

# SafetyNet

Newsletter of the **Joint Health and Safety Committee**

Volume 4, Issue 3 | Winter 2010



## Sabbaticals 101: An Ounce of Prevention

*Is there a sabbatical in your future? Then help make it successful by following these tips to keep you and your family safe and healthy.*

### *Before you go:*

- **Get Check-Ups:** Book medical/dental appointments at least two months before departure in case follow-up tests or treatments are necessary. Have your doctor write new prescriptions for all medications, listing the generic and brand names of each drug. Schedule eye exams, too, and obtain prescriptions for glasses and contact lenses, even a back-up pair, in case of loss. Finally, take the addresses, phone, and fax numbers of your physician, dentist, optometrist, etc.
- **Get Shots:** Be sure everyone's immunizations are up-to-date. Check with your local Community Health Travel Immunization Clinic to find out what's recommended for your destination. Refer also to Canada's Public Health Agency/Travel Health website ([www.phac-aspc.gc.ca](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca)).
- **Check Your Health Insurance:** Whether you're leaving the country or only the province, contact your provincial health care office first; you may be surprised. For example, to maintain Ontario health coverage, you can't be out of the province for more than 212 days in any twelve-month period. To be exempted, OHIP requires a letter on university letterhead stating the reason and dates you will be away, plus the names of those accompanying you. In addition, you will all need to appear in person with this letter, your current OHIP cards, and other required ID, in order to be issued with new OHIP cards. Upon returning, you must return to the OHIP office to receive yet more new cards. Oh, the joys of bureaucracy!

If heading out of Canada, talk to Human Resources for details about your supplementary insurance coverage. Confirm how bills should be paid/submitted, and be sure to note your insurance company's address, customer service phone and fax numbers, plus your plan and ID numbers.

- **Pack a First Aid Kit:** In addition to the normal contents, include favourite over-the-counter medications that may not be available at your destination. For international travel, ask your local hospital pharmacy to assemble a "traveller's kit" containing sterile needles, gloves, syringes, and IV bag (around \$30). Request an official letter stating that you are carrying these items for medical purposes, and then pack this kit in your checked luggage, not carry-on.
- **Fill Prescriptions:** If possible, reduce potential hassles by bringing enough prescription medicines to last for your sabbatical. Draft a letter that your doctor can print on letterhead and sign, stating the reason why you are carrying so much medication. You may need to show it at Customs and Immigration, so keep it and all medicines handy.

### *While You're Away:*

- **Find a Doctor:** Ask co-workers for recommendations or, if language is an issue, check the lists of English-speaking doctors often provided by the Canadian, American, and British embassies. Don't wait until someone is sick or injured - register with a doctor's office as soon as possible.
- **Know the Local Emergency Number:** Don't assume it's 911; in New Zealand, for example, it's 111.
- **Find the Hospital Emergency Room:** Locate the nearest hospital and emergency room entrance. Be prepared.
- **Beware of the Water:** If you're told "Don't drink the water," that includes avoiding ice cubes and rinsed lettuce, too. When the local water supply is iffy, bottled or boiled water is best - even to brush your teeth.
- **Talk to the Locals:** Find out what precautions your neighbours observe and follow suit.
- **Book Return Check-Ups:** Send scenic postcards to your family doctor and dentist, requesting appointments for everyone in the month following your arrival.

### *Back Home:*

- Visit the doctor and dentist, get new OHIP cards, and start planning your next sabbatical!

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**LAURIER**  
Environmental/Occupational  
Health & Safety

Prepared by Nancy Matthews, author of *Sabbaticals 101: A Practical Guide for Academics and Their Families* (New Forums Press, 2008). Nancy and her husband, David Matthews, are currently in New Zealand, enjoying their fifth sabbatical.

# Recognizing and Responding to “*Stressed Out*” Students

By Dr. Alison Edgar Bertoia, Director of Counselling Services



*Whether in the classroom or another campus setting, you may find yourself in the position of noticing that a student is not acting like his/her usual self. Students today face pressure from many sources including family, relationships, finances, cultural issues, academic pressures, and their own expectations (of self and others). In addition, students are coming to university at younger ages, and may still be in the process of consolidating many of their coping skills. You can play an important role in supporting these students.*

## **Things You Can Do:**

- **Listen:** Often, simply having someone take the time to listen to their thoughts and feelings in a non-judgmental way will help “take the pressure off”, and help the student refocus on a coping plan.
- **Validate - but Offer Hope:** One of the most effective helping skills is conveying that the student’s concerns are understandable, but that there are viable options available to address their concerns.
- **Assist in Finding Resources:** We are fortunate at Laurier to be able to offer a multitude of support options to our students – but they need to remember (or sometimes be reminded!) to use them. Some students may need extra assistance to access the support available. If it feels appropriate, offer the use of your office phone to make that initial appointment, or, if more urgent, walk the student to the service.
- **Know (and convey) your own Limits and Availability:** It is fine to offer personal support, but it is best for all involved if you clearly state your professional boundaries and time limitations. It is not your job to solve the student’s problem(s), but rather to support the student in solving his/her own problem(s).

## **How to Recognize Possible Crisis Situations:**

Many students struggle to ask for help outright, exhibiting their distress in less direct ways. For example:

- Unusual or a change in behaviour (e.g. appearing distraught/disoriented)
- Irritable or wildly variable moods
- Sudden/severe drop in academic performance or attendance
- Appearing to live in the library, 24-hour lounge, etc. (housing issues)
- Abusing drugs/alcohol
- Exhibiting self-harming behaviour
- Taking inordinate amounts of your time discussing concerns
- Multiple requests for extensions, accommodations, support

More definite and urgent signs of crises could include:

- Concern regarding threat of serious injury or potential danger to someone
- Signs of significant deterioration
- Extreme social withdrawal
- Escalation in “acting out” behaviour
- Serious psychiatric difficulties (depression, anxiety, psychosis, paranoia)
- Serious substance use/abuse behaviour

## **If you suspect a crisis situation:**

Don’t keep your worries to yourself. Aside from being bad for your health, one of the most prominent lessons learned from the Virginia Tech tragedy is the importance of sharing concerns. Speak with a colleague, a manager, department chair, or a staff member you trust to review your concerns and to ensure crisis situations are dealt with as promptly and thoroughly as possible. For imminent safety concerns, contact Special Constables (ext. 3333). Not only can they assist in addressing the immediate crisis, but they may also have other relevant information to assessing risk and/or understanding what is behind the crisis.

If it feels comfortable and safe, share your concerns with the student. As part of this you may want to suggest some support services available on campus or in the community.

## **To refer a student to Counselling Services:**

If the situation is not urgent, the student is encouraged to call Counselling Services (519-884-0710 ext. 2338), or stop by to make an appointment with an Intake Counsellor to begin the counselling process.

If the student’s needs seem more urgent, the student can call or drop by Counselling Services to request one of our Rapid Response Crisis appointments. If all the crisis appointments are booked for that day, we will suggest other resources in the community that are available.

Counselling staff are also available to consult with staff and faculty regarding student concerns, post-trauma debriefing, suicide prevention, and can provide referral information regarding the University’s Employee Assistance Program. In addition, Counselling Services offers a full range of personal and performance coaching services for students. Visit the Counselling website for more information about available services and supports.

<http://www.mylaurier.ca/counselling/info/home.htm>

## Safety in the Field:

# Risk Assessment is Essential

By Dr. Scott M. Ramsay, Department of Biology

One of my summer pastimes is sailing my 16-ft Wayfarer. When I took sailing lessons, among the key points was safety, including knowing the risks involved in sailing a small craft and being prepared for self-rescue. Those lessons reinforced ideas that I was already aware of in my field research, where risks may be associated directly with the research activities themselves or indirectly from elements in the environment.

Each year before packing up the lab and taking students to the field station, I revise my field safety planning form and sit down with each of my students and go through all of the risks and safety procedures it documents. Field safety planning forms first came to prominence about ten years ago after fatalities among some researchers working in remote environments. Since then such documents have become an essential part of field research, to the point that they are a required part of the permit application process for some field stations. I find the process of reviewing the planning form is a real help for students who have never worked in the field before, and helps to remind experienced students that bad habits involving risky behaviour can lead to trouble.

Once we are in the field, I distribute safety equipment to each of my students and instruct them in its use. This is particularly important, especially for equipment that carries its own inherent risks such as bear protection. In addition to the safety gear, I suggest that each person should always carry water, some food (good as a mid-morning snack if nothing else) and rain gear. The study sites we work at these days all have vehicle access, so the risk of being a long journey from shelter is not a problem, but it is always important to think about how long it might take to return to safety if there was trouble. Even short trips on foot have the potential to lead to long periods of isolation.

One requirement I insist upon for all field workers is adequate first aid training. Standard level first aid is sufficient for most situations where you are working at an established field station.

For more remote circumstances, however, wilderness first aid is essential. Wilderness first aid builds on top of the standard level, adding a heavy emphasis on the risk of hypothermia, self rescue, and knowing how to package an injured person for transportation when you cannot rely on emergency services.

One of the daily activities that is a must for all field workers is the sign-out and check-in process. At an isolated camp the research team has the responsibility of keeping track of one another, and maintaining regular contact with someone at home. Students have to be made aware of the importance of sticking to their planned return times and signing in when they get home. Where the terrain permits, two-way radios can be a helpful way of maintaining contact with team members while working, and becoming aware of problems before someone fails to show up at a planned check-in.

Finally, as a team leader it is important that the members of your team know they can come to you to discuss even seemingly minor safety issues. When you are working in a wet, dirty environment, what might be an inconsequential injury at home has the potential to lead to serious health consequences.

An effective risk management plan is essential for safe work in the field. It allows you and your team to anticipate and mitigate the kinds of risks you are likely to face. It sets out regular sign-out and check-in procedures for all team members; and it lays out emergency procedures to follow should they become necessary. Just as putting on a PFD and knowing how to right a capsized boat before ever leaving the dock can make for a safe and pleasant sail around the lake, having the right equipment and a good risk analysis and emergency plan in place can take much of the worry out of field work and allow you to focus on gathering good data.



## Slips, Trips and Falls!

With the arrival of winter, the likelihood of slipping and falling increases dramatically. That means the likelihood of injuring yourself increases as well. Remember to tread carefully outside and also when you are walking across the mats placed in the corridors to catch the drippings from wet, salty boots. The EOHS Office has produced a brochure highlighting the hazards of slips, trips and falls: [http://www.wlu.ca/documents/35176/Brochure\\_Sept\\_07.pdf](http://www.wlu.ca/documents/35176/Brochure_Sept_07.pdf)

Check it out, and also have a look at past issues of SafetyNet where we've provided advice on how to avoid this particular danger.

Volume 1, Issue 1 (Winter 2007)

Volume 4, Issue 1 (Spring 2009)

# Monitoring Yourself By Jeanette McDonald



Often it's the small things that make all the difference in minimizing discomfort and achieving an ergonomically friendly work station or study space. Check out the following "monitor" scenarios and make adjustments accordingly.

Scenario	Adjustment(s)
Top line of text/image on screen is higher than eye level	Lower your monitor (e.g. remove riser) and/or raise your chair height until the top line of text/image is at or slightly below eye level (or lower for bi/trifocals or progressive lenses)
You move your head up and down in order to browse text/image on screen	Elevate monitor height until top line of text is at or slightly below eye level (or lower for bi/trifocals or progressive lenses)
You experience symptoms of eye fatigue, blurred vision, or headaches from looking at your monitor	Push the monitor back to a comfortable reading position such that symptoms diminish
You experience difficulty reading text/image on your monitor requiring you to lean forward	Move the monitor closer to your body until you can read with ease and sit comfortably
Task/overhead lighting produces monitor glare	Tilt your monitor down; dim the lights; close window coverings
Light from office/room window produces monitor glare	Place monitor at right angle to the light source; use a glare screen or screen hood

Source: *Easy Ergonomics for Desktop Computer Users*, Department of Industrial Relations, Cal/OHSA Consultation Service Research and Education Unit. 2005.

## JHS COMMITTEE MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



### John Campbell

John started his employment as a tradesperson at Laurier in 1976, in what was then Physical Plant and Planning. Since 1987 he has been in a Physical Resources Managerial role and is currently the Manager, Facilities Operations. He has been active in the promotion of worker health and safety within his department and is currently a certified management representative on the Joint Health and Safety Committee. He has in the past served as a management co-chair on the committee. He believes that a safe and healthy work environment is attainable through awareness, training and the diligence of all employees. He enjoys collecting old books (especially poetry), stamps and coins.



### Jeremy Bernard

Jeremy joined Laurier in February 2008 as the Technical Coordinator of the Performance Facilities. He moved to Laurier from the Meaford Hall and Opera House where he held the position of Technical Director. With a passion for the arts, Jeremy fits right in with the staff, faculty and students at Laurier. His background as a musician (drummer) led him to the profession of audio engineering. And if he's not on stage or in the studio he's on the ice taking part in any pick-up hockey game that he can. Jeremy has been on the JHSC since April 2008.

## Joint Health & Safety Committee Members 2009/2010

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#### Worker Representatives

Sheila McKee-Protopapas (Certified, Co-chair) - WLUFA

Jeremy Bernard - IATSE

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Maureen Coulter - WLUFA

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Kenneth Maly - WLUFA

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Sarah Lamb - Biosafety/Radiation/Chemical Officer

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Brenda Murphy - WLUFA

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Tammie Maertens - Special Constable Service

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Tony Araujo - Campus Operations

#### Non-Voting Advisor

Stephanie Kibbee (Certified) - Director, Environment/Occupational Health & Safety

#### Recording Secretary

Janice Vilaca - Office of the Vice-President/Principal

The EOHS office is located in Bricker Academic, Room 103.

## Training Updates

- **NEW EMPLOYEE EOHS TRAINING**  
FEBRUARY 2 | MARCH 2, 2010
- **NON-CRISIS INTERVENTION TRAINING (BRANTFORD)**  
FEBRUARY 3, 2010

## Wilfrid Laurier University



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