

## Reality and the Borders of the Classroom

André Goldenberg, Graduate Teaching Assistant, CST

Photo of Andre

This *TA Issue* of *CORE* is a forum for Teaching Assistants (TAs) to explore and discuss issues that have become important to them during their stay at York. As TAs, we are called upon to perform a great variety of teaching tasks. Along the way, we encounter important ideas, issues, attitudes and situations that demand attention and reflection, as well as discussion. The *TA Issue* of *CORE* provides a unique opportunity to discuss and debate these topics in a timely way.

This year's *TA Issue*, entitled *Reality and the Borders of the Classroom*, is no exception. The events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 left their mark on York TAs. Concerns and debates over violence, security, racism and civil liberties continue to affect us in profound ways – as educators, as graduate students, and as individuals. In those early days of the Fall 2001 semester, we struggled and argued about whether and how to address the dangers of the world around us in our classrooms. In some tutorials, many York TAs facilitated discussions about the attacks on the United States and their aftermath, and struggled to stay on track with the course material, which quickly took a back seat to the news. In other cases, TAs were met with silence and a room full of students all too eager to “escape” the “reality” of the news, by talking about more tangible (or perhaps more mundane) things. In many cases, the issues and wounds of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the days that followed were simply too raw and too powerful to be discussed away from homes, families and more comfortable or more private surroundings.

One year later, four members of the York TA community share their thoughts on how September 11<sup>th</sup> in particular, and the “real world” in general, did or did not affect their teaching. Their contributions to this year's *TA Issue* of *CORE* reveal the lasting impact of September 11<sup>th</sup> and other national and international events. Whether they have chosen to leave “reality” at the borders of the classroom, or to place it center-stage, or to reject the very distinction between the “real world” and the “academic world,” these four authors challenge us to reflect critically on the relationships between our disciplines, our students, our jobs and our selves, and the world(s) in which these relations are played out. They help us address the links between our teaching, whether in style or content, and our lives, as well as the ways in which we accept, reject or transform these links.

In her piece entitled *When Should We Close the Classroom Door on Current Events*, Maryanne Fisher uses a comparative analysis of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 and New Year's Eve 1999 (i.e., the Y2K computer scare) to frame a discussion of the role of the TA in a highly focused and structured academic environment. Fisher challenges some of the more dominant and conventional paradigms of current critical theory by suggesting that

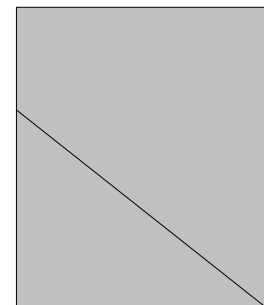
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### TA issue

is made possible through the combined support of CUPE Local 3903 and the Centre for the Support of Teaching

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the TA's true role in times of social upheaval, especially when students are already overloaded with the "real world," is simply to *get through the material*. She does *not*, however, advocate turning a blind eye to events outside one's classroom and one's discipline. Rather, in eschewing such a "disciplined" approach, Fisher's stance cautiously incorporates the world around the TA while acknowledging the very "real" borders of academia, including course content, structure and time pressures.

Laila Haidarali's article provides a different perspective. In *Every Day is a Drive Thru History*, Haidarali takes us through the emotional nightmare many TAs faced on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, struggling to deal with the "real world" themselves while wondering and worrying about how their students would react. She uses these observations to demonstrate the limitations of teaching methods (especially in History) that decontextualize and deconstruct real-life events, treating them *only* as "events" instead of sites of power and meaning, and opportunities for growth and learning. Instead, argues Haidarali, we must not forget that the classroom in which we teach is part of the very reality that we teach to our students. She relates a number of examples that demonstrate how an attempt to draw on students' realities (needs, wants, histories, experiences, and observations) increases student interaction and participation in the classroom, and helps bridge some of the gaps between teacher and learner. Positionality, says Haidarali, is key; we must acknowledge our *role* as TA, both within the classroom and as part of a larger structure of higher learning and education, in order to become more effective teachers and attribute meaning to the material. This role comes with tremendous opportunities for discussion and sharing, as well as a great deal of authority and power, both of which must be acknowledged in order to make classroom interactions reflect the reality of their structure. Acknowledging the "reality" of the classroom itself (and the reality of our role as TAs, and as individuals), instead of simply dragging

the events of the "real world" into the classroom, gives us a way of transcending the traditional borders of education to foster social change.

In the final piece in this TA Issue of *Core*, Harvey Briggs brings a unique and challenging perspective to this debate. His thesis is that *Nothing is Outside, Nothing is Inside* – that is, the distinction between the classroom and the real world is artificial, unhelpful, and even damaging. Briggs essentially argues that TAs would do well to stop thinking about the classroom as an environment in which discussions about reality are played out. Instead, the classroom *is* the real world: reality is enacted, reproduced, created and transformed in every class. By sharing two anecdotes about how his students demonstrated this principle to him, Briggs also sheds light on his own philosophy of teaching. Good teaching, he argues,

*When students become teachers, not just to their peers, but also to their TAs, a magical moment of recognition, shared understanding, and collective problem-solving occurs.*

becomes most evident when the instructor is *part of* the classroom (and thereby of reality), not just in front of it. Sharing reality, acknowledging the reality of learning, and experiencing it together not only enhances the teacher-student relationship, it also creates important opportunities for students to engage with course materials and ideas in ways they never expected. When students become teachers, not just to their peers, but also to their TAs, a magical moment of recognition, shared understanding, and collective problem-solving occurs. Such moments ultimately facilitate the free exchange of ideas, and even provide solid ground for progressive social change and social justice.

These three perspectives on *Reality and the Borders of the Classroom* provide important direction and guidance for the kind of thinking and teaching in which we must engage in order for university teaching to remain relevant and effective in a "post-9/11" world. More specifically, these discussions demonstrate the impor-

tance of thoughtful research and reflection on the role of the TA in higher learning, on the development of teaching philosophies, and the internal and external conflicts or tensions that underlie our every moment in the classroom, both as teachers and students. Just as the hallmark of York's student body is its diversity, the community of York TAs is also striking in its expression of difference. The freedom of thought so central to the very idea of university teaching is indeed reflected in the variety of ways TAs address the important question of the "real world" and where they stand in relation to it.

Before we proceed with these three articles, however, this issue of *CORE* will begin on a slightly less conventional note. Kelly Young's piece of prose/poetry, *Jubilant Thrives*, provides a personal and emotional way for readers to engage in these debates. Written shortly after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, in New York City, Young's piece sets the tone for this issue and introduces all of its major themes: the struggle between professional duty and personal emotion; the borders between reality and pedagogy and their collapse or merger; the transformative

power of education and expression; and the need to develop new words and new ways to express the fundamental tension at the heart of the educator's role in society – *how do we teach others about something in which we are firmly entrenched, involved and participating every day?* Through her words and images, Young provides an answer: *creativity, expression, language and knowledge* – these are the tools we use to express, construct, confront and teach reality. It is an answer that ultimately produces more questions than it answers – as it should. As all good teaching should.

I hope you enjoy this Special TA Issue of *CORE*, and that you find meaning in the debates and discussions it will undoubtedly bring to your teaching and learning. I certainly have found such meaning – I am very grateful for having had the chance to work with these four talented authors, and the opportunity to pursue these ideas in depth and at length.

# When Should We Close the Classroom Door on Current Events?

Maryanne Fisher, Graduate Program in Psychology

## Photo of Maryanne

There is a line in one of my favourite John Travolta movies, *Phenomenon*, that points out that essentially, people everywhere are made of the same basic stuff. If this is the case, then events that occur in one part of the world should affect everyone else. So why were the events of September 11, 2001 ignored in the class I teach? In contrast, a similarly shared event,

the Y2K computer scare, was a much more constant topic of academic discussion in 1999 and 2000. My contribution to this issue of CORE outlines some of the similarities and differences between September 11, 2001, and New Year's Eve 1999, in the hopes of explaining why the former was neglected.

For the past three years, I have been a TA for a full-year fourth-year course in the Department of Psychology at York. This course is called "Advanced Research in Psychology." Students who wish to graduate with an honours degree in psychology must either complete an independent thesis, or complete this course. Although professors may vary how they design the course and the material they choose to include, the basic premise is to provide a class in which students may pursue a research topic and write a thesis. It is a challenging course, for the students, the TA, and the Course

Director. In eight months, students must learn the basics of experimental methodology for psychology, review pertinent literature, design a study, create consent forms and ethics proposals, recruit and test participants, analyse data, and then write everything up according to APA (American Psychological Association) guidelines in the form of a thesis.

When I was a TA for this course for the first time, the Y2K computer scare associated with midnight, January 1, 2000, was looming in front of us. It was talked about in class, especially as the fall term was coming to a close. Since it was relevant to talk about computer problems as the students were entering data and writing their theses on computers, the

topic was addressed several times throughout the term. Students would bring the topic up, wanting to know what more they could do to protect their work. There was a great deal of anticipation involved, as the timing of the event was, at the very least, predictable. The consequences did not seem as severe as death, since people could avoid taking a train or plane on the night of December 31, 1999 if they were worried. The media had spent time talking about the possible consequences, so people were informed about what they could do to prepare. Furthermore, emotions were not significantly involved, as the feared event had not yet occurred. Some students seemed more worried than others, but no one was missing classes or talking about it in an emotionally-charged manner.

Y2K was a shared event as all students in the class, as well as the TA and course director, might have been affected in somewhat similar ways. Further, it was a shared event internationally, with no specific geographical point on which to focus our collective attention. The forthcoming event was so interesting to one student in the class that she changed her thesis topic suddenly in December, in order to examine people's expectations and worries surrounding Y2K. The student collected all her data in a two-day span (before and after midnight on New Year's Eve) and submitted an excellent thesis.

So, in comparison, why was there an absence of discussion over the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>? Some people would argue that this event was much more important than Y2K. One of the most important reasons for the lack of discussion is that the event did not seem relevant to teaching the experimental methodology being covered at that time in the course. I had no idea how to bring the event into a

discussion on sampling procedures or counterbalancing, for example. The students also seemed a bit relieved to not have to talk about it – they were discussing it with their peers in hallways, watching the news on television sets around

campus, and in general, being inundated with discussions. Perhaps it was a relief to come to class and think about methodology rather than war. Not one student brought the issue into any class discussion. It was a very emotional event; some students seemed much more affected than others, and it may therefore have been a personal experience that students did not wish to share with a class. In general, September 11<sup>th</sup> did not seem to have the equally-shared effects of Y2K.

With September 11<sup>th</sup> there was a great deal of finger-pointing in every direction, with the target of the finger dependent on the student's feelings of allegiance. Instead of anticipating an event, all feelings were reactionary. The results of the event were serious,

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...why were the events of September 11, 2001 ignored in the class I teach? In contrast, ... the Y2K computer scare, was a much more constant topic of academic discussion...

involving death, racism, the destruction of monumental buildings, and the invasion of Afghanistan. But still, no one chose to do a thesis study on the event. Perhaps no one felt emotionally ready to do an objective investigation of the event, or could figure out a way to avoid politics and instead construct a scientific inquiry.

There is also a personal reason underlying why I did not intentionally bring the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> into any class discussion. Humanity has a history of war. In the last decade, there has been war occurring throughout many parts of the world, involving death tolls far exceeding those of September 11<sup>th</sup> (in the east Congo, for example). I felt that if I talked about one event, I would have to talk about others, simply because to not do so would be placing more importance or higher value on the USA's situation. This discussion would have taken significant amounts of time away from the pre-planned discussions on experimental design, statistics, and similar topics, preventing me from fulfilling my role as a TA in psychological research methodology.

Perhaps a few readers of CORE will believe that I made a mistake by not addressing the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and by not leading the class through a discussion. I would argue that I fulfilled my role as a TA to the best of my ability. Students came to class to discuss certain material, develop their critical

skills, and learn about psychology. Since no student brought the event to any discussion, I do not believe that I should have done so, as it was likely that the students were processing the event, and thinking about it, at a very personal level. I think that as TAs we should not only teach content and critical skills, but also follow the lead of our students and become part of the discussion rather than always the initiator.

**Mark in your calendars...**

**TA Day  
September 4, 2003**

**A One-Day Conference of  
Professional Development  
for Teaching Assistants  
at York**

## Jubilation Thrives Kelly Young, Graduate Program in Education

Tuesday, September 11, 2001

Today, we became noticers in a different way than before. We search for meaning, discern trivial acts through notional lives. We turn to artistic practices, interpret tragedy through works of art, embrace a poetics of relation, a way of knowing the world through aesthetic forms. We write, hold on to each word, comfort is momentary.

Wednesday, September 12, 2001

Globe and Mail headline: Jubilation Dies.

Jubilation: public rejoicing, a loud utterance of joy in face of silence: as silence wraps tongues to frozen poles, a new language washes over America and the world, colonialist seamless discourse lingers, moves beyond an attack of terrorism, to an act of W-A-R.

From the Oval Office the President says to his people and to the world:

we saw evil the very worst of human nature and we responded with the very best of America through responsible justice security precautions protection of the people. the resolve of our great nation is being tested make no mistake we will show the world we will pass this test.

Test: a word generally used in educational discourse appears in the political arena and weaves a horrific paradox. John Dewey once asked: What is the promise of education? Poet Carl Leggo might reply: Education promises poetic rumination that involves courage of the heart. We reply: We need poetic intervention not retaliation. As history returns to structure its present, language moves in waves across lips and screens as we repeat the words: War on Terrorism. And in New York City, poets reply to horror in poetic forms along city streets, painters seize on canvas what language fails to capture, left in doorways, on walls, moments encapsulated in time, as we learn to make a relationship to an absence.

We (re)interpret our memories and histories in relationship to the images of the burning planes and buildings, construct new selves in relation to the old, the dead, we turn to books, sculptures, paintings, poetic intervention that grips us from inside, a pedagogy of surprise full of unfolding gifts that push boundaries through artistic inquiry, a work of art woven out of complex theories bearing witness to difficult knowledge, life-histories of stories that could not otherwise be told.

Poets respond void of language all their own with unyielding sadness below silent skies. Landmarks, which no longer help children find their way, crumble into memory. Yet through the arts:

Jubilation thrives.

# Each day is a drive thru history<sup>1</sup>

Laila Haidarali, Graduate Program in History

I met the students in my tutorials for the first time on Tuesday, September 11, 2001. While preparing for my first day of class, I sat down to savor my morning coffee while watching the news. The news, that morning in September, was of course a live unfolding of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Like countless others, I watched the attacks, the explosions, the crumbling towers. I showered and dressed while keeping an eye on the television, not believing anything I saw or heard. My journey up to York on Route 196 was equally surreal. The bus was abuzz with word of the attacks. Pieces of information and misinformation were transmitted from one stranger to the next. I disembarked, ready for my first class, yet unwilling to step back into the now seemingly small world of academia. I did not discuss much of what I had seen with my students that met later that afternoon. Many had not seen the events first-hand and many seemed eager to fly home to their families and to their television sets.

As a historian, I was always aware of the making of that moment, the impact of that day, the resonance of the attacks. Historians tend to eschew the present, viewing the contemporary as ahistorical. History tends to address the contemporary only as a reference point, and not as a focus of inquiry. In classrooms, we struggle to move our students beyond the presentist and personal, to the historical and analytical. We teach them that while contemporary discussions offer some insight into the past, they alone cannot be our window to the past. As a result, conventional history instructs us, as Teaching Assistants, to leave the outside world outside of the classroom.

After five years as a TA at York, I find this method unsatisfactory and unrealistic: you cannot leave the “real world” outside of the classroom because it is the “real world” to which

we belong. The world—its events, its history and its future—does not exist in the ethereal “out there.” World events, religious discord, racial, sexual and national identities all manifest themselves in the classroom and our understanding of the past. Unacknowledged, these “outside” factors can assume a cryptic control in shaping the learning process. We need to dismantle this obstruction by providing a controlled space for the “outside world” in our classrooms.

As a TA in the third year course, the History of Sexuality in America, I know that sexual, gender, religious, racial, national, and class politics all work in shaping the dynamic of the classroom. We discuss a host of sexual issues in their historical context, and these issues are equally viable today. Monogamy, hetero/homo/bi-sexuality, reproductive rights, and interracial sexuality—are only some of the topics we discuss and students struggle with their own identities and ideologies throughout these discussions.

Throughout the year, while students grow more comfortable with me and I with them, they often expose their own personal histories. In a recent tutorial discussion on the social construction of Sexually Transmitted Diseases, students shared their experiences of sex education in high school. While the conventional historian may discount this exchange as ahistorical and presentist, we traced the historical line between the use of “fear” tactics in 1940s and 1950s sex education for youth, to the types of methods to which my students had been exposed. We learnt from each other that cultural, religious and gender differences stratified the way we learned about sex, and in turn, structured the way we viewed the history of sexuality. We created our own histories in dialogue with the course readings and as a result, we became more engaged with the material. To

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## CUPE 3903

### Teaching Development Grants

The CUPE 3903 Teaching Development Fund has been established to assist contract (part-time) faculty members in CUPE Unit 2 to:

- develop a new program of study
- develop new teaching materials
- develop teaching skills, or
- any combination of the preceding

Two types of grants are available through this Fund:

- (1) **Major Teaching Development Grants:** two grants each in the amount of one full Course Directorship
- (2) **Minor Teaching Development Grants:** five grants in the amount of \$2,500 each

**Application deadline: Tuesday, February 3, 2003**

*To receive grant guidelines and submit an application, contact Stephanie Marston, Centre for the Support of Teaching, 111 Central Square, 416 736-5754, smarston@yorku.ca. For further information, e-mail Michelle Lowry (mlowry@yorku.ca), or visit the CUPE3903 website at [www.cupe3903.tao.ca/docs/pdf\\_tdf.html](http://www.cupe3903.tao.ca/docs/pdf_tdf.html)*

deny that personal histories work in tandem with public histories is to overlook the complexity of the historical experience. To suppress that viewpoint from my students, to chant the mantra that the classroom is no place to discuss personal experience, is to deprive them from learning the interpretative nature of history. Our views, our attitudes, our politics all play a role in reading/writing historical accounts. There is no objective truth in History—this is not a Science.

But some may argue that elucidating the interpretative nature of History can be successfully achieved without revealing one's own position to the subject. And I agree that it is not always necessary to do so. But often the masking of positionality means that we have not interrogated our position adequately; that we hold our own views as "personal" and not open to scrutiny; that we disentangle ourselves from the messy business of personal involvement with our students; that we believe that the outside world does not influence the classroom in which we teach. As TAs, we need to address the factors that contribute to our positionality in the classroom. We are not simply the worker, the marker, the tutorial leader: we play out multi-layered existences in the theatre of the classroom in unconscious ways. Sometimes the persona of our "audience" assumes more prominence—we are willing to learn about our students' views, their cultural and religious backgrounds, their sexual identities, but grant our own little attention in the

classroom. Sometimes we use the shield of TA "authority" to prevent any divulgence of the personal, the political and the problematic.

I do not reveal all in the classroom. On some subjects, I remain more detached, less willing to reveal my politics and my opinions—I use judgement as my guide, and I always listen to my students before I express my own vision. I am respectful of our differences in the classroom, and I am aware of the power and privilege I hold in a position of authority. Some topics are best left for another arena. One such topic, related to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, raised the question of religion, nationhood, and cultural hegemony, especially for Palestinians and Israelis. The topic emerged in a discussion of interracial sexuality. One student identified herself as being of Israeli parentage and related her opposition to interracial marriages to her ancestry. Several comments from class members and this student expressed the tensions between pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian views, and a lack of understanding for both the Jewish and the Palestinian experience. I moved on, or rather away from the contemporary, and returned to the assigned reading that had inspired the discussion—a monograph of the history of interracial sexuality where Jewish Americans were situated quite prominently. We returned to the discussion quite aware of the lack of consensus on this topic. The environment remained open and friendly, but we were

more respectful and aware of our own diversity.

The diversity of York's student population is one of its greatest strengths and as TAs we should encourage the recognition and exploration of these differences in relation to the discipline in which we teach. We must continue to relate our academic subject to our students in meaningful, constructive and relevant ways. We must continue to demonstrate that one can be passionate and pragmatic about a discipline without being disciplined by its constraints. We must continue to allow the "outside world" to permeate our tutorials without flooding its structure. As we move closer to our goal of professorial teaching, we must remember that the "outside world" exists in the very world of the classroom. Next year, when we look at the faces of our students we should remember that something propelled them into taking the course—something perhaps as mundane as a departmental requirement, or as personal as fleeing one's country. Whatever the reason, interest in the topic often begins with interest in one's own history and one's own pathway to knowledge. We can ignite these sparks by understanding that as each new group of students saunters in to the class for the first time, a whole new world begins anew.

<sup>1</sup> James Douglas Morrison, *Wilderness: The Lost Writings of Jim Morrison*, Vol. 1. New York: Vintage Books, 1988, p. 103.

## Congratulations!

The Faculty of Graduate Studies and the Centre for the Support of Teaching extend their congratulations to the following individuals who have completed the University Teaching Practicum since our last report in *Core* (November 2001):

Joey Cheng, Chemistry  
Krista Hunt, Political Science  
Caroline Roncadin, Psychology  
Heather Sparling, Music

Johanna Devaney, Music  
John Ippolito, Education  
Rhian Salmon, Chemistry  
Myung Jin Yu, Visual Arts

Atsmon Ganor, Visual Arts  
Chris McDonald, Music  
Christine Saulnier, Political Science

The University Teaching Practicum is a self-directed program of professional development in university teaching for graduate students. Through this program participants engage in a process of in-depth learning about their own teaching – reflecting on their practice, analyzing their approach, applying new strategies and techniques, and documenting their experience. At the same time, they have opportunities to deepen their understanding of pedagogical principles and of student learning theories, and to participate in discussions on all manner of issues related to teaching and learning.

For further information about the University Teaching Practicum, please contact the CST.

# Nothing is Outside: Nothing is Inside

Harvey Briggs, Graduate Program in Sociology

With any topic I have confronted as a teaching assistant at York I have had (what may be) the luxury of being able to link the discussion to the real conditions of people. I have been able to draw parallels as diverse as those between the lives of hunters and gatherers of 10,000 years ago, and the families in which my students live; to display the similarities between the proletariat in the Industrial Revolution and the workers in the present day Maquila Dora zones; and to show the link between the glass ceiling and the stigma of Mother's Allowance. In the process I have developed a number of strategies for incorporating the outside world; perhaps the most important is to be honest, to apply a standard of openness in the way that I interact with the students in my tutorials. I take no credit for this strategy, as I had good TA's as an undergraduate at York and I have done my best to follow their example. I have also had the pleasure of working with passionate and gifted Course Directors. If I were to provide a recipe for excellence in teaching, each of these elements would be important ingredients.

My own strategies focus on making the class comfortable with the discourse generated by the particular topic or material. The challenge each year is one of making the students feel that they can question and discuss a set of issues that are at once both broad and foreign. To be successful I have had to bring the material to them, to connect it to things with which they are familiar. Current events are certainly a big part of such a strategy. The challenge for me has been to link the students to the material; beyond that, I have found that the work becomes a simple matter of providing direction.

In the process, I am afraid, I have learned far more from the students than I could have hoped to deliver to them. A brief list of lessons I have learned would need to include: 1) dead silence is not an effective probe if the students do not understand the text; 2) the debate between the Course Director and TA is of most interest to the Course Director and TA (most probably only to the latter); 3) what is a dissertation? why keep mentioning

this thing?; 4) how does the material relate to the world of the student? The last point is of greater relevance here and although I have no singular answer, I offer the following two anecdotes as examples of my approach.

In one summer course for which I was a TA, entitled "Women, Work, and the Family," there was a strong dismissal of many issues when we discussed Mother's Allowance. The discussion generated a class-based discourse that included some of the old standard objections: "some women have babies just to get more money," and "my mother always had a job." In response to these statements I deferred to the course texts and explained that those who need the system should not be stigmatized. One student approached me and asked if she could respond to the comments in a way that she thought might help me make the point; I agreed. The next week for her seminar presentation she showed up in the most ragged pair of tracks pants and a beer label t-shirt with what looked like a large chicken stain

down the front. She stood at the door of the classroom with a can of beer, and a cigarette, and yelled "Johnny" repeatedly, then ranted to the class: "That little bastard... he's gone off again... I am going to kick his little ass." She then sat down at the front of the class and said "that is what many of you think women on Mother's Allowance are like." She then explained that she was able to attend school and care for her child because of Mother's Allowance. As she shared the reality of her existence the questions and comments from the students changed and the class learned something. I would never ask a student to do what she did, but I am glad that I knew enough not to get in her way. Maybe that is one thing that we can do more often: give room. By this I mean to create a space that we as instructors cannot define, and a space in which we become participants. How can we do this? I can say that it has only happened to me where I have become part of the class and not "in front" of the class.

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## University-Wide Teaching Awards

*Deadline: January 31, 2003*

**Do you know an instructor who deserves recognition for excellence in teaching?**

The University-Wide Teaching Awards honour those who, through innovation and commitment, have significantly enhanced the quality of learning by York students. Four awards are offered each year in the following categories:

- \* Full-time faculty with 10 or more years' teaching experience
- \* Full-time faculty (tenured, tenure-stream, CLA) with less than 10 years experience
- \* Those teaching in other than a full-time capacity (part-time/contract)
- \* Teaching assistants

The purpose of these awards is to provide significant recognition for excellence in teaching, to encourage its pursuit, to publicize such excellence when achieved across the University and in the wider community, and to promote informed discussion of teaching and its improvement.

Nominations should be submitted to the Secretary of SCOTL, University Secretariat, S883 Ross, by January 31, 2003.

Further information and nomination forms are available at [www.yorku.ca/univsec/senate/committees/scotl/uwta%20form.htm](http://www.yorku.ca/univsec/senate/committees/scotl/uwta%20form.htm) or the Centre for the Support of Teaching, 111 Central Square, (416) 736-5754.

My second story involves a “crystalline moment” in my time at York as a TA. In the same course we discussed issues facing Native families in Canada. I soon found myself banging against that same wall that had surfaced during the earlier discussion on welfare and Mother’s Allowance. At the time the media was foaming at the mouth over the “Native problem,” and that debate seemed to thwart any discussion of the real problems; the discourse was limited to a veritable debate about what First Nations were “costing Canada.” Some of the students were interested in the real issues at stake, but a significant number could not get over the notion that here was a culture that was “milking the system.” One of the students, an orthodox Jewish student whose family had been directly affected by the Holocaust, was upset by this dismissal. She approached me about the

class’ response and I suggested that she read a short story, *My House*, by First Nations’ author Beth Brant, a story that has always struck a chord in me as a Native person. The next class she spoke briefly about her family and then read the story. I still remember — very vividly — lifting my head as she read the last few lines and hearing the very quiet sound of students gently crying. That day we had a discussion (not a meaningless debate) about the lives of Native peoples in Canada.

“Nothing is outside, nothing is inside”<sup>1</sup> – we should listen well to Erwin’s good advice to his friend, for this is the nature of ourselves and our students, and should also be the nature of our teaching.

<sup>1</sup> Hermann Hesse, “Inside and Outside” in *Stories of Five Decades*. Pennsylvania: The Franklin Library, 1984.

## Global Conflict: Community Peace

Siobhan McEwan, Advisor, Centre For Human Rights & Equity

Startpeace  
image

*Global conflicts have an immediate impact on our campus communities. How can we understand and manage the historical wounds of global conflicts so as to be able to discuss current conflicts without confrontation?*

On November 11, 2002, the Centre for Human Rights and Equity hosted a seminar on **Global Conflict: Community Peace**. This event was the first of a series of initiatives at York endeavoring to create an atmosphere and to promote the necessary

skills for respectful, thoughtful discussion on issues surrounding global conflict.

The goal of the seminar was to facilitate the development of constructive ways to discuss global conflict. Recognizing that global events have an immediate impact on our campus communities, the session was designed to explore how we can best work with each other, without confrontation, whether we are active in a student club or leading discussions in the classroom. Speakers Anne Goodman and Jihad Aliweiwi brought their academic and activist experiences to their shared focus on the community. Discussion focussed on generating strategies that can be used to successfully share information and have discussions about

conflict while maintaining the integrity of York as an educational institution dedicated to a respectful learning environment.

Anne Goodman, who comes from South Africa where she was active in the anti-apartheid struggle, has a Ph.D. in peace education from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). Her areas of research, teaching and practice include peace and reconciliation in Africa, peace education, trauma healing and reconciliation, the culture of peace, nuclear issues, and ethnic identity and conflict transformation. She is currently Esau Distinguished Visiting Professor at the University of Winnipeg, and has also taught at McMaster University and OISE. She has a long history of peace and environmental movement activism and was a member of the National Working Group for the International Year for the Culture of Peace.

Jihad Aliweiwi is currently Regional Director of Catholic Cross-Cultural Services. He has a substantial career as a community activist first at York where he was a leader of the Arab Students Association, and subsequently as the Executive Director Canadian Arab Federation. He has worked to facilitate dialogue and peace among and between communities.

The event was co-sponsored by the Centre for Human Rights and Equity, York Federation of Students, Graduate Students Association, Office of Student Affairs, Sexual Assault Survivors Support Line, Centre for the Support of Teaching, York International and CPM Association.

A second event is currently being organized for TAs early in the winter term on:

**Global Conflict in the Classroom** – A session for TAs to explore practical teaching strategies for use in the classroom in dealing with issues that might arise concerning global conflict. *Watch for announcements on this event in 2003.*

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