A New Face at Ban Righ Centre

Maureen McDonald

In March 2019, Susan Belyea became the new Director of the Ban Righ Centre. Only the position is new to her, however. She has a long history with the centre, both as a socially active resident of Kingston, and later as a mature student completing her PhD at Queen’s. As a student, Susan came to the Ban Righ Centre first for the soup. Drawn by the idea of a quiet and welcoming place to go to for lunch, she soon realized it would also provide a great workspace. “The first day I showed up with my laptop and some files and settled in to work at one of the workstations changed my relationship to Queen’s. I had never found a great place for me to work – most places were either too anonymous or too social.”

It wasn’t just a place to study; during her lunch breaks, Susan would often head to the lounge, where she met women from other faculties and departments. It introduced her to a Queen’s that was diverse in terms of race, country of origin, academic and activist interests, passions, and beliefs. Returning now as Director, Susan is determined to keep people-to-people connections at the heart of what happens at the Ban Righ Centre. It is what drew her the job, and she wants to continue to foster the sense that “we’ve got your back” – that Ban Righ Centre is a place students can walk into and find connection with staff and with each other.

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Spring Celebration 2019

Photo Credit Bernard Clark

On Saturday, April 27th, the Ban Righ Centre celebrated the achievements of mature women students at the annual Spring Celebration in Wallace Hall.

Eleven awards were presented to twelve recipients - women who demonstrate remarkable perseverance and determination to return to post-secondary studies as mature students often while simultaneously raising children or adjusting to life in a new country.

Master of Ceremonies Lindsay Rodgers.

Award recipient Omolara Babajide

Some of the participants of the 2019 Spring Celebration.
Student Spotlight: Yasmine Djerbal

*Lindsay Rodgers*

Yasmine Djerbal is a fourth year Ph.D. student in the Cultural Studies Department at Queen’s University. She is one of many mature women students whose remarkable contributions to our community extend beyond her academic pursuits. Yasmine believes that it is important to “investigate how we live, and how we are made to live”. Her work as both an academic and organizer reflects this sentiment. For example, in collaboration with two friends (and mothers to racialized girls), Yasmine helped to establish “Roots and Wings”, a working group of the Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG) that aims to ‘educate, empower, and engage’ girls of colour between the ages of 8-14 while exploring social justice issues. Yasmine explains, “I was very excited about the idea of youth learning about social justice issues, creating a community of care where they felt included, and meeting adults who looked like them, and whom they could look up to.”

Academically, Yasmine is likewise interested in social justice issues. Upon arriving in Canada, Yasmine was compelled to examine how France and Canada oversee, read, and manage Muslim populations when, shortly after moving to Canada, she found that the recently established Charter of Quebec Values “seemed to mirror France’s laïcité (secularist) laws enacted a decade earlier.” She began to wonder about the “historical, social, and cultural connections (real or imagined) between Quebec and France, and how these inform contemporary experiences of Muslim (im)migrants and citizens in Canada”. Yasmine expresses a sentiment the Ban Righ Centre shares when she reveals: “I am continually in awe of the work that is being done by fellow students and academic researchers.” We wish her all the best in the final stages of her Ph.D., and look forward to celebrating her continued success!

The Changing Needs of Ban Righ Students

*Susan Belyea*

Ban Righ Centre has always provided personal, academic and financial support to mature women students at Queen’s University. Student needs change over time, and we work hard to respond to emerging trends. This year, the number of requests we have received for bursaries has risen by 46% compared to the same period, May 1 – July 31, last year. Students cite changes to OSAP funding in Ontario, rising debt loads, and the shortage of affordable housing and childcare spaces in Kingston as key problems tipping them into financial crises. We are actively seeking new ways to address the changing needs of the students in the Ban Righ community.
Winter Bazaar

Lindsay Rodgers

The Winter Bazaar, an event held annually at the Ban Righ Centre, is one of our most lighthearted and fun activities. Each December, as the semester draws to a close and we look forward to having more time to spend with our loved ones, the Ban Righ Centre becomes animated and festive.

We invite students and their families to participate in the joy we feel when we’re able to exchange tokens of care and affection with our loved ones. By inviting students from all faiths and traditions and their families to gather and share a meal, this event elevates the aspects of holidays that we cherish most: celebration, togetherness, and avoiding the busy shopping centres!

Local businesses and community members contribute to the success of this event by donating gifts, all of which are ‘sold’ for 25¢. Our Reading Room becomes a Holiday Market where children and their parents can ‘shop’ for one another (and their pets, of course.) It is such a pleasure to witness children finding a gift for those they hold dear, and maybe just a little something for themselves as well. We witness all kinds of approaches: Those who slowly and meticulously peruse all that’s available before deciding what suits whom, and others who enthusiastically march toward the first thing that catches their eye. Once the gifts have been chosen, the Ban Righ Centre board members and volunteers, equipped with brightly coloured paper, scotch tape, and a variety of greeting cards, are ready to assist with the wrapping.

Each year, our gift supply is thoroughly picked through, and we need to restock. This year we are especially in need of children’s toys. If you are able to donate new or gently used toys for our event, please drop them off at the Ban Righ Centre between 9-4, Monday-Friday. We thank you for helping to make the holiday season a little easier for our student-parents!

Choosing gifts at the Winter Bazaar
Student Spotlight: Sarah Barnes

Lindsay Rodgers

In our newsletters, we often celebrate the ongoing important work of current Queen’s students. We are always keen to highlight the remarkable ways that students in the Ban Righ community are contributing to their fields. For this profile, we are proud to highlight the successful completion of a degree, and report one example of what might follow.

Sarah Barnes convocated in fall 2018 with a Ph.D. in Kinesiology. Her dissertation examined a phenomena that we all recognize the value of, perhaps most notably when we’re missing it: sleep. Barnes explored the history of ideas about the relationships between sleep and athletic performance. Her research showed that “historically, understandings of ‘good’ sleep have often led to the moral and physical regulation of athletes”, and notes that, “[i]nstead of assuming that the promotion of sleep in athletes’ lives is straightforward and unambiguous, it is important to examine the cultural and historical conditions that shape such prescriptions in the first place.”

Like most of our students, Barnes was lead to this topic through her own experiences as a feminist scholar and athlete, which included her role as a team manager with the Canadian women’s national basketball program. These experiences encouraged Barnes to think critically about “the sport system, sport science, coaching, and how social categories like gender, race, class, ability, and sexuality shape the types of experiences that people have in sport.”

Shortly before finishing and defending her dissertation, Barnes was offered a post-doctoral position with the School of History and Sociology at Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, Georgia. We miss having her warm presence around the Centre and in Kingston more generally, but are happy with her success.

Barnes reports that, “[w]hen mobilized in the classroom, my research and sport background offer students the tools to evaluate their own scientific and technological knowledge and to reflect on their own investments in sport.” Outside the classroom, and when not studying or thinking about sport and sleep, Barnes shares, “I play tennis and have developed considerable interest in the delights of southern cooking.”

Since, as Barnes notes, “fatigue, exhaustion, and burnout are not singular to the lives of athletes” it is an opportune time to remind our readers that among the many treasures found at the Ban Righ Centre, we have a room designated for quiet study, or for a restful nap in between classes. It includes a basket with freshly washed sheets and pillow cases to use on the futon. It is open to those of us who would benefit from a bit more sleep.
The Ban Righ Centre News

Student-Parents

Blake Noyes

The Ban Righ Centre provides support to mature women students, many of whom tackle higher education while simultaneously managing children and other family responsibilities. In 2018/19, 47% of bursaries went to student-parents, an indication of just how many mothers are committed to furthering their education.

It isn’t easy. A study from the University of Guelph, Student Pathways and Supports: Investigating Retention and Attrition in Mature University Students, (van Rhijn et al, 2015.) ranks finances, family responsibilities, and employment as the highest predictors of mature student dropout. This observation is borne out by many of our student moms, who cite the inability to secure affordable, reliable daycare as one of the greatest challenges they face while trying to complete their studies. In 2018 we researched the availability of childcare in Kingston and found long wait lists, a lack of subsidized/affordable care, and lack of proximal support.

During the 2019/20 school year, in an attempt to address the childcare issue in a small way, the Ban Righ Centre piloted a new initiative - Student-Parent Networking Groups. We hoped student-parents would meet and form trusting relationships, and that from there they would be able to coordinate with one another to share childcare. We held six events throughout the year; students brought their children to the Centre and enjoyed dinner and adult company while their children were cared for in another part of the house. Additionally, we set up a Facebook group where resources could be shared among these parents.

Though some students found these events to be helpful, accessible childcare that would allow them time alone to focus on class and study is what they truly need. Ban Righ Centre is actively working with campus partners to find a better solution for student-parents at Queen’s.

The Ban Righ Foundation Board of Directors,
2019-2020

Pictured from left to right:
Sylvie Charlebois; Julia Jansen-van Vuuren; Susan Belyea; Nancy Butler; Xin Sun; Melanie Cote; Connie Taylor; Amber Hastings Truelove; Sara Perosa; Lisa Webb

Not Pictured:
Erin Clow; Blake Noyes; Ellie Sadinsky; Alka Sood; Asha Varadharajan
Carole/Susan: Continued from page 1

For Carole Morrison, who left the Directorship of Ban Righ Centre earlier this year to take a role at Career Services, those connections have left her with lasting memories of her time here. She hesitates when asked to identify her favourite memory – there are so many – but thinking about the families who have participated in the Winter Bazaar is quick to evoke a smile. This event arose from a desire to provide families with limited budgets an opportunity to participate in a season of gift-giving. Carole remembers children whispering to one another as they purchased donated gifts for parents and siblings, all priced at 25¢, while student parents connected with each other over the joys, triumphs, and challenges they experienced.

Everyone strives to keep an easy-going vibe in the house - the kettle is on, soup is on the stove, people greet each other and stop to chat.

She also remembers times that the Ban Righ Centre stood by women students during periods of real need. With the support of the Ban Righ Foundation community, Carole and her team were able to act in a way that fostered resilience in these women. She is incredibly proud of each of them. Those students have since told her how important that support was to them.

While the Ban Righ centre provides many kinds of support for mature women students, the style and nature of that support is continuously evolving. Susan sees a meaningful role for us to play in bringing the concerns we hear from students to other forums on campus. Students with children, for example, face particular challenges while at school, and many mature women students also face food insecurity. These are two important issues where Ban Righ Centre is collaborating with other groups on campus to develop policy and programming, with a goal of connecting with students and creating possibilities for connection.

Both women feel a deep sense of gratitude toward the many donors and supporters who make it all possible. Carole recalls being overwhelmed early on by the generosity of the many donors to Ban Righ Centre. Seven years ago resources were scarce, but thanks to a lot of hard work, and the goodness of Ban Righ Centre supporters, what was once a precarious financial ship has been righted.

Susan is still getting to know the wide circle of friends of Ban Righ, but it is clear that the work done here matters tremendously to them. She is surprised at how complex things are behind the scenes. Everyone strives to keep an easy-going vibe in the house - the kettle is on, soup is on the stove, people greet each other and stop to chat, student advisors engage in casual drop-in conversations about anything and everything. At the same time in the background, donor engagement, budget considerations, the production of events large and small, meetings with campus partners, and all the other daily jobs that keep the centre and foundation afloat happen. The work is engaging and she leaves the centre at the end of every day satisfied that Ban Righ is doing exactly what it’s meant to do.

Now, as Carole moves on to Career Services, her goal is to continue to contribute to the enhancement of post-secondary experiences for students. It is her pleasure is to watch students thrive and shine. Susan is aware that she is filling some pretty big shoes. “Each director of the Ban Righ Centre has made important contributions to the success of women at Queen’s, and each has left their legacy in the culture of the Centre”.

She is thrilled to take on this role.
2019 Inspiring Women

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

2019 INSPIRING WOMEN
An evening at the Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts

Wednesday, October 23
7:30-10:00 PM
No ticket required, however seating is limited

In memoriam

Roxanna Jean Denniston-Stewart

AUGUST 2, 2019

The Ban Righ Centre community was deeply saddened to learn of the sudden passing of Roxanna (Roxy) Jean Denniston-Stewart on August 2, 2019 in the United Kingdom.

Roxy served as the Dean of Student Affairs representative on the Ban Righ Foundation Board of Directors from 2006-2009.

We send our condolences to her family at this difficult time.

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