

I like my news like my coffee: Black

Lucky for me too, because the Canadian media can't help but talk about Conrad



SCOTT
LILWALL

Since classes let out in April, my mornings have gotten sadly predictable.

I routinely wake up ten minutes later than required to make it to work at a decent time, screw up the oatmeal-to-milk ratio for my morning breakfast, and before going to the coal mines each morning, I make sure to get an update on my favourite long-running soap opera, *The Trial and Tribulations of Conrad Black*.

Luckily, I haven't had any trouble finding a source for my daily fix—the Canadian media has proved to be an eager pusher to feed my addiction.

Like overzealous parents fussing over a colicky infant, the fourth estate has spent the last four years racing to cover every little development (and a few non-developments) in the former media baron's ongoing death spiral.

Black renounces his Canadian citizenship? Front-page news. Lord Conrad on trial for fraud in the United States? Cover story for *Maclean's*. When the guilty verdict came in, it showed considerable restraint on the *Globe and Mail's* part not to burn a headline onto the surface of the moon.

Even after the conviction, the obsession remains. This week, newspapers have been tripping over themselves to report that Black has filed a new

motion, asking a judge to give him a new trial—or, why the hell not—a simple acquittal on the charges. Not so much an appeal as a request for a do-over.

Why do forests fall for the paper to print the latest juicy gossip on Black, while many other hard-working Canadian criminals vie desperately for ink? After all, other corporate crooks like Bernie Ebbers, the Edmonton-born CEO of Worldcom, don't seem to warrant the same amount of coverage.

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Sure, events like this do get a few headlines—maybe a day or two of top-copy coverage before they're jettisoned out of the news cycle—while the Black Saga continues on, garnering seven-page spreads in the *Ottawa Citizen*. In fact, the CBC's website has over 5000—that's right, *five thousand*—articles, photographs, and interviews about Conrad and his various dramas.

For a moment, let's ignore the irony inherent in writing in a newspaper about how Conrad Black is getting too much press. Instead, let's ask why the media is so obsessed with the story.

Quite simply, it's because *journalists* are interested in the story. Conrad Black was a superstar in the press world. His companies once owned over 400 newspapers in North America, and he was one of the driving forces behind the *National Post* when it started out.

Journalists like to talk about journalism. Endlessly. If given the chance, we will go on for infuriating lengths of time about what we do—it's just our nature. We don't even have the courtesy to keep it among ourselves, jumping at every chance we get to wax journalistic to anyone within earshot. We have no shame.

As a result, Conrad Black is such a big deal in newspaper-land because the people in charge of deciding what is news are addicted to the story, while the average Canadian probably couldn't care less about what the media baron said or did this week.

With all the sniping about bias in the media, this is a point that's often overlooked: news is inherently skewed to what those who report it think is important. It's not something that is done intentionally, but nonetheless is a fact of life in determining what makes it through the news filter.

Not that we should be devoid of information about Conrad Black, but the interests and needs of those reading the newspaper—not those involved in its creation—should be the priority when it comes to deciding how much is needed.

The coverage should be careful and thought-out. Like a fine bowl of oatmeal, neither too much nor too little makes for a pleasant morning.

There's plenty of options, so pick good ones



MARIA
KOTOVYCH

Everyone who knows me will agree that I'm a geek. I've already graduated once from the U of A, and soon afterwards, I re-applied to be an Open Studies student taking one class per term for personal interest. And yes, by "personal interest," I mean that I went to school for fun. This admission has evoked numerous responses, ranging from surprise to pity, from fellow classmates.

Fast-forward a few years, and I'm now registered in an after-degree program, so I must once again consider my program's requirements when selecting courses. But being the geek that I am, I have a double-major, meaning that I've been spending a lot of quality time with the good old University Calendar lately.

For many new students, the Calendar might be quite daunting—especially when they try to navigate through hundreds of pages of oddly abbreviated and unfamiliar course names. For these same students, trying to decide which classes they should take might be equally stressful, especially because the University offers a much wider range of courses than what you'd find at a typical high school.

After registering in required courses, students then have to select their options. But how exactly does a student pick two or three courses from the thousands that are out there?

Especially when that student might only have a vague idea of what many of those disciplines actually are.

With so much to choose from, many students settle for simply taking the handful of typical fluff courses with a reputation of being an "easy A."

For this reason, I challenge you to leave your comfort zone when selecting an open option. *Take a risk.* Take something that you've never heard of before—or at least something that you've never studied. Unlike the cat, your curiosity isn't going to kill you

With so much to choose from, many students settle for simply taking the handful of typical fluff courses with a reputation of being an "easy A."

For instance, when I first started University, I had no idea what sociology was. Curious, I registered for the intro course, and I found it so interesting that I ended up taking subsequent higher-level classes.

There are other benefits to taking a class that, to a new first-year student, might sound kind of obscure. For instance, if you're trying to impress that hottie in one of your classes, you'll look all smart-like, name-dropping guys like Plato and Nietzsche in casual conversation.

If you browse the Calendar, you'll eventually stumble upon some courses that might strike you, a doe-eyed

freshman, as slightly unconventional. I bet you didn't know that U of A students can take classes on such diverse topics as Human Sexuality, Witchcraft and the Occult, Fairy Tales and Folk Tales, Insect Diversity, Violent Weather, Storytelling, and Symbolic Logic. Cool, huh?

And imagine discussing *these* classes with that same hottie whose interest you've already piqued with philosophy discussions (but who will hopefully become more than a platonic friend).

You might roll your eyes when I say this, but another way to select an option is by taking something that you hated or sucked at in high school. I'm totally serious.

High schools and universities present knowledge in completely different ways from one another, so you might find that a course you once hated can be quite enjoyable when taught at the University level.

For me, that happened with math and statistics. While I struggled to understand and enjoy math in high school, that trend completely reversed when I took university Linear Algebra and Statistics. Not only did I do well in those classes, I even enjoyed them! When you take risks, you never know what might happen.

Selecting options becomes easier with a few years of University under your belt, once you've had some time exploring your interests and you've received some advice from other students about good classes.

In the meantime, I encourage you to be creative: dive right in, take some risks, and explore different disciplines. You're only in danger of opening your mind, broadening your horizons, and becoming a geek like me.

Surprisingly enough, the reason most buses smell like urine is not due to land-roving jellyfish.

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