the effects, both positive and pernicious, that this can have on identity formation.

Jennifer Koopman teaches Humanities at Dawson College.

2:00-3:00 **Staying Cool under Fire: Critical Thinking and Documentary Filmmaking**

Truth or just effective propaganda? Engaged in the subject or biased? From CBC's "The Passionate Eye" to standpoint theory, documentary filmmaking has been at the contentious nexus of critical thinking and criticism since its inception as an art form. In this talk, former documentary filmmaker and Dawson teacher Gray Miles explores the vital importance of a thoroughly-grounded critical perspective through two award-winning films he co-produced and produced: *As the Towers Fell* and *Cruel Courage*. *As the Towers Fell* tells the story of the 9/11 attacks through the responses of the journalists covering the events - several of whose work was severely criticized for bias after the dust had settled. *Cruel Courage* is a film about cyclical violence in Colombia, composed of several interlocking stories, that skirts the line between critical and emotive discourse. What constitutes a doc you can trust? After this talk, you decide.

Gray Miles is a documentary filmmaker and teaches Humanities at Dawson College.



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3:00-4:00 Model United Nations Simulations and Critical Thinking

A key component of critical thinking is fostering the ability to step outside one's own perspective and see things from another's point of view. Therefore, exercises and learning activities that foster an understanding of the world from a point of view outside of one's own can help develop essential critical thinking skills. Model simulations such as Model United Nations, where participants each adopt unique roles and negotiate with each other, offer the chance for critical thinking in action, as the group grapples with seemingly intractable challenges. In this paper, Chris Bourne, along with students from DCMUN will demonstrate how Model United Nations simulations offer an opportunity for students to practice the critical thinking skills they learn in Humanities.

Christopher Bourne teaches Political Science at Dawson College and is one of the Faculty Advisors for **Dawson College Model United Nations**.

4:00-6:00 SPACE EVENT TV: Collisions with the Ordinary

Ordinary people on television are now the norm. Drunken teenagers, aspiring super models, lumberjacks, fishermen, pilots and tow truck drivers are the new celebs. Factual programming has evolved from talking heads in lab coats and boring bearded historians to outlandish scientific presentations, larger than life personalities and the extremes of our environments. And we can't get enough. This collision between the ordinary and ourselves is what draws millions of viewers a night. In this talk, Meredith Fowke will explore what really makes TV tick: ordinary people up against ordinary people.

Meredith Fowke is a producer and concept developer whose programs on monsters, cars, thrift shopping, oil drilling and bomb hunters are seen on the History and Discovery channels on television around the world.



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Tuesday, October 22

10:00-12:00 Religion and Democracy: Implications of Post-authoritarian Developments in Indonesia

A dozen years ago Indonesia was seen by many outside observers as the next failed state, with a weak post-authoritarian government, a stalled economy and rising ethnic and religious tensions. The future of Indonesia as a unified country was even questioned. Yet today, Indonesia is seen as having a relatively stable emerging economy, a relatively successful democratic system, a military firmly under civilian control and a successful track record of neutralizing terrorists and marginalizing extremist voices (although there are notes of caution, especially in regards to corruption, religious tolerance and pluralism). This paper examines how Indonesia overcame its post-authoritarian challenges. Further, it will question if Indonesia's circumstances are unique, or, whether there are lessons that can be drawn upon by other countries, in the developing and more specifically the Islamic world, which are undergoing rapid political change.

Michael Wood teaches Humanities at Dawson College.

12:00-2:00 The Apology of Socrates (presented in the Dawson Theatre)

The Apology is Plato's dramatic account of his mentor and teacher Socrates' defense against the charges of corruption and heresy. The trial took place in 399 BC in Athens. In his magnificent defense of himself, we learn that Socrates is anything but sorry. Dawson students and Faculty from the Dawson Theater Collective and Liberal Arts will perform this dramatic monologue as part of the *Humanities and Public Life Conference* at Dawson College. Come and witness one of the most brilliant and engaging critical thinkers in history take on the topics of religion, education and political life in one of the most celebrated monologues of all time!

2:00-3:00 Thou shall not commit fallacies!

What is a fallacy, and why should we not commit them? Basically, a fallacy is poor reasoning, and there are many ways that one can commit a fallacy. In this age of blogs, advertisements and social media, when it seems that everybody has something to say, it is more important now more than ever to be able to differentiate between good and bad reasoning, to reason well and to not be persuaded by bad reasoning. In this workshop, I will discuss four of the most common fallacies that we encounter on an everyday basis, and, as a group, we'll assess and discuss instances of strong and poor reasoning in the media.

Diana Karbonowska has just finished her Master's in Philosophy at the University of Guelph.



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3:00-4:00 What I believe is true for me; what you believe is true for you

In today's world the internet and other media present us with a vast array of values, beliefs and ways of life. A natural response to such a situation is relativism, often expressed as the idea that what I believe is "true for me," and that what you believe is "true for you." In this talk I draw on ancient and contemporary discussions of relativism to show how it contradicts itself and so does not make sense. But I also examine what motivates relativism to show that, far from being opposed, respect for others and a critical commitment to objective truth go hand in hand.

Brian Redekopp teaches Humanities at Dawson College.

4:00-5:30 The Balanced Mind: Humanities as Therapy for the Soul

Critical thinking is often associated with learning how to recognize, dissect, reconstruct and reflect on arguments according to formal logical rules and the clear and concise ordering of ideas. While this approach definitely has its value, the history of the Humanities has another equally valuable, and surely complementary, approach to offer: one that has to do with balancing the different aspects of the mind – our senses, thoughts, emotions, and desires – so that the mind can become a clear and well-focused lens on our inner and outer worlds. This approach can be deemed "therapeutic" in that it is meant, among other things, to help us move from a non-optimal and sometimes even diseased functioning of the mind, to an optimal, balanced, and healthy mind. My presentation will explore this therapeutic dimension of contemplative and meditative practices in the Humanities as preparing the ground for accurate self- and world-perception, and thus as essential practices for critical thinking in a deep sense. More specifically, I will compare and contrast Socrates' and Seneca's philosophical therapies for the soul, with Classical and Hatha Yoga approaches to meditation. This will be an opportunity to reflect not only on the overall importance of a balanced mind for critical thinking, but also on differing Eastern and Western conceptions of the mind and the place of thinking (critical or otherwise) in the context of larger universally shared human goals such as perceiving truth and achieving happiness.

Sarah Allen teaches Humanities and Philosophy at Dawson College and is a certified Hatha Yoga teacher.



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10:00-11:00 Humanities and Critical Thinking through the Lens of Storytelling

Virtually every culture on the planet can trace its roots to an oral storytelling tradition. To a certain degree, storytellers are the equivalent of the Humanities professor whose task is to transmit human understanding regarding knowledge, ideas, beliefs and values. Stories transform complex knowledge into a mode which is easily accessible and integrated into our daily lives. It is through our collective and individual stories that we learn to understand ourselves, our world and find meaning in our lives. This presentation will explore the power of storytelling as a pedagogical tool to teach critical thinking skills and as a resource for reflecting upon human understanding of knowledge. The presentation will also include a short, reflective activity for participants.

Lynn Barwell is a graduate of Dawson College's Chemical Technology Program and is currently pursuing her Master's Degree in Theological Studies at Concordia University.

11:00-12:00 Harmonious Voices: The Aesthetics of Renaissance Polyphony in English Music and Poetry

There is an intimate relationship between artistic production and everyday life. This presentation provides an example of the way in which common social practices can influence works of art and works of art in turn perpetuate and disseminate those practices in new forms. Aemilia Lanyer adapts the motet, one of the most popular forms of church music in her day, in her long poem *Salve Deus Rex Judaeroum* (1611). The *Salve Deus* is, among other things, one of the earliest proto-feminist works of English poetry. Lanyer thus contributes to the development of a new type of public discourse by adapting and transforming an existing aesthetic form that is itself deeply embedded in the social world of 17th century England.

Danica Meredith has a Master's degree in English from Carleton University.

Beverly Sing teaches Humanities, Classical Music and Liberal Arts at Dawson College.



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12:00-1:00 Paradoxes of Lying, Truth and Trust

Lying, Truth, and the perennial question of Truth have been central subjects in philosophy since pre-Socratic times. Truth, the dictionary tells you, is the opposite of falsehood. Presumably, if you know what falsehood is, then you should know its opposite: truth. But how do you know falsehood when you see it? Consider the Charbonneau Commission's inquiry into the awarding and management of public contracts in the construction industry where people under oath tell conflicting "truths" about each other. Consider the sex scandals that have rocked the White House and some State governors' offices in the U.S. as the culprits either confessed publicly or else continued to lie, lie, lie until there was "No One Left to Lie to" as the late Christopher Hitchens pointedly wrote about the Clintons. Consider also espionage as a profession, where you have to spend a lifetime lying. When Bill Clinton told the Starr investigation on allegations of his sexual contact with Monica Lewinsky "I did not sleep with that woman," was he lying or telling the truth? When witnesses grilled by Crown prosecutors at the Charbonneau Commission answer repeatedly "I don't know," are they telling the truth or are they lying? Are they in contempt of court? The problem starts when you try to define that trio of lying, truth and trust. Can you trust someone who fooled everyone in the past but who now tells the truth? Can you trust someone who tells half-truths? How about one who tells honest lies? Do you believe someone who greets you with a polite lie? We think of lies as being generally ignoble but they can also be noble. Before making normative judgments, it is important to circumscribe the nature of lying in the first place. This talk will address the paradoxes involved in lying, truth and trust by raising critical questions and attempting to answer them.

Nadia Khouri teaches Humanities at Dawson College.

2:00-3:00 Critical Thinking and Public Peace: The Role of the Humanities in Mitigating Conflict

This presentation examines how humanistic discourse has evolved in response to conflict, as a way of addressing the desire for peace. While the Humanities encompass many disciplines devoted to the study of human understanding and experience, they are much more than the simple documentation of human expression. They are also about developing an intentional way of thinking and being in the world, *especially in relation to others*. As such, they contribute much to the evaluation and mitigation of conflict in the public sphere. Drawing examples from debates regarding evolutionary theory and same-sex marriage, the examination investigates the historical development of critical thinking, as well as the confluence between moral conscience, "belief" rationale and empirical-scientific reasoning. Additional consideration is given to discussing the ongoing role of the Humanities in fostering a critical awareness of competing discourses and rhetoric, and in clarifying the balance between equality and diversity in democratic, pluralistic societies.

Robert Smith is a doctoral student in the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Montréal, and an alumnus of Concordia University's Department of Theological Studies. His interests include religion and politics; morality and the confluence between faith and science; media literacy and communication ethics; feminist and queer theory; and the interpretation of sacred texts.



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3:00-4:00 Critical Thinking in Public Discourse: setting an agenda for addressing social/cultural issues

The age of print media created a divide between those people whose opinions were published, and those, whose were not. This allowed certain segments of society to lead the debate at large, and while this opened up a space for abuse (where the powerful get to direct the discourse and can use this ability to propagate their power) it also allowed for public discussion to have a coherence and a direction. It was not quite a unity of public discourse, as there was dissent and disagreement among the discussants, but at least there was a set of topics that were discussed in some detail and the terms of discussion were pretty much accepted by the publishing caste. The internet, however, has changed all of that. Rather than a number of identifiable voices thinking their way through issues on the page on behalf of the entire society, we now have an uncountable mass of people contributing. This opens up a space for popular opinion to emerge in an inclusive way that was never possible before; but it also opens the playing field to innumerable topics and tactics, making any kind of popular discussion of pressing issues difficult, if not impossible. While critical thinking is (allegedly) topic-neutral and therefore does not restrict the issues we might discuss, it at least allows us to reinstitute a framework of rules for discussion. However, these rules are not universally known, and not even universally accepted by those who do know them. Critical thinking, in its traditional sense, can therefore institute a power dynamic that hangs on from the old way of going about discourse. But are these rules themselves oppressive and the tools of potential abuse? And if so, could any set of rules avoid similar pitfalls, or will any rules contain that potential within them? How can we minimize that potential?"

Brooke Struck is a doctoral candidate in Philosophy at the University of Guelph.

4:00-6:00 Addressing the Whole Person: 40 years of New School and Critical Humanistic Education

Ever wonder what happens on the 8th floor at Dawson in New School? The New School is not a program or a profile, but it is another way of doing your Humanities and English courses within Dawson. We are celebrating New School's 40th anniversary this year, and we invite alumni and curious minds to critically reflect on Quebec's longest running alternative school's footprint in "addressing the whole person." The New School's approach is based on the principles of critical humanistic education, which draws from the traditions of humanistic education and critical pedagogy. Critical humanism also draws on progressive education, existentialist theories, feminist pedagogy, and values education. Come engage with our philosophy, our faculty, and some of our alumni in a panel that addresses what it means to learn as whole person.

Greta Hofmann Nemiroff teaches Humanities and English at Dawson. **Cory Legassic** teaches Humanities and Sociology at Dawson. **Blair Trelinski** is New School Facilitator. They will be joined by **Alexandre Ouimet**, a graduate of New School.

6:00 Closing Reception in 5B16

