

Old age ought to be (gently) embraced

GENERALLY, WHEN I THINK OF THE FUTURE, I think in terms of the next five years—or at the very most, the next ten. However, the recent aging symposium, held this weekend at the U of A hospital, tried to get people pondering life a little further down the line—and then a little further still.

But after listening to Dr Daniel Callahan, international program director of The Hastings Center (a bioethics think-tank), I for one am not convinced that money spent on longevity research couldn't be better spent elsewhere. After all, there are very few compelling reasons for extending life spans, and a multitude of negative repercussions if we do.

Suppose these technologies were developed, Callahan asks: who would have access to them? Only the wealthy? And what would the effects be of having people live longer on our already overpopulated planet? Why should we be seeking to lengthen our lives at all?

The cost of developing new technologies is huge—and there are plenty of diseases that could use a cure before aging. Cancer, AIDS and multiple sclerosis come to mind, just to name a few. Enhancing our quality of life—that is, making the time we have better rather than longer—makes so much more sense. In fact, I find it difficult to call aging a disease at all. After all, it's a natural process to which we are all subjected.

The University recently ended its policy of mandating retirement at the age of 65. In light of possible developments in anti-aging technology, one wonders whether the average retirement age won't be pushed back further yet. Given improved health, we can even expect to continue working well into our 70s. Although some people do already and are happy for it, I would be disappointed not to have the choice, the same way I would be upset if I were forced to quit just because I had gone past my statistical prime.

All things considered, the prospect of extending my life an extra ten years or so isn't really appealing—not necessarily for personal reasons, but for the impact that it would have on those around me. Who would be expected to take care of me for another decade? Even if I am lucky enough to be in good health, I would still need support and assistance. And if I weren't in a situation where I have family around, this could get very pricy. In fact, this effect is already evident today, as many long-term care facilities are being privatized and charging huge sums for often questionable care. That is, there simply aren't enough beds or health-care professionals to meet the demand. Already, we can hardly accommodate the aging population—and this is just the beginning of the boom.

When I picture myself 40 years from now, I don't see a woman giving up on life or thinking that it's over at 60; rather, I see someone who's still pleased with her accomplishments in youth and eager to experience a new age. Growing older is a beautiful process that allows us to change and develop. It's this graceful process of aging that we should focus on instead of just worrying about when our time is up.

When it comes to choosing between living an extra few years or having a healthier and happier life, I wouldn't hesitate in choosing the latter. But it's easy to say now that I don't want ten more years. In the face of old age, perhaps I'll change my mind. Maybe my age is getting the best of me already—I am a ripe old 22 after all.

KRYSTINA SULATYCKI
Photo editor

Fly away already

SO NELLY FURTADO HOSTS THE JUNOS AND PICKS up three awards at the same time. How exactly does that work? And the winner is ... me?

I know she touts herself as a "Promiscuous Girl," but at this point "attention whore" might seem like a more apt descriptor. First the Grey Cup, and now this. What B-List Canadian spectacle will Furtado ruin next?

ADAM GAUMONT
Opinion editor

LETTERS

Three Rs not enough, Malcolm

I would like to say that I appreciate the current social issue that was brought up in the article "Unnecessary Course 101" (27 March). Miss Malcolm indirectly addressed the disconcerting reality that our society is lacking environmental awareness, misunderstanding the practices of sustainability and overall rests far too comfortably with an apathetic view of the world.

If we were actually an environmentally conscious generation then we would see that environmental friendliness is greater than the concept of "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle." The current environmental issues that are under thorough discussion, and would likely be the basis of a class called Environmental Sustainability 101, are not small-scale concerns. They are issues being faced globally and they require solutions that are not so simplified. Quick-fix environmental Band-Aids make people feel like they are making a difference when in fact they do not entirely understand the problem.

It appears as if the uprising discussions about environmental sustainability are not of value to enough people. I am very pleased, however, to hear that our President of the University, Dr Indra Samarasekera, has addressed the hot topic of sustainability as a real issue. I believe that the implementation of a mandatory sustainability course is a beginning to a long road of solutions. People must be made aware of the extent of environmental issues to fully understand why they are being told to follow the principles of sustainability. Without a background of knowledge and understanding for sustainability, today's industrial society cannot be expected to rapidly convert from money-making to resource-conserving as its priority.

The University has the responsibility as a secondary-education provider to liberate well-rounded, well-informed individuals into society. The purpose of a first-year course is to provide a foundation for students to succeed in their future courses.

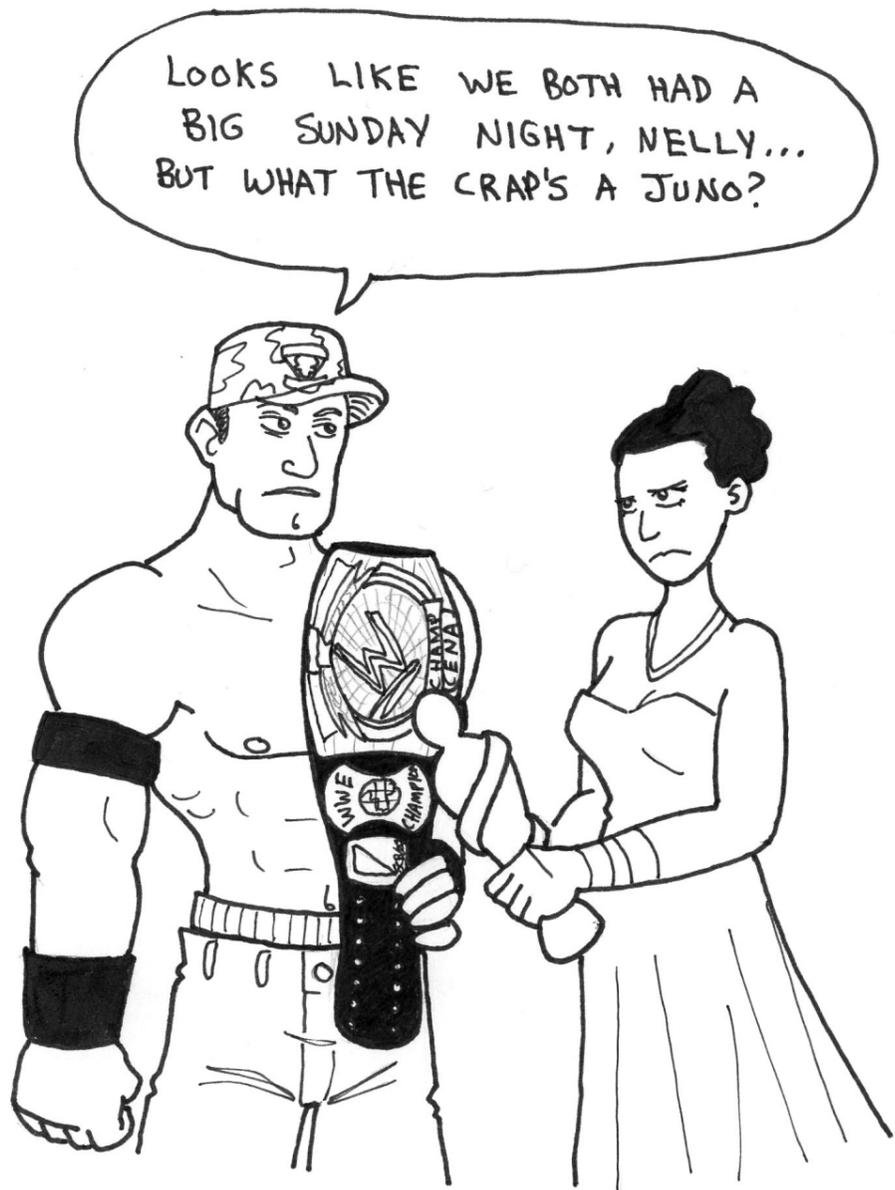
The purpose of Environmental Sustainability 101 would not be a tree-hugging hippie class, as this is not the point of sustainability. Rather, the main objective would be the preparation for students, further down the road, as future resource managers and concerned, knowledgeable world leaders.

SALLY ELLS
Science III

Not everyone is an environmentalist

I do agree that university students should not be forced to take courses on environmental sustainability but I find it pretty arrogant of Miss Malcolm to think that this generation has all the moral conscience it needs to make changes in the future. Call me pessimistic but I do not think that all members of this generation will "... work to compensate for prior abuses when it's our turn to take over in important leadership roles."

Does Miss Malcolm talk to some



SCOTT C BOURGEOIS

of the engineers? Yes, some truly care about the environment but watch as others start working for huge oil companies and money starts to talk. I think our generation likes to put up a false front. We buy into this idea that we change the world and that's all it becomes: an idea. We can talk a lot about solutions but in the future will we be that different from past generations? Engineers are given a bad rap, but it's not just them: most people you talk to will say they care about the environment, but how many actually make substantial changes in their lifestyle or are willing to pay more or vote accordingly?

I would also like to question what she thinks is "needlessly wasteful" or "unnecessarily careless," because in ignorance she may be in fact doing such things. If we, as university students, already know all we need to know about the environment, why, after three years of learning about it, am I still continually embarrassed by my ignorance? And even if we possess the knowledge, many of us do not seem to use it. I have a roommate who recycles basically because she lives with me and I threaten her with torture and death, and a brother who thinks the extent of the anthropogenic impact to climate change is debatable and that changes that could occur in future centuries are not worth the time and effort (not to mention the money) trying to understand because hey, it won't happen in our lifetime so why worry. As for the rest of my peers I find us just as lazy as other demographics in making changes in our lifestyles to decrease our impact.

So while the majority of lectures and courses on the environment are "preaching to the sustainable

choir"—or as my brother would say a bunch of hippies doing nothing but talking and eating granola—I do not "sigh and feel slightly annoyed"; instead I try to understand the environment we are all a part of and try to come up with ways to convince even the most apathetic that it is worth the time, energy and money. And as Miss Malcolm proved it is a daunting task indeed.

APRIL ZEMBAL
Science III

Some students still need to clean up their act

There is nothing more frustrating than hearing someone say [that] they already know everything so they shouldn't bother learning more about one of the biggest issues in the world. Did you know, "Canada is one of the worst environmental performers in the industrialized world and has shown no improvement over the past decade"? A study performed at Simon Fraser University placed Canada 28 out of 30 industrialized nations. If we are all behind a cleaner, better planet, why is it that every time I look in the garbage I see pop cans and every time I look in the paper recycling bin I see garbage? Why are the tar sands increasing production five-fold in the next 13 years?

The idea that we have all learned in-depth about this issue from birth is ignorant. About 15 per cent of the student body is international students from varying backgrounds. Many leave Canada when they finish their programs and may become very involved in their own countries. Wouldn't it be great if they brought back ideas that prevented them from

making the same mistakes we have?

University is all about unnecessary courses—that's the difference between university and college. Taking courses on topics other than your major is what makes university interesting. It's like the difference between a Ford Escort and a Rolls Royce, the extra things are what make it special. Looking back, first year didn't have so much work that an extra hour a week for a single semester would have been the straw that broke our backs. I'm not saying the class should be three hours per week with a three-hour lab and a two-hour final, but I think we all could spare an hour a week for the sake of improving the future of our country.

"The Canada we see in this report does not reflect the one we hold in our hearts," says Dr Suzuki. Either we know the problem but we're too stupid to do anything about it or we don't know enough and that's why we aren't doing anything. I hope it's the latter.

BEN CAMPBELL
Engineering III

Letters to the editor should be dropped off at room 3-04 of the Students' Union Building or e-mailed to letters@gateway.ualberta.ca.

The Gateway reserves the right to edit letters for length and clarity, and to refuse publication of any letter it deems racist, sexist, libellous or otherwise hateful in nature. The Gateway also reserves the right to publish letters online.

Letters to the editor should be no longer than 350 words, and should include the author's name, program, year of study and student ID number to be considered for publication.