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PRESIDENT'S VOICE

"Solutions U." and Humanities Problems

The humanities' only platform is the University, so it is here they should be valued on their own terms

By Elizabeth Hanson
President, QUFA

Last week, with spring in the air, I marked the anniversary of the pandemic shutdown by being vaccinated. The young pharmacist who gave me the shot told me, adorably, that he was finding his job "very satisfying." I was a little surprised both at his ebullience and my own, though I shouldn't have been. I have not been particularly fearful for myself insofar as infection rates are low in Kingston and I work remotely, but like most of us lucky ones, I have felt the weight of the pandemic's cost to the world. The jab I received, along with millions more like it, signal that the end of this ordeal might be in sight. Moreover, the ebullience my vaccination occasioned arose not from simple relief but also from the ethical significance of the act; each vaccination affirms the value of the person vaccinated, while the global scale of the effort acknowledges our connectedness. It's hard to overstate the meaning of these vaccines as a human achievement.



Virtual Public Lecture

Parental Status and Career Outcomes



with

Dr Jana Raver

E. Marie Shantz Professor of Organizational Behaviour
Smith School of Business, Queen's University

Everyone Welcome

A question-and-answer session will follow the lecture

Thursday 25 March 2021
2.30 p.m. – 4.00 p.m.
via Zoom

Please RSVP to Elizabeth Polnicky (ep43@queensu.ca) for Zoom details

This week, Professor Jana Raver of the Smith School of Business will deliver a virtual public lecture entitled "Parental Status and Career Outcomes." Please RSVP to Elizabeth Polnicky (ep43@queensu.ca) for Zoom details. Please see p. 6 for more information.

The COVID-19 vaccines are a slam-dunk, incontrovertible demonstration of the value of universities as

problem-solving engines. Universities are the nurseries of basic science and the platform on which most advanced

scientific research is conducted, even when corporations such as pharmaceutical companies are also involved. They cultivate the public-health expertise and cultural knowledge necessary to meet and overcome vaccine hesitancy. They teach intellectual property and contract law, training lawyers who will be capable of articulating the wickedly complex network of obligations into which governments, corporations, and scientists enter in the development of these vaccines. And when those very obligations result in dangerously uneven global vaccine distribution, threatening to undermine both the ethical significance of vaccination I just extolled and the long-term efficacy of these vaccines as viral variants flourish, there will be scholars who can advise international organizations on how to address that problem.

I lay all this out in order to acknowledge the obvious fact that the problem-solving university is crucial to human flourishing, including my own, before turning to the subject of this column, which is to “problematize” that account of the university. My reflections here are prompted by the Principal’s emerging vision / mission / goals / values statement, which he discussed at an open QUFA Council meeting a couple of weeks ago. The document isn’t yet up on the Principal’s Web site, so detailed comment waits for another day. However, those who have followed the Conversation are familiar with the elements of its vision of a more inclusive, research-intensive, world-

serving university than Queen’s has been. In this spirit, the statement commits to “the transformative power of the mind to achieve breakthrough solutions,” the pursuit of which furnishes the reason for valuing all the disciplines we pursue. Obviously, there is much to celebrate about these aspirations, especially given the decline we have witnessed in the reputation and academic quality of Queen’s over the last decade. Nevertheless, in a letter to the Principal, QUFA Executive Director Leslie Jermyn and I expressed some concern with this statement, noting that in this vision the university constituted a virtuous, technocratic “we,” sleeves rolled up, finding solutions, but not requiring ourselves to think contemplatively or self-critically, except about whether we are being inclusive. We also noted that “breakthrough solutions” is not innocent language; a vaccine is a “breakthrough solution,” but nowadays so is new software. “Solutions” performs a neoliberal trick; the word is a way for products to present themselves as social goods, and social goods to frame themselves as products. Attentive readers may have noticed that in my second paragraph, in noting the global unevenness of vaccine distribution, I hinted at this neoliberal backdrop, acknowledging the possibility that technocratic knowhow, state power, and global capitalism might combine in ways that actually threaten to prolong the pandemic while devaluing human lives.

However, my aim here isn’t to assert the importance of cultivating such focused criticism within the university, which like the value of a vaccine I take to be self-evident. My concern is more self-centred. As a certain kind of humanities scholar, I am excluded from this vision of the university. I do not pursue solutions but—just the opposite—I “problematize.” This ugly neologism that I learned in grad school does not mean exactly “to criticize” or, in more recent parlance, to find things “problematic.” Both these operations might be construed as problem-solving because they are corrective, addressing shortcomings with respect to implicit moral norms or objectives. Problematizing, in contrast, refers to the art of finding “problems,” in the sense of something questionable or demanding explication, where most people might see settled truth, plain sense, or righteousness. That such an intellectual practice might seem a waste of time, if not perverse, was acknowledged by American English professor Gerald Graff in his 2003 book *Clueless in Academe*, which explores what he calls “the problem problem,” the fact that the academic demand to find problems where none are apparent is bewildering to most people. He demonstrates this with wonderful expressions of exasperation on the point from a class of eleventh-grade English students. He also quotes from Vivian Gornick’s memoir, *Fierce Attachments*, about her working-class mother’s sense that she has lost her daughter, when Gornick explains that the book she is reading is “a comparative history of

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QUFA Voices publishes QUFA-related news and information for QUFA Members and provides QUFA Members with a forum to express their QUFA-related ideas and opinions. We want to hear from you! Please send your QUFA-related story ideas, news items, opinion pieces, letters to the editor, photographs, and other submissions to the editor.

QUFA Voices is edited by Robert G. May. He can be reached at mayr@queensu.ca.

love over the last three hundred years,” and her mother snaps, “That’s ridiculous ... love is love. What’s to compare?” To my colleagues in Watson Hall, it is pretty much axiomatic that there is something to compare, which means maybe we ought to problematize the idea—but I digress. The book that frustrated Gornick’s mother engaged in a particular practice of problematizing: “historicization,” or the demonstration that an idea or category that appears natural or salient to us either radically changes or only exists because of transient historical circumstances. Like all problematizing, its aim, as Graff points out, is defamiliarization. While such defamiliarization exercises may be directed at ideas or categories—love, justice, race, etc.—since we orient ourselves through these categories, the aim is ultimately to estrange us from ourselves.

Here’s an example from my own work. Several years ago I spent time exploring the idea of Purgatory, the non-Biblical doctrine that achieved widespread acceptance in late Mediaeval Europe that the dead who were not damned had to undergo prolonged suffering for their sins before they could enter into the paradisaic presence of God. Purgatory was understood in agonizingly physical ways, but it also connected the living to the dead because the living could shorten the ordeal by saying prayers and masses on their behalf. Wealthy people solved the purgatory problem by paying priests to pray for the dead or founding “chantries”—chapels where priests could sing masses for them. This practice led to a massive increase both in the wealth of the church and to anti-clericalism, that is, hostility to perceived corruption in the church, which would eventually lead to the Reformation. I had fallen down the rabbit hole of Purgatory because I was pursuing a matter pertinent both to my field of specialization, Renaissance drama, and my discipline more

broadly: the uncertainty in the sixteenth century about whether learning in letters was a spiritual good that should be widely distributed or the natural property of gentlemen, a question that I felt related to the tension in literary studies between their often élite character and the conviction among literature professors that this is a problem, that participation in literary culture should be widespread, if not universal. (Graff, incidentally, thought the “problem problem” needed solving, and the point of the book was to help those eleventh graders and everyone else to get with the problematizing program.) In short, I was seeking to historicize assumptions that I saw determining arguments in my own department. I was particularly interested in one anti-clerical movement (led by dissident clerics) called *Lollardy* because, in addition to excoriating the Church’s accumulation of wealth through practices such as saying prayers for the dead, the Lollards also sought to translate the Bible from Latin into English, and to teach ordinary women and men to read it. In other words, they sought to distribute what the Church hoarded, and in this hoard, wealth and control of literacy were thoroughly entangled. In fact, the chantries where priests sang for souls in Purgatory often also served as schools where the assisting choirboys were trained in Latin letters.

In this scholarly investigation I got more than I bargained for, though. Purgatory is a cruel fiction, and if I met someone today who believed in it like those folks did, I’d think they needed treatment pronto. But it’s important also to note that the objection of the Lollards was not to the fraudulence of Purgatory, but to the Church’s commodification of salvation; its control of literacy was part of the ploy. The priests were making money by hoarding desperate necessities that should be free to all Christians. So, were the Lollards nuts, too? It took me some time to

understand the point; to all these people salvation was *real*, even *material*, in the same way the COVID-19 vaccine is to me. This was the late fourteenth century (after the Black Death), and had there been a bubonic plague vaccine people of course would have hailed it (as a miracle). But precisely because disease saturated Europe and people passed from living to dead far more rapidly than do most people living in twenty-first-century Canada, these people, like those in many other cultures, worked harder at the problem of the relation between the living and the dead than we in the technocratic university do. My mother died four years ago, and one of my pandemic projects has been sorting through the boxes of her stuff stored in my attic. This apparently endless task makes her present to me, but as I do it, my scholarship also makes me realize that not only do I have no idea where she is, but that it is a problem worth thinking about that this doesn’t pose a problem for me.

What I’ve tried to suggest here is that the humanities demonstrate “the transformative power of the mind,” in the words of the Principal’s vision statement, but that they do so by discerning problems that aren’t susceptible to “breakthrough solutions” or even social correction. My point is not that the whole university should do like the humanities and problematize instead of problem-solve—that would truly be nuts. But the humanities show us the myopia in naturalizing intellectual life as problem-solving. In fact, they do a lot more; I didn’t even get started on the subject of beauty. Unlike biotech research, or computer engineering, or customer analytics, the humanities’ only platform is the university. Here in their home, they should be valued on their own terms.

Elizabeth Hanson can be reached at hansone@queensu.ca.

GRIEVANCE CORNER

Special Programs Under the Ontario Human Rights Code

A new special hiring initiative at Queen's will aim to address the underrepresentation of Black faculty members

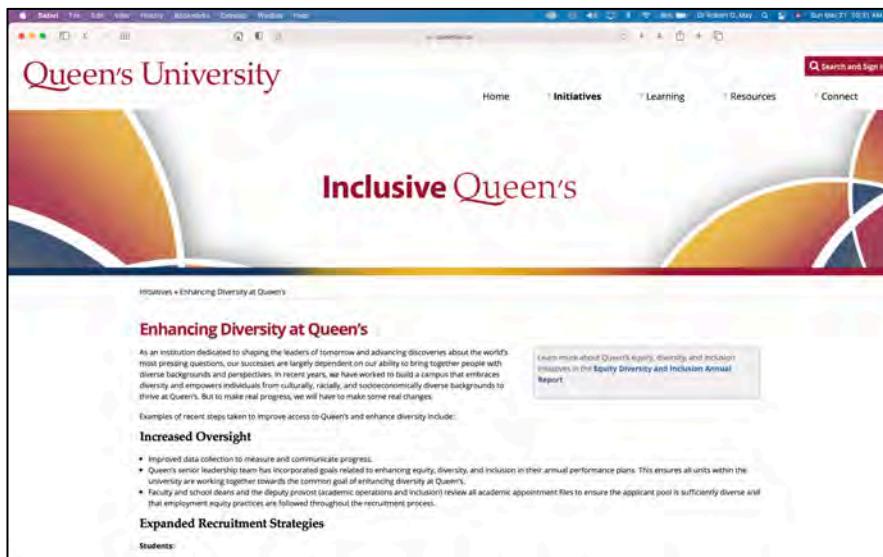
By Peggy Smith
Grievance Officer, QUFA

COVID-19 was not the only driver of change on the Queen's campus during the 2020-2021 academic year. Increased awareness of racism faced by both student and faculty members has resulted in a number of initiatives meant to identify, discuss, and address anti-racism at Queen's University.¹

QUFA has a role to play in the identification and elimination of barriers to inclusion faced by both present and future faculty members who self-identify as being members of an equity-seeking group. We are excited to announce that the University and QUFA have recently agreed to launch a special hiring program under the Ontario Human Rights Code to address the underrepresentation of Black members in our academic community.

New Special Program Hiring Initiative

Under this program, advertisements for targeted positions will be restricted to "qualified individuals who self-identify as Black persons, including those from Africa or of the African diaspora (e.g., African and Africa-descended people from the Caribbean North America, Europe, or Latin America)." This will be the start of a two-year initiative to raise the number of Black academics in the Faculty of Arts and Science.



Queen's University

QUFA Members can read about some of the initiatives the University has undertaken to address anti-racism at Queen's on the Inclusive Queen's Web site: <https://www.queensu.ca/inclusive/initiatives/enhancing-diversity>.

Legal Status of Special Programs

Special programs under the Ontario Human Rights Code are deemed to be non-discriminatory and protected from a legal challenge if the parties can provide evidence of the following:

- the program is aimed at assisting a disadvantaged group,
- the restrictions established within the program are rationally connected to the program, and
- the program does not internally discriminate against the people they are meant to serve.

QUFA has reviewed the program with the University and is satisfied that all of the criteria have been met to give this program the legal protection it needs to move forwards. We hope that the recruitment is a success, and we look forward to welcoming our new Members!

Questions?

If you want to learn more about special programs, the complete "checklist" of issues reviewed by the University and QUFA as required by the Tribunal can be found online.² If

you have questions, please contact me directly.

Notes

¹<https://www.queensu.ca/inclusive/initiatives/enhancing-diversity>

²<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/your-guide-special-programs-and-human-rights-code/special-program-guidelines-checklist>

Peggy Smith can be reached at smithpe@queensu.ca.

QUFA VOICES Voice Your Views!

If you have an opinion about anything you read in *QUFA Voices*, send us a letter to the editor!

mayr@queensu.ca

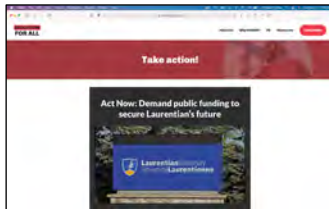


GET INVOLVED

Take Action to Help Laurentian University Faculty

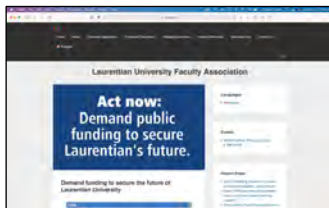
Please consider signing letters to ask both levels of government to support Laurentian University, to stop the insolvency proceedings currently underway, and to provide sufficient funding to the University (please see the February issue of *QUFA Voices* for more information).

The federal letter can be found here:



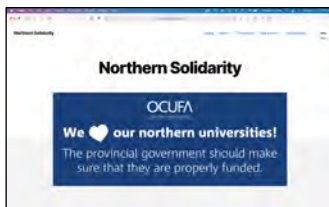
https://www.educationforall.ca/lufa_tool

The provincial letter can be found here:



https://lufappul.ca/wp/?page_id=4989

Our provincial umbrella organization, OCUFA, has launched a Web site to track events unfolding around the Laurentian insolvency. You can sign up to receive updates here:



<https://northernsolidarity.ca/>

ANNOUNCEMENT Nominations Are Open

The Nominations Committee is chaired by Past President Kayll Lake. There are positions open on the committee if you are interested in helping out. The Executive positions up for nomination and election this year are:

- Vice President
- President
- Chair of the Political Action and Communications Committee (PACC)
- Chair of Council (to be elected by Council in March or April)
- Term Adjunct Representative
- Member at Large (one of two positions)
- The new Past President is appointed in this round

If you are interested in joining the Nominations Committee or standing for election, or if you know of people who are interested to serve in either capacity, please get in touch with Kayll Lake (lakek@queensu.ca) or Leslie Jermyn (jermynl@queensu.ca).

ANNOUNCEMENT QUFA Spring General Meeting

The QUFA Spring General Meeting will take place at the following date and time:

Thursday 15 April 2021
1.00 p.m. – 3.00 p.m.
via Zoom

Please join us!

Please RSVP to Elizabeth Polnick (ep43@queensu.ca) by 13 April 2021 for Zoom details.

More information can be found on the QUFA Web site:

<https://www.qufa.ca/event/qufa-spring-general-meeting-3/>

The budget for the coming year will be presented, and open Executive Committee positions will be elected.

Please see the current Policies and Protocols document on the QUFA Web site for election rules:

<https://www.qufa.ca/about/constitutional-documents/>

ANNOUNCEMENT QUFA Survey for Pre-Tenure Faculty: Impacts of the Pandemic

We encourage you to fill out an important QUFA survey regarding the impacts of the pandemic on new faculty.

We sent the Word document to all pre-tenure faculty in early March, but if you didn't receive it and would like to contribute, please contact Micheline Waring (micheline.waring@queensu.ca).



Virtual Public Lecture

Parental Status and Career Outcomes

with

Dr Jana Raver

E. Marie Shantz Professor of Organizational Behaviour
Smith School of Business, Queen's University



Everyone Welcome

This lecture will provide participants with an overview of current research evidence on how becoming a parent influences one's work experiences and career outcomes, focusing particularly on the gendered nature of this process. Unique challenges faced by parents during the COVID-19 pandemic will also be discussed. Participants will come to a deeper understanding of the complexities of encouraging equality of the sexes at work in the face of persistent societal stereotypes of mothers and fathers.

Topics to be covered include:

- Evidence on the “motherhood penalty” and the “fatherhood bonus”
- Unique difficulties faced by mothers, including navigating “mom shame” versus “career shame”
 - Unique difficulties faced by fathers, including “flexibility stigma”
- Parental leave policies and some of their unintended negative effects

Dr Raver specializes in developing and sharing knowledge that helps organizations to build highly effective teams, overcome adversity, and minimize harmful interpersonal behaviours.

A question-and-answer session will follow the lecture

Thursday 25 March 2021

2.30 p.m. – 4.00 p.m.

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