

Bringing Research to LIFE

Upcoming Events

The Advanced Plant Science Seminar Series presents:

Climate Change and Agriculture: The Road Ahead

With Dr. Don Smith, professor, department of plant science McGill University

Thursday, March 31, 2011 at 3:00 p.m.

Carolyn Sifton Lecture Theatre Room 130, Agriculture Building

For more info contact: (204) 474-8563

Paul Thomas Scholarship Dinner

Monday, April 4, 2011 at 5:45 p.m.

Marshall McLuhan Hall, University Centre

The University of Manitoba is pleased to invite you to an evening honouring the distinguished career of Dr. Paul Thomas. This event will create the endowment for the newly established Paul Thomas Scholarship in Public Administration.

To register or for more information call 474-7619

Political Leadership and Democracy in Manitoba: The Duff Roblin Era and Beyond

With Dr. Paul Thomas, senior scholar, department of political studies and first Duff Roblin professor of Government

Monday, April 4, 2011 at 7:30 p.m.

Robert B. Schultz Lecture Theatre, St. John's College

To register or for more information call 474-9521

What does emotion have to do with it? Everything!



Arlene Young (English, film, and theatre), Jason Leboe (psychology), and Brenda Austin-Smith (English, film, and theatre)

Photo by Ian McCausland

BY SHAWN JORDAN

Why do we remember some things and forget others? What makes us choose to act ethically? How do authors and filmmakers manipulate our emotions? These and many other questions about the role of emotions in people's lives are being tackled by a group of University of Manitoba researchers embarking on 'The Affect Project.'

"Whether or not we are aware of it, our emotions influence and shape our knowledge, experience, creativity, and ethics," says Faculty of Arts professor Arlene Young. "Not only that, the effects of our emotions extend out into our physical, social, and cultural environments," adds Young.

Although it is a powerful force that weaves through all facets of life, it has remained relatively unexplored in an academic sense. 'The Affect Project' is seeking to change this by initiating a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach to studying the powerful effects of emotion. The project has only just begun and it is growing rapidly and garnering attention across disciplines, universities and countries.

It all started with a small research group in the department of English, film, and theatre. The group included two Victorianists, one Romanticist, and a film studies scholar. It now consists of a total of fourteen researchers from three universities (University of Manitoba, University of Toronto, and University of Birmingham): two in psychology, one in philosophy, one in political studies, two in film studies, and eight in English literature. Young's University of Manitoba co-investigators on this project are Brenda Austin-Smith (English, film and theatre) and Jason Leboe (psychology).

Young, one of the group's co-founders, explains that the project was conceived of as an interdisciplinary, critical response to the presence of the affective in contemporary life and culture, as well as the 'affective turn' taken by a range of scholarly disciplines.

"Affect is a significant but complex feature of our lived experience," says Young. "From affect as a cognitive phenomenon, through emotion as a motive for creativity, to empathy as a spur for community action and policy development, to the feeling that we belong in a given physical, social or cultural environment."

The nature of affect and its influences have most often been explored within institutional and disciplinary confines that limit opportunities for rich intellectual exchange and the impact of results across those borders.

"To combat these limitations, the project seeks to develop connections among those working in different scholarly fields and those working in the community, such as in museums and film groups, who share an interest in affect and wish to explore the role and power of emotional expression in both private and public life," explains Young, who describes how the group's inquiries will highlight what William James calls "the feelings of [emotion's] bodily symptoms." That is, experiencing affect as a physical, biological, or neurobiological expression of emotion.

Young indicates that there will inevitably be some overlap between affect and emotion in the general understanding of human feeling and expression, and that both affect and emotion are central to investigations of memory, aesthetics, and ethics.

As the project gains momentum, more will be learned about 'ourselves'

and others and how affect runs like threads from our past through to the future, through our lives and around the world.

The objectives of *The Affect Project* are as follows:

- Explore the range of meanings generated by the idea of affect as it is studied and expressed in a diverse set of disciplines that address its manifestation in memory, aesthetics, and ethics. These disciplines will include, but will not be limited to, English, film studies, psychology, political studies, philosophy, and neuroscience.
- Establish links among these disciplines and among their working concepts about affect, the problems these disciplines define, and the approaches they use in their research and analysis.
- Determine the mechanisms for developing collaborative interdisciplinary research, for harmonizing methodological approaches, and for enriching intellectual exchange among project collaborators.
- Expand our understanding—in both general and academic terms—of the ways in which affect influences and shapes knowledge, experience, creativity, ethics, and the physical, social, and cultural environment.
- Compile a database that provides cross-sector perspectives on affect. The database will include links to scholarly and curated websites and a bibliography of current research.