• Celebrating 90 years! •

Naipaul: Bigot Racist Adulterer Sadist

Nobel Laureate winner

BIOGRAPHY BEARS ALL. PAGE 7

THE UBYSSEY

January 9, 2009 | www.ubyssey.ca
Vera's burgers are deliciously expensive since 1918 | volume xc, number 28
UBC's official student newspaper is published Tuesdays and Fridays

Toope's two years

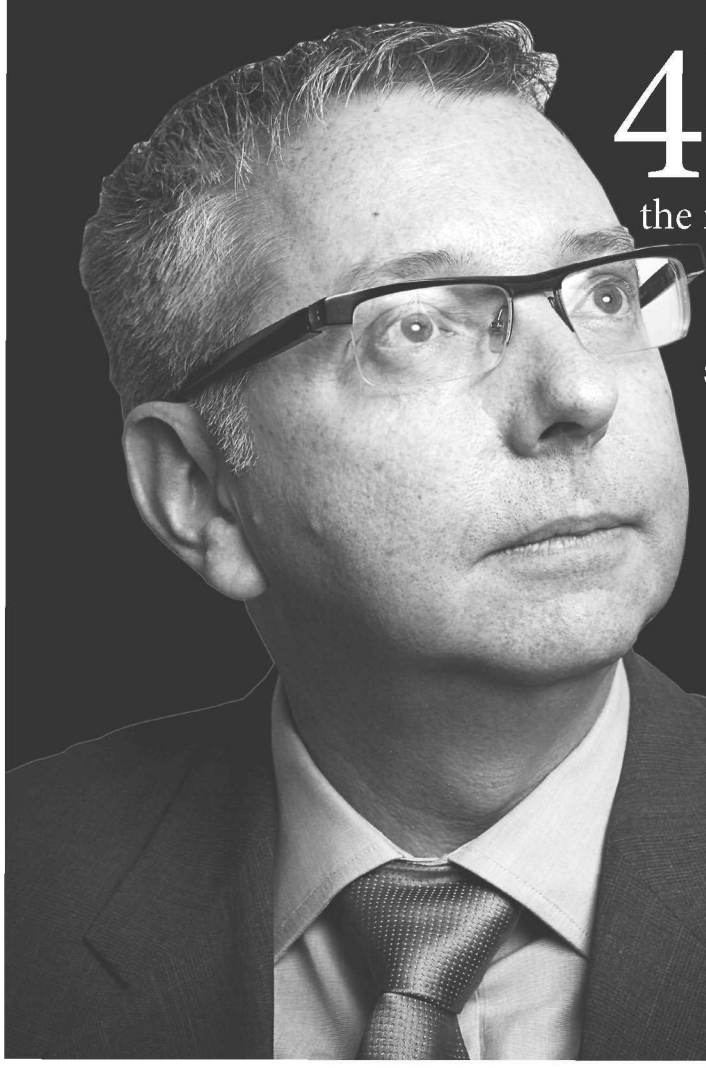
Stephen Toope talks about his time here at UBC

On Canada Day in 2006, Stephen Toope became UBC's 12th president, beginning a five-year term. At the time, UBC had firmly entrenched itself as a globally respected research-intensive university—or as previous president Martha Piper liked to say, a "world-class university."

1 **ON PLANNING |** "Consultation does not mean agreement. Consultation means consultation."

2 **ON THE FARM |** "This is not a small group of pointy-headed people who have a fixation with the farm."

3 **ON THE WAR ON FUN |** "I don't see us as being purveyors of prohibition. That's not our role, and it's not the RCMP's role either in my view."



4 **ON HIS SURPRISES |** "Maybe on the more negative side, on the inverse side, there's ambition, but there can also be a level of smugness."

BY JUSTIN MCELROY
News Editor

MORE ON PAGE 3

Wheelchair woes

While most UBC students take getting around campus for granted, for those with physical disabilities it's another story. Making the campus accessible requires energy, diligence and time.

MORE ON PAGE 5

WE HAVE SUDOKU

PAGE 2

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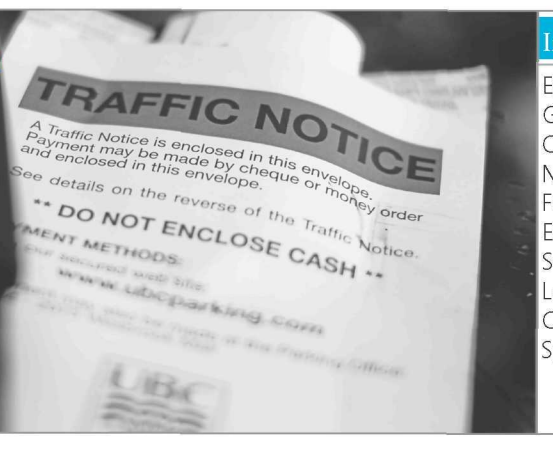

Set to Rule:

Parking lawsuit about to be settled.
see it online at www.ubyssey.ca

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Events

If you have an event, e-mail us at events@ubyssey.ca

January 9

Women's Hockey • UBC Thunderbirds vs. Lethbridge Horns • *Jan. 9 @ 7:30–9pm, Thunderbird Winter Sports Center, Tickets: $10 student/$4 youth & senior/&2 UBC student* •

Winter Broomball Championships • One of UBC REC's most entertaining tournaments, the Winter Broomball Championships are the perfect escape for the winter blues. CoRec teams of five (four plus goalie) will compete in the most fun you can have on ice without wearing skates. Helmets with a full cage or half-visor and mouth guard are required. Participants are strongly encouraged to bring their own. Knee pads and elbow pads are also recommended, but not required. Be sure to sign-up for a timeslot early as spots are sure to fill up quickly! • *All day Jan. 9, UBC Student Team: $106, UBC Staff Team: $175* •

January 10

Shoot for the Cure - Women's Basketball vs. SFU Clan • The UBC Thunderbirds are proud to be a part of the CIS initiative SHOOT FOR THE CURE. Part proceeds from every ticket sold will go to the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation—BC/Yukon Region. Come out on Saturday night for an evening of basketball and support both your Thunderbirds and breast cancer research in Canada. Show your support and come to the game wearing PINK! • *Jan. 10 @ 6-8pm, Location: War Memorial Gym, Tickets: $10 adult/$4 youth & senior/$2 UBC student* •

Basketball • UBC Men's Basketball vs. Simon Fraser Clan for the last time in conference play this year • *Jan. 10 @ 8pm, War Memorial Gym, Tickets: $10 adult/$4 youth & senior/$2 UBC student* •

January 11

Chip In! Christmas Tree Recycling at the UBC Botanical Garden • Come help. Your help is much appreciated! Be sustainable! Drop off your Christmas tree (only) to be chipped into mulch for Garden trails. Please remove all tree stands, decorations, lights and tinsel. All dates and times are self-serve drop off. • *Jan. 11, 9–4:30pm, Location: UBC Botanical Garden parking lot, 6804 South West Marine Dr.* •

January 13

Improve your Presentation Skills • Whether you shake in your boots at the thought of speaking in front of a group or ham it up on stage, Coach Rhonda Victoor will catapult your speaking to a whole new level! After nearly two years of gruelling competition Rhonda became the World Effective Speaking Champion in Japan in November 2004: an event attended by 10,000 business leaders including author Stephen Covey. Now she will share the GEMS that helped her become a world class speaker! • *Jan. 13 @ 9am–4pm, Location: TBD, Cost: $100* •

Note taking Workshop • Learn about the Cornell note taking method and SQ3R—techniques to help you take better notes. Also, get some tips to improve your concentration in lectures. • *Jan 13 @ 12–1:30pm, Held in the Dodson Room of the Chapman Learning Commons, To register go to: www.students.ubc.ca/workshops* •

January 14

Find your Career • Ever wonder what types of careers are best suited to your interests and personality? This interactive workshop will help you deepen your understanding of your work style and work preferences so you can better plan and prepare for your future career. Complete the Type Focus personality inventory prior to attending the workshop. • *Jan 14 @ 12–1pm, Irving K. Barber Learning Centre Room 260, Cost: Free* •

Unmasking the Hidden Job Market • Is the eternal search for employment feeling a bit futile? You may be surprised to know that an overwhelming 80% of jobs are unadvertised. So where are all the jobs? Professional association members from a variety of industries come to uncover the secret world of networking to help you be successful in your career quest. • *Jan 14 @ 2–4 pm, LSK 460, Cost: Free* •

January 15

Post-Graduation Work Permit Info Session • Are you graduating and planning to look for a job in Canada? Do you want to know about government regulations on post-graduation work permit? How can you find job? How can you prepare and what are the resources? Come join us in the info session and learn more about resources and tips related to post-graduation employment. • *Jan. 15 @ 1–2pm, Location: I. House, Upper Lounge, Cost: Free* •

January 16

Beijing Performance Photography • Performance Photography emerged in China to forge a new artistic direction within a rapidly evolving society. Numerous Chinese photographers will have their work presented • *Jan 16–Apr 20, Free Admission, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery* •

Critical Thinking and Learning • Develop critical thinking strategies and enhance your academic performance: an introduction to the Strategic Content Learning Model. This workshop is part of the Emerging Scholars Program. • *Jan 16 5–6:30pm, Register at www.students.ubc.ca/workshops, Location: Dodson Room of the Chapman Learning Commons* •

Sudoku

		8		6	9		3	
		1					8	2
			8			9		
	8	7	6	3				
9								1
				7	2	8	4	
		4			7			
2	6					4		
	7		2	4		1		

solution, tips and computer programs at www.sudoku.com

Medium # 99

su | do | ku

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SUSCOMIC.COM, BY MICHAEL BROUND

Classifieds

We Want You!

ACTORS NEEDED
Brave New Play Rites Festival, UBC.
Auditions: Sunday January 11, 10am – 6pm and Monday January 12 , 6pm – 10pm in the Dorothy Somerset Studio.
Head to www.bravenew.ca for more information.

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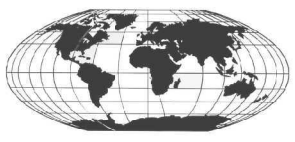

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THE UBYSSEY

January 9th, 2009
volume xc, nº 28

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Letters to the editor must be under 300 words. Please include your phone number, student number and signature (not for publication) as well as your year and faculty with all submissions. ID will be checked when submissions are dropped off at the editorial office of The Ubyssey; otherwise verification will be done by phone. "Perspectives" are opinion pieces over 300 words but under 750 words and are run according to space. "Freestyles" are opinion pieces written by Ubyssey staff members. Priority will be given to letters and perspectives over freestyles unless the latter is time sensitive. Opinion pieces will not be run until the identity of the writer has been verified. The Ubyssey reserves the right to edit submissions for length and clarity. All letters must be received by 12 noon the day before intended publication. Letters received after this point will be published in the following issue unless there is an urgent time restriction or other matter deemed relevant by the Ubyssey staff.

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Contributors

Kellan Higgins, Trevor Melanson, Dan Haves, Joe Rayment and Shun Endo had delicious burgers and plenty of beer. Drew Thompson Rian Harrison, Paul Bucci, Claire Hanna, Justin McElroy and Isabel Pilar Ferrares did not. (And a bent wiener.)

Canadian University Press

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Stephen Toope, president and vice-chancellor of the University of British Columbia, chatted with *The Ubyssey* to give his views of the what UBC should be. KELLAN HIGGINS PHOTO/THE UBYSSEY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

At the same time, student engagement surveys showed a disconnect between undergraduate students and professors, that campus development often happened with little in the way of consultation, and that UBC was struggling to deal with structural deficits. Today under Toope, UBC continues to score in the top 50 in most international rankings of universities but still faces many of the same challenges: attempting to increase engagement between undergraduate students and professors, balancing the budget in face of government cutbacks, and cranes on campus that clash with the wishes of students. This past December, *The Ubyssey* sat down with president Toope for the first time since September of 2007, and spoke with him at length of the challenges—and successes—he has had at the halfway point of his first term. Here are excerpts from the conversation.

The Ubyssey: Two and a half years into your tenure, it's fair to say you've fully settled into your position. What would you say has marked your presidency so far?

Stephen Toope: I guess I would say in some ways my tenure is a continuity from the past two presidents [Martha Piper and David Strangway] because in the past 20 years UBC has repositioned iteslf as a globally influential university, and I think we're continuing along that trajectory. We're attracting really outstanding students, especially at the undergraudate level. Our students are really remarkable, and at the graduate level we have some really exceptional students and would really like to do even better there by offering better support packages for graudates....I think that's moving in the right direction, the research prowess of the university has grown tremendously and continues to strengthen. The biggest challenge was this sense of a lack of attention—and it's pretty common to all reasearch-intensive universities—on the undergraduate experience.

U: Many student leaders have commented that compared to previous president Martha Piper—you really focus on the micro aspect of the experience of undergraduate students as being a fundamental part of your job.

T: I'm not sure I would classify it as micro, it's macro too, but a different macro. Universities exist because there are students; we wouldn't be a university without students, so if we're not engaged and directly thinking through the vagaries of the undergraduate program, then we're not fulfilling our role as effectively as we could. Research is macro too, but the undergraduate experience is fundamental to the university.

U: Are you satisfied with the way planning and campus development has gone on campus?

T: (Laughs) Look. What I can say is planning, in any circumstances, is one of the most politically fraught activities you can engage in. If you look at planning, never mind the university. If you look at it in Vancouver, in Toronto, in Montreal, it's always highly contentious, because there are all sorts of interests, some of them are incommensurable. People have different visions, and they're often restricted by very specific time frames....Inevitably there's going to be controversy. Am I happy with everything that has ever been decided? No. Would I change some things? Absolutely. Do I think people have overall made [their] best efforts? I think they have. Not every decision is right. So I hope that we can, going forward, make sure we have really robust consultation processes.

U: Were you, UBC, and the board prepared for the controversy that would come up with the farm?

T: I was, yes.

U: Was everyone else?

T: I think there was some surprise. But I can tell you that I had discussions months ago, saying this is a big, big issue and we have to be paying close attention because it's not going away. This is not a small group of pointy-headed people who have a fixation with the farm. This is a much broader set of issues and people who are really engaged. These are people who care, and care for very understandable reasons. I was surprised with 15,000 [signatures] on the petition, I thought that took a lot of organization, and it was pretty admirable, but I wasn't really surprised that this was a big issue.

U: There's been a perception, particularly among fraternities, that the RCMP and UBC have been cracking down on alcoholic activities on campus. Do you think this perception actually exists, and more importantly, does UBC have a role to play in mediating issues between students and the RCMP?

T: I certainly hear it enough to feel that there's a level of frustration that we have to take seriously. People have called it the "War on Fun," and the Radical Beer Faction produced a really good report. It was very thoughtful, about what some of the issues are. So does UBC have a role to play? Yes. Is it playing that role? Yes. Are we where we need to be? Not yet. [VP Students] Brian Sullivan and various people in this office have been trying to facilitate a dialogue. One of our board of governors members, Bijan Ahmadian, has been actively working on this file, trying to broker better communication between the fraternities and the RCMP....We're trying to find ways to bring people together. I think that there's enough concern that I'm inclined to think there's a real issue, that it's not just a perception, that it is real. So, I think we do need to keep working on this one....I think our role is probably an intermediary one at this point, but with a sense of support for university life. University is not just going to classes and doing your papers and lab, it's the whole nine yards of having fun—I hope relatively responsibly, but this is a university. I've spent my whole life in universities and I know how they function, and I've lived in dorms and I know how they work. We have an obligation to ensure that safety issues are being dealt with properly and things like that, but I don't see us as being purveyors of prohibition. That's not our role, and it's not the RCMP's role either in my view.

U: What are other areas at UBC that have been a focus of yours?

T: We now have a draft of our Aboriginal Strategic Plan, which is up on the website, and I think we've really been trying to be focusing our attentions and energy on actually delivering on promises we've been making since TREK 2000. So we're going to appoint a senior adviser to me on aboriginal affairs, and we have a strategic plan which I think is getting a lot of support, and now we have to make sure we actually implement that thoroughly.

U: But how do you measure improvement in aboriginal issues at UBC?

T: I'll give you some random examples. I think we would be successful if we had substantial increases in the number of levels at undergraduate and graduate levels, not only at admission time, but that were sustained and supported throughout the program to successful graduation. That's one measure. I would like to see more aboriginal students in science than we currently have, and that requires us to work with high schools because it's very hard for aboriginal students to gain access to courses to allow them to go into science. I think we should have significantly more [aboriginal] faculty members than we currently have at UBC. It's in the mid-teens right now. We have more [aboriginal professors] at UBC-O proportionally, but we have to set some targets, and find mechanisms of support, and really reach out to find the very best aboriginal candidates. And I think the last measure is much more robust relationships with aboriginal communities. We have good relations with Musqueam, through the sports program, there are mentoring programs, language programs, but it could be more.

U: Say you're talking to a Grade 12 student, trying to make their decision at what university to go to. What do you say to convince them to go here?

T: Why come to UBC? Because I think there is a chance to really make a difference here, for a set of reasons. You're going to be with a group of students who are very strong, who are very ambitious and want to succeed. You've got an incredible range of opportunities in the university because of its scale, size, strength across many faculties. It's not a university where one faculty is strong; you've got pinnacles of excellence across the university, you're in a beautiful place. It gives you opportunities to engage if you do want to do all the outdoor things, but there's a lively music community, a lively drama community, political activism is alive on campus. I think those things are all very positive, but I would say you have to be pretty self-motivated, because this is a very big place, so you've got to think through the kind of person you are, and decide whether or not you are the type of person who jumps into things and seizes opportunities. And if you're that type of person, that kind of leader, really, then this is a wonderful place. U

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»News Briefs

FORMER UBC PROF NAMED PRESIDENT OF GHANA

On January 3, John Atta Mills was declared the winner of the Ghanaian presidential election. Mills, who led the National Democratic Congress to victory over Akufo-Addo's New Patriotic Party, was also formerly a visiting professor at UBC's Liu Institute for Global Issues. Mills is noted for having a great admiration for Canadian-style social democracy and took part in a relevant country-wide consultation before Canada hosted the G8 summit in 2002.

The Georgia Straight reports that Mills has promised he will not allow his party to extract revenge against the former NPP government, which in the past eight years of power took retribution against former NDC government officials. As Mills says on his own campaign website, "The time has come to work together to build a better Ghana....I assure Ghanaians that I will be President for all."

UBC WEIGHS IN ON THE "NEXT BIG THING"

UBC Reports asked a group of researchers and professors what they felt was "the next big thing" to change the world.

Wade Huntley felt that nuclear disarmament is near at hand after diplomatic steps were taken by nuclear-armed countries.

Associate Professor W.G. Dunford of the department of electrical and computer engineering foresees driverless vehicles as the next big thing in technology. The vehicles will be hailed like a taxi and will come in a wide range of sizes and fuel sources depending on your type of trip.

Assistant Professor Elizabeth W. Dunn believed there is going to be a serious change in public policy and soon happiness will be its primary end.

Erik Rosolowsky, professor of physics and astronomy, said that thanks to a new and advanced telescope, scientists are closer to learning more about how our solar system came to be by observing other solar systems currently in the process of forming.

Dr. John Steeves, Dr. Gary Birch, and Borna Noureddin believe that brain-computer interfaces or BCI are going to change the world for the physically disabled, giving them the ability to perform tasks by commanding a computer with their thoughts.

And perhaps most interesting was Professor Frank Ko's recent development in nano materials called tissue scaffolding. Tissue scaffolding works within the body to regenerate damaged tissue, slowly releasing drugs to help in healing, and is then broken down and metabolized by the body.

NEW MEDIATOR FOR UBC STUDENTS

UBC has appointed Shirley Nakata as the ombuds for students. Starting this month, Nakata will aid in the resolution of conflicts between students and professors, staff members and university departments, conducting impartial investigations, and providing advice to students. The new position is jointly funded by the Alma Mater Society, Graduate Students' Society and the university. Previous to Nakata's appointment, the AMS had independently employed an Ombudsperson's office.

Nakata has extensive experience as a legal professional and conflict mediator. She was director, professional conduct with the BC College of Teachers, managing the professional conduct department and the discipline process. She has served as a board member of the BC Council of Administrative Tribunals, and the West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund. Additionally, she has worked with the Canadian Human Rights Commission as a human rights investigator.

UBC ALUM APPOINTED KANDAHAR GOVERNOR

A former agricultural expert at UBC, Tooryalai Wesa, was sworn in as governor of Kandahar, the war-torn province of Afghanistan.

Wesa received his PhD in educational studies from UBC in 2002. He speaks six languages, and is fluent in four of them. Included in Wesa's resume is that he has trained Canadian soldiers, was the founder and first chancellor of Kandahar University, and worked as an associate researcher at the Institute of Asian Research at UBC.

Wesa recently went to Kandahar to speak to constituents about the crisis. Wesa fielded comments that foreign troops were not helping enough, responding that many Afghans are reluctant to co-operate with the foreign troops in their search for insurgents. Wesa said that residents should work together instead of engaging in family and tribal feuds.

Wesa's top priorities are security and improving employment opportunities in Kandahar.

Get in the game, see the action, experience the moment

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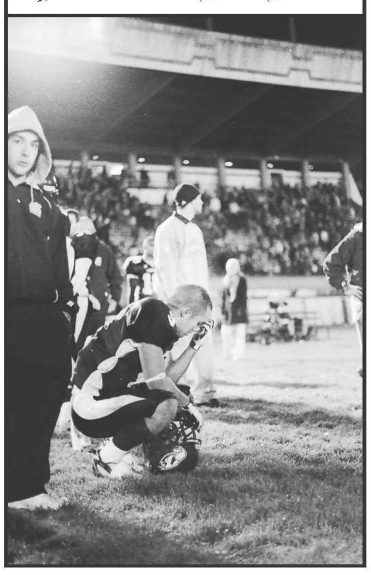

The Ubyssey is having a bi-election

Multimedia position is up for grabs.

Position papers are due Tuesday, January 13
A all-candidates forum will be on Wednesday 14
Voting ends, January 20.

questions, email
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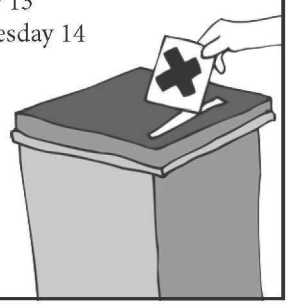

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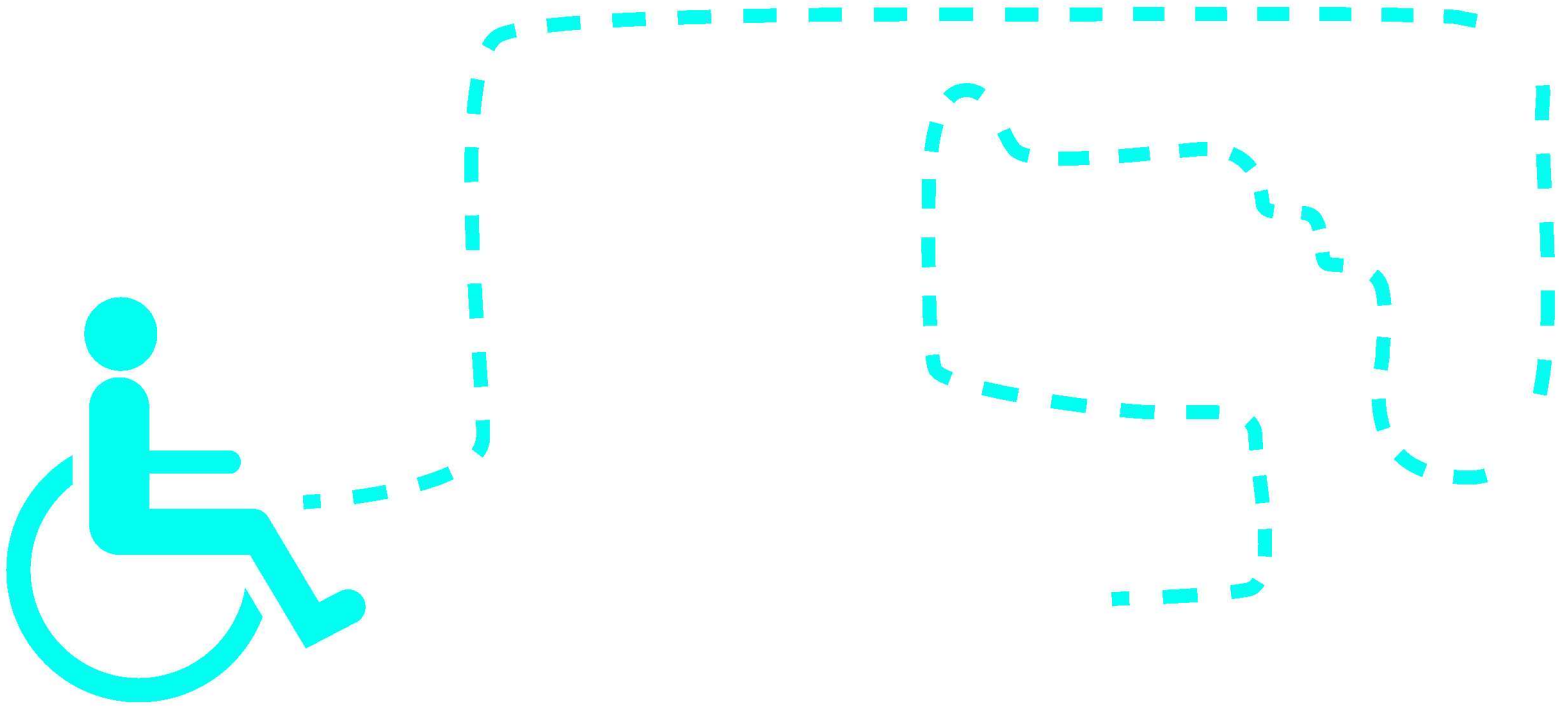


Our view

Newspapers a dying breed?

Right now, three hundred or so young journalists (including many of us at *The Ubyssey*) are in soul-freezing Saskatoon, taking part in the annual national conference for Canadian University Press. The conference is a good opportunity to learn from top writers, network like crazy—and drown our sorrows as we contemplate the state of our profession.

Since the beginning of this decade, it seems every year there's been warnings about the inevitable death of newspapers. Now it's actually happening. A few examples: Sun Media has announced they are laying off 500 workers. CTV Globemedia is cutting five per cent of their workforce. CanWest stock trades near 80 cents and hurtles ever closer to bankruptcy. And that's just in Canada, where our economy hasn't completely cratered yet. In America, the company that runs the *LA Times* and *Chicago Tribune* among others has filed for bankruptcy. *The New York Times* is desperately trying to sell its Manhattan building, and it seems that every week another magazine is being shut down.

It's easy to blame the Internet for this collapse. After all, newspapers flourished because they had a local monopoly on current print information. In the past five years, Craigslist has destroyed classifieds—a major source of a newspaper's revenue—in all major metropolitan areas. But purely blaming the series of tubes would be a copout, because all industries face change, and some deal with it better than others. In the case of the newspaper, the response was roughly akin to sticking one's head in the sand. The basic format of the paper hasn't changed in decades, and it's only been in the last couple of years that people have begun to seriously use the capabilities of the Internet to deliver news in a more innovative way.

There is some fat in the media that needs to be cut—but what's happening now is cutting of the fat, muscle, and marrow. There are important parts of papers that are getting cut these days due to budget constraints: Investigative pieces that take weeks of work; Beat writers who spend years cultivating sources and gaining knowledge about a particular subject; Bureau chiefs who doggedly hold local politicians to account. What's going to replace that? Citizen journalists? Blogs? Because right now, the vast majority of what they publish is either a rehash or a reaction to news that was written by actual journalists.

So yes, while few are crying about what's happening to newspapers, maybe the next time you pass by a news stand, do more than stare at the front headlines. After all, you don't know what you're missing until it's gone.

Yelling doesn't make you right; it just makes you loud

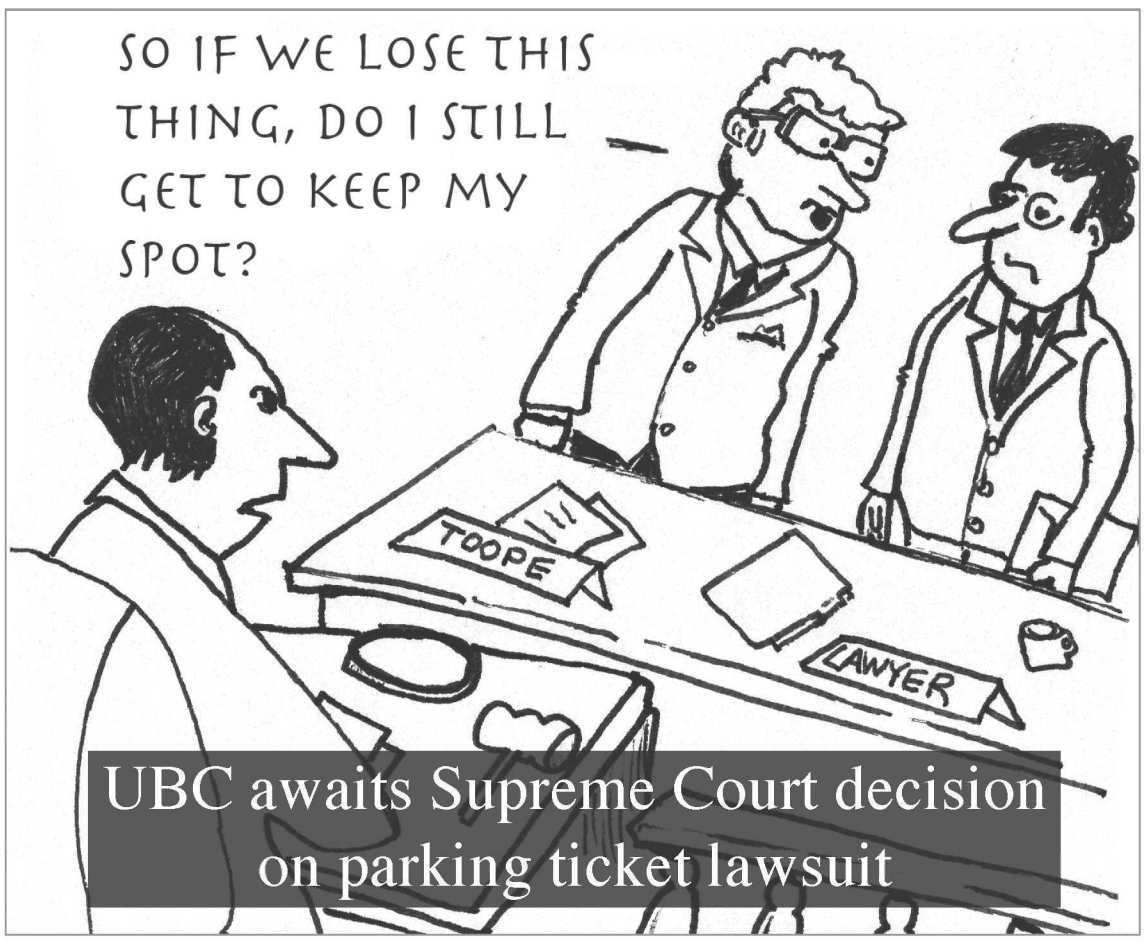
In Monday's issue, *The Ubyssey* published a captioned photo (we call them "stand-ups") on the protest against the Israeli attacks on Gaza. As a result of the piece, in the past couple of days, people have got in touch with us informing us that we are Zionist conspirators and an anti-Israeli rag. The strange thing about the comments though, is that most of them had some very thoughtful critiques at their roots—the thoughtfulness was, however, drowned out by the yelling and ad hominem attacks.

First, let's set something straight: we, at *The Ubyssey*, are not smart enough to start or maintain a conspiracy. We are neither Israeli nor Hamas agents, we have less vulnerability to corporate influence than almost any publication, and we have never had anything against the proletariat. If you were to come down and speak to the various people involved in putting the paper out, you'd find we disagree on just about everything—we're not here due to common political aspirations, we're together for journalistic goals.

On Tuesday afternoon, a man called the office with a complaint. The crux of his argument seemed to be that we should have identified it as a protest against the civilian deaths in Gaza rather than a protest against "the conflict between Israel and Hamas." This point was deciphered during a fairly long, angry conversation in which the man seemed to imply that not re-printing the group's press release verbatim is lying, and then he called two of our editors Zionist conspirators who were too uneducated to understand some of the finer details of his argument (which was interesting, since he was talking to the person who was closest to the phone when it rang, and he had no way of knowing the editor's academic credentials). Almost every word he said was delivered with indignation and an exclamation mark, which made it a frustrating experience.

The irony is that his initial point—that the reporter could have identified the protest more accurately—is one we're receptive to. In the future, we will be more diligent in identifying motivation for these protests. We could have gotten to that point with a civil conversation though. The anger and yelling can only hurt the argument; it encourages reactionary responses and more anger, and reminds all of us journalist types how Chomsky describes "flack's" influence on the news.

We appreciate when people from different sides of a story call to give us input—it opens our eyes to perspectives we may not have known. There's no need to yell though. It doesn't make you right, it makes you an asshole.



UBC awaits Supreme Court decision on parking ticket lawsuit

by Dan Haves

Web letters

IN RESPONSE TO "MACLEAN'S MAGAZINE WINS HATE SPEECH CASE" [OCT. 24, 2008]

They never needed to go to the editor and have a meeting at all. They could have just written a letter to the editor and requested it be printed. I don't blame Maclean's for preferring to go bankrupt.

Here's a short list of other things they requested:

—5,000 unedited words in Maclean's pages

—editorial autonomy over the cover art

—that the article be written by a "mutually acceptable author"

—given all the things above, a temporary surrender of editorial control over their own magazine, something that no publication, Maclean's, the Ubyssey or otherwise, owes anyone

—a donation to a charity of the Sock Puppets' choice

The Sock Puppet Three acted like a bunch of self-indulgent prisses in bringing a human rights complaint against Maclean's. If they wanted to write something so badly, they could have started their own publication and printed it there. None of this fiasco was ever necessary.

—Jesse Ferreras
Master's of Journalism, '08

IN RESPONSE TO "RBC: PUTTING THE CAMPUS LAST" [NOV. 18, 2008]

The fact that students require more financial assistance is a fault with the university, and not the banks. RBC are capitalizing on this which is quite understandable - its good business. I don't blame them.

As an RBC client myself, I am quite happy that I don't have to waste my time taking the bus to and from Sasamat to get teller services.

Albeit, if it was a choice between a student pub or a bank at that location, I'd easily choose the former.

—Nick Sertic

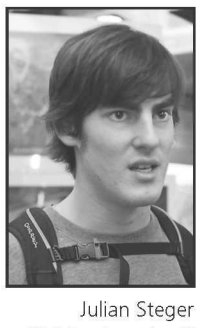
If you wish to submit a letter it must be no longer than 350 words. Your identity will be confirmed by phone or by ID from the office. People may email us at feedback@ubyssey.ca.

Streeters

Where do you get your news most often?

Rob Vanner
Science 4

"I read *The Globe and Mail* online because it's the most convenient.... That's mainly where I get my news. I don't really watch TV or listen to the radio."



Julian Steger
Civil Engineering 3

"I guess I get my news from the Internet because it's easier and it's free."

Brittany Rhoads
Arts 2

"I try and go for a bunch of different sources....The easiest for me is definitely TV....I read the newspaper very occasionally."

Silvio Ruprah
Arts 4

"I get my news from the Internet because it's the most up to date....When I'm taking a dump, I like to read the newspaper."

Kaitlin Ling
Arts 3

"Mostly the television just because it's on and it's easy."

—Coordinated by Dan Haves, with photos by Drew Thompson

Controversial biography on Naipaul is unforgiving

BY RIAN HARRISON
Culture Writer

Much has been written already about Patrick French's *The World Is What It Is: The Authorized Biography of V.S. Naipaul*. The reputation of Naipaul—2001 Nobel Laureate for literature—will probably survive the publication of this warts-and-all account, despite a review by Paul Theroux predicting his former mentor's downfall.

"It is not a pretty story; it will probably destroy Naipaul's reputation forever, this chronicle of his pretensions, his whoremongering, his treatment of a sad, sick wife and disposable mistress, his evasions, his meanness, his cruelty amounting to sadism, his race baiting."

All true, according to French's biography, yet the review is still a distortion. When Theroux writes that "Naipaul's pathology is central to the tale; his writing peripheral," he misses half the story.

In absorbing detail, *The World Is What It Is* assembles the writer's life into a story, beginning with his childhood in Trinidad. The reader sees Naipaul's vexed relationship with the culture he was born into; his identification with his father, Seepersad Naipaul, who almost became a novelist, despite an unspecified mental illness, poverty and a lack of education; the Naipaul family's life as the poor relations of a large and insular extended family; the young Vidia Naipaul's brutal study regime and his scholarships, first to an elite colonial school, and finally to Oxford University, where Naipaul had his own nervous breakdown and where he met Patricia Hale, his first wife, then another scholarship student.

The revelation of French's biography, though, is the connection between Naipaul's traumatic past and his writing. Above all, it describes a bond between the best and worst parts of the writer. This is not an unusual observation, but after the biography, the books themselves look different: less objective, but more interesting, perhaps even better.

The impression that slowly builds throughout the biography is of a writer so obsessed with the marks his progress had left on him that finally, there was almost nothing that didn't speak to his obsessions. In his books, fiction and non-fiction alike, the landscape symbolizes the psychic state of the writer: his violence, his fear of chaos, his terror of losing control of himself, emotionally or economically.

Above all, every building Naipaul describes, whatever he writes, is haunted by the threat of ruin and decay. Not surprisingly, given his history, given houses in general, and what they mean. Here too though, the writing is made more psychological by new information about the writer.

Tell Me Who to Kill, a short story from the sequence *In a Free State*, is given a new meaning. In form, it is a series of negating revelations, where every expansion of the narrator's consciousness reveals a further humiliation. His first illusion is of the greatness of a troubled man who has come to possess his own house.

Later, the narrator sees the interior when it is lent for a wedding; he sees that the dignity was wishful thinking. "The lights dim, dim. It is what I remember most. That and the dead-rat smell. You feel dust everywhere, dust falling on you even while you walk. It isn't dust, it is the droppings from woodlice, hard smooth tiny eggs of wood that roll below your hand if you put your hand down anywhere."

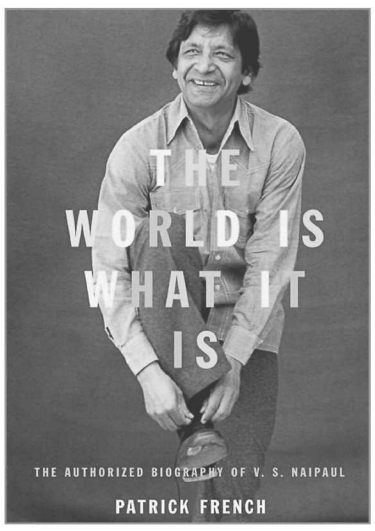
This is Naipaul, we can now see, tearing down *A House For Mr Biswas*, often considered his greatest work. The novel is a posthumous triumph for Seepersad Naipaul, whose life it is closely based on. The book begins with its hero dying in a cramped house stuffed full of furniture, reading Marcus Aurelius, then begins again from his birth, slowly showing how the cramped house and the books have been a victory, a scrap of dignity.

The dressing down is brutal, for all its precision. According to French, Naipaul tried to drop Theroux, and essentially did drop him, years before Theroux thought that he had, in a letter "designed to brush off a more sensitive man." Evidently, Theroux remained unaware, perhaps until the publication of this biography, that the friendship he eulogized in 1998 had actually ended in 1967.

It turns out that Theroux, mostly in the form of personal letters to Naipul, had left enough evidence lying around to hang him. French very nearly does, using carefully selected samples of Theroux's own writing voice to make him look twice the caricature Naipaul had looked in *Sir Vidia's Shadow*. This is possibly the worst: "As for himself, 'I would be very happy to meet a decent, tolerant, intelligent girl that isn't fat.' Soon he found one, Anne Castle, an Oxford graduate and his future wife..."

Naipaul though, looks no more like a caricature in the memoir than anyone else in Theroux's non-fiction. As French says, he is insensitive; the harshness he shares with Naipaul seems to stem more from this.

Although Theroux's review of *The World Is What It Is* appears to have been written in an unhinged rage, Theroux seems at some point to have been cooperating with its research. In an interview with French that he appears to plead that his racist comments, and communication with Naipaul in general, were said in the spirit of a sort of private language: "I began to see it [Africa] through his eyes



a lot, I think somewhat to my detriment."

French likes to use a lot of double-edged language, and one of the secondary fascinations of this biography is seeing the biographer revel in, or seem to revel in, his own editorial power.

It is ultimately French's fondness for authorial control, and not the miniscule quotes from Naipaul's intellectual opponents, that raises faint suspicions of French's veracity, despite the facts. Lies can also be assembled from nothing but the facts.

On the other hand, Patrick French is working in an aesthetic medium, one that requires manipulation to make any sense at all. It's reminiscent of a line from an early Saul Bellows novel: "you want to see without being seen."

ams student society | Insider weekly
a weekly look at what's new at your student society 01.09.09

AMS ELECTIONS 2009

The nominations close this **Friday @ 4 pm**, and the All Candidates Meeting will take place after.

Official campaigning begins on **January 16**.

Online voting opens on **January 29**, and on campus polling will take place on **February 4**. The results are expected to be announced that evening.

We're hoping to have a great turnout for elections this year, and are looking forward to meeting all the candidates this Friday!

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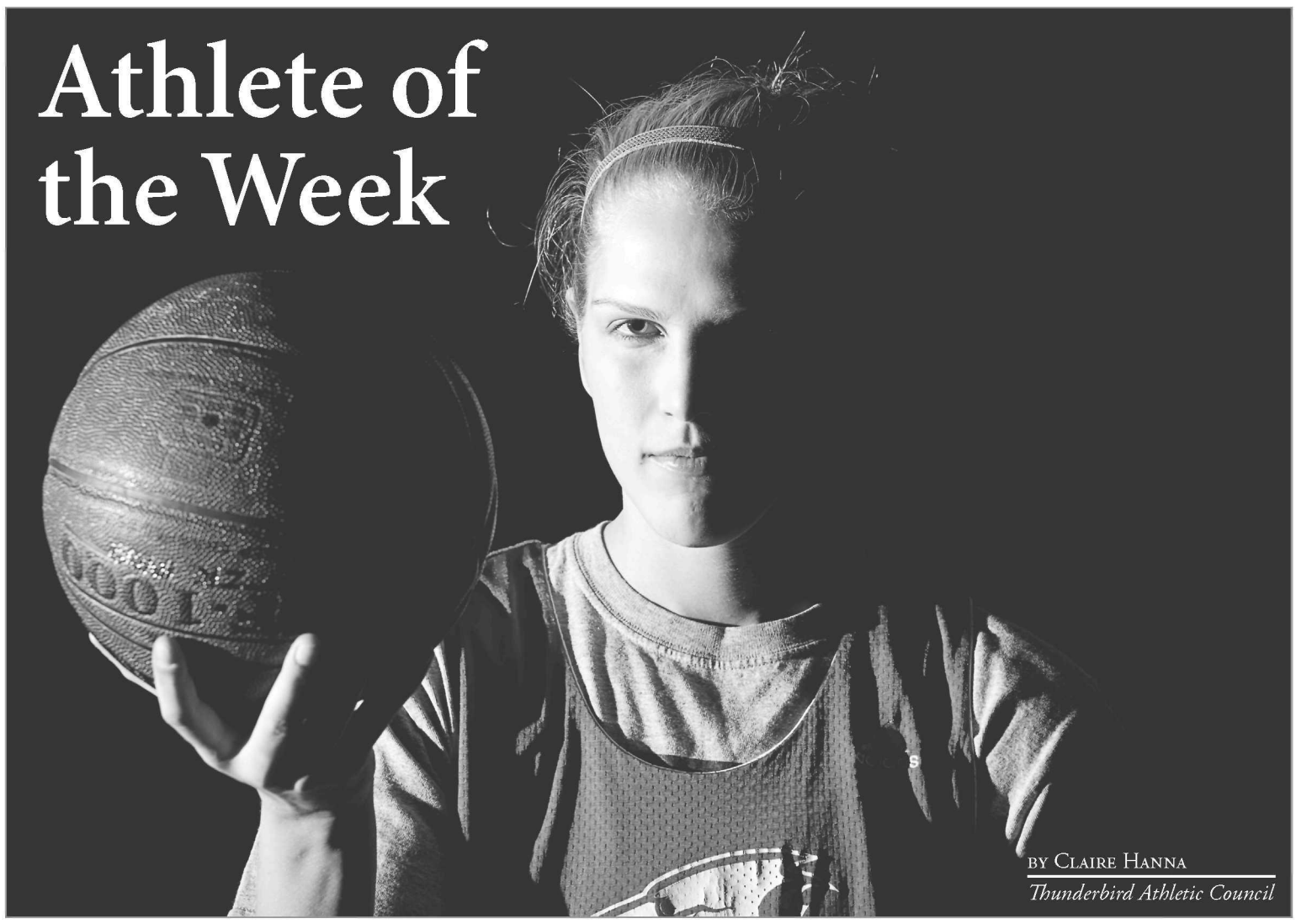
Athlete of the Week



BY CLAIRE HANNA
Thunderbird Athletic Council

KELLAN HIGGINS PHOTO/THE UBYSSEY

JOSH WHYTE

Josh Whyte, a Calgary native on the UBC men's basketball team, is the first repeat athlete of the week in 2008-09. This past weekend, Whyte notched a season-high 14 assists versus the Thompson River Wolfpack. Not only is this a personal best for the guard, but a conference high this season. Talk about setting up the offence! Leading the Birds to a dominating 94-58 defeat of the Wolfpack, Whyte also chipped in with ten points of his own. To his teammates, Whyte is a fun-loving, relaxed guy, but also someone who knows when to bring it on the court.

KELLAN HIGGINS FILE PHOTO/THE UBYSSEY

LEANNE EVANS

It was a good weekend for basketball; Leanne Evans is athlete of the week representing women's basketball. A towering 6 foot 2 forward, Evans grabbed an amazing 13 rebounds off the boards. This performance propelled Evans to the leading spot in rebounds in Canada West, averaging 10.3 boards per game. Not only did she play great defense, but she added 14 points to the scoreboard. The hard work Evans puts in daily has started to pay off, and her teammates are grateful for her contagious enthusiasm, especially this past weekend. Evan's amazing weekend performance helped the lady Birds to a 70-54 victory over the Thompson River Wolfpack.

You can catch more of Whyte and Evans this weekend when the Birds battle the Simon Fraser Clan in the Buchanan Cup on Saturday January 10 at 6pm (women) and 8pm (men).

Birds in '09

BY SHUN ENDO
Sports Writer

The new year will no doubt be a crucial year for the UBC Thunderbirds. The biggest issue this year will be whether or not to join the NCAA. The topic has been argued from various perspectives, but the final decision will happen this year—hopefully. The NCAA more or less gave the green light already. So now UBC must decide whether joining the league would have a positive impact. It will be interesting to hear how these people would make a decision based on how it will be "beneficial" to UBC students. The wait and see game is almost over.

After experiencing a dismal first half in the 2008-09 season, all eyes are on the men's basketball team to bring back some attention to the Birds. The squad has an impressive 12-1 record at the moment with a 9-0 divisional record on the line this week. They are a top contender for the national championships this year with the Pacific Division crown all but assured. Josh Whyte, a transfer student from the University of Victoria, consistently has been an instrumental in the campaign and has been scoring on average in double digits. The T-Birds will be one of the teams that would most likely succeed if the department decides to join the NCAA.

The swimming team too is in the hunt for a national championships. Birds will host the nationals for the second consecutive year at the Aquatic Centre and hope to obtain the top rank in both men's and women's. The attention will be on Annamay Pierse who has broken Canadian records numerous times in the past year. She will be an essential swimmer in bringing the banner to the pool.

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