

# HUMSU COMMUNITY OVER COVID NEWSLETTER

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# Untitled

By: Anahita Monfared

This summer has arrived with some alterations to my “summer bucket list”; whereas I was planning on spending more time working and going out with my friends, I now must settle for activities which can be done from home. That includes going through my (very) long summer reading list, which I have accumulated over the past year. Although the progress has been slow in that regard, it has been great to read for pleasure rather than for school.

Another activity that has helped me keep busy – and has helped me maintain a routine – has been practicing languages on Duolingo. Since the app keeps a record of daily streaks and the amount of points gained each day, I feel more motivated to practice every day and to keep my scores high.

This quarantine has also made me realize how much I appreciate and love going to university and being busy. Classes can be very stressful – especially when there are too many deadlines to meet – but it creates a routine which keeps me motivated during the day.

Other than missing my friends and not having a set routine, I’m enjoying staying at home and relaxing.



*Image taken by author*

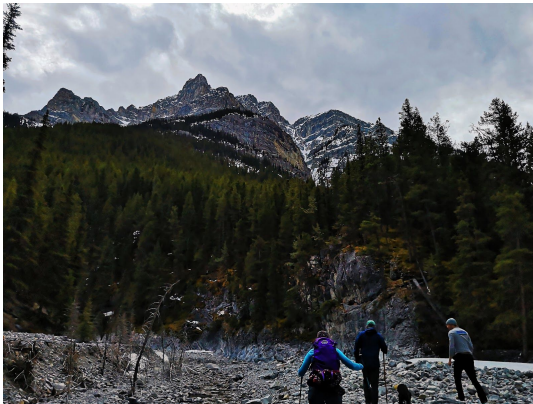
## Distractions

By: Lauren Thomson

Hi, I am Lauren, one of the executives of HUMSU and editors of this newsletter, but I suppose that is a given considering I am in the “From the Editors” section... Here is some information about me, I am majoring in Humanities, and planning on having Communications as my minor. I came to SFU from St. Albert, Alberta, but now I am living in Canmore, Alberta, which is a lovely town in the Rocky Mountains. With my degree, I am not completely sure what career I want to pursue yet, but I am hoping either to venture into journalism and write about travelling, or politics.

How I have coped during this time is keeping busy. I think that it is very important and helps keep one distracted from thinking about the difficult situation we are in. Fortunately where I live, there are a lot of trails to hike and walk my dog. It is also fortunate that because of COVID-19, I have more time on my hands which has allowed me to get back into some of my hobbies such as art, I prefer drawing and watercolour. As well trying to venture into new activities, such as jogging. My thoughts on jogging though are not positive, to quote Ann Perkins from the sitcom Parks and Recreation, “I mean, I know it keeps you healthy, but God, at what cost?” Enough about the horrors of jogging.

Other things that are happening in my life is that I have a job at a local garden centre because businesses are beginning to open up again where I live, and I am also taking a few summer courses, which will be interesting. Let’s just say that I will definitely be keeping busy this summer.



*Images taken by author*

## No Title

By: Jenna Fiedler

Oh, how I miss the outdoors. As someone with a suppressed immune system I have needed to take extra precaution when leaving the sanctuary of my home which I've been doing as little as possible. This time of year, I normally spend going on hikes on Burnaby Mountain when not in classes.

Now with all my free time at home I have started teaching myself Ukrainian and have been working on my creative writing. I love researching mythology to help get inspiration for my stories. Below is my retelling of a Celtic legend about a creature called the Cat Sidhe or the fairy cat. Hope you like it.

One evening a farmer was late getting back home. As he made his way along the path, he happened to notice an unusual number of cats pass him by. It was common to see one or two prowling about looking for mice and rats, but this had been the eighth one. Eventually the farmer upon seeing the eleventh cat let his curiosity get the better of him so that he decided to follow the latest cat he met along the trail. It was so dark out the farmer could barely see, but the cats all seemed to know where they were going, so he let them be his guide. The farmer had no way of knowing how much time had passed since he started following the cats and he hoped his wife back home wasn't in too much of fright at his absence.

When he arrived at a small clearing, he thought he must be in bed dreaming or else passed into the fairy world, since what he saw before couldn't be possible in the real world. It seemed as if every cat in the country had gathered together for some meeting of great importance. He hadn't been able to see much before, but the moon was now slipping out from behind the clouds that the farmer could see the cats' faces more clearly. Their faces all appeared sullen to the farmer as though they had been stricken with some great loss. The farmer's stomach began to turn. He was about to leave the cats when they all abruptly began to move to the side to make way for pallbearers. The farmer turned and saw eight cats coming from the path he had been walking and between them they carried a coffin. Carved into the coffin was a black crown. It was then all the cats started to move and trail after the coffin chanting and yowling about the king being dead.

The farmer suddenly felt the need to abandon the parade of cats immediately as though his very presence was an intrusion of some kind. As the farmer ran home all he could think about was that he had just witnessed a funeral parade of cats and somehow understood all that they said.

When the farmer eventually reached his house, he was near hysterics. It took the farmer's wife quite some time to calm him down enough so she could make out what he was trying so desperately hard to tell her. As she sat and listened to his strange story the couple's own cat was stretched out on a window ledge perked up his ears. After the farmer finished reciting his tale the cat sat up and said, "What Old Tom his dead? Then that means I'm the king now." The cat was about to leave when he turned to his caretakers, "you've both been wonderful, I shan't forget you," and with that he leapt off the window ledge and disappeared up through the chimney. The farmer and his wife never saw their cat again, but every so often they would receive surprise gifts at their door. Usually they would get chickens, ducks, or the occasional goose all already plucked and ready to cook. "To think we had him all those years and now he's a king," the farmer's wife exclaimed one morning when she saw that a new milking goat had been left at their door.



Image source: [Art Transforms You on Facebook](#)

## The Paradoxical Mask

By: Sara Wong

“Do I have it on properly? Is it supposed to cover my nose?”  
- me to my Instagram followers

The item in question was a pale blue disposable face mask. Two months ago, I never thought I'd end up wearing one of these, but when you have one parent with an autoimmune disease and another who's a major germaphobe, you end up taking a lot of precautions.

Prior to COVID-19, the only people I associated with wearing face masks in public were international students. Clearly, I wasn't the only one with this image. Since going out with a mask on, I feel like I've drawn more attention to myself. Ironically, when I wear a mask, I feel more exposed.

As a third generation Chinese-Canadian, I sometimes feel like I'm “not Asian enough”. Contradicting what I said earlier about vulnerability, wearing a mask has also allowed me to own more of my identity (ironic again, I know).

Moment of empowerment aside, I still find putting on a mask strange and I'm looking forward to the day I can dispose of them for good.



*Image taken by author*

## Letters in the Time of Coronavirus

By: Alessandra Capperdoni

Overwhelmed. Depressed. Depleted. I could describe no better my state of being in the time of coronavirus as a state of anxiety of different sorts but always anxiety induced or exploded by the sudden and ominous irruption of the virus: anxiety about the possibility of impending death (my father is 82 years old and living alone in northern Italy); anxiety about illness and physical suffering (a friend at SFU who just came out of it described it as the worst possible physical experience); anxiety about the economic effects on city, nation, and globe as well as, very concretely, our jobs; anxiety about the social impact of physical distancing—the loss of intimacy, loss of friendship, the loss of physical enjoyment, but also the loss of the body of the others in everyday occurrences (I never thought I would miss rushing around the city in overcrowded skytrains ...).

But such anxiety about the human (in the broadest sense, which includes the entire natural world) becomes more meaningful when we think “through” it with the sensibility that we nurture in the Humanities. This is not an unprecedented event. History teaches us that populations have been living through waves of epidemics for centuries and centuries. Not surprisingly, their responses were not so different from ours. And so “my coping” with the pandemic takes place precisely in revisiting those times and those experiences through the “letters” (writings of all sorts) they left behind.

When I am not “zoomed out,” I fill all possible gaps in my day by reading from literature and history, but also listening to podcasts from psychoanalysis and critical theory—all fields of great interest (and not only research) for me. Since the outbreak, but even more so since the end of a very compelling term, I have taken up again readings about the historical accounts of the plague in 5th century Athens in Thucydides as well as in Sophocles’s *Oedipus the King*; the creative storytelling impulse of the youth fleeing the plague of Florence in late medieval Italy in Boccaccio’s *Decameron* alongside Rosemary Horrox’ *The Black Death*; Daniel Defoe’s (yes, the guy who wrote *Robinson Crusoe*, itself a masterpiece of solitary confinement) account of the Great Plague in London in 1665 in *A Journal of the Plague Year*; accounts about the quarantine experienced by the philosopher Rousseau when travelling from Paris to Venice (*Confessions*, 1770) or his *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (1782) as a kind of voluntary quarantine; and the great masterpieces of 20th century modern fiction that address, in realist or metaphorical terms, the invisible threat of epidemics but also the resilience of



people in committing to life, creativity, and love: Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, Albert Camus's *The Plague*, and, why not, García Márquez' *Love in the Time of Cholera*.

And did you know that Isaac Newton discovered the law of universal gravitation while self-quarantined during the Great Plague in London? Here's hoping.

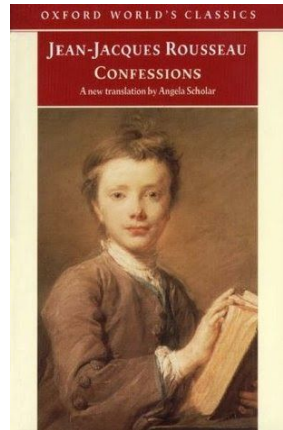
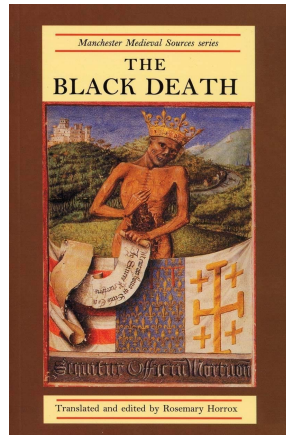
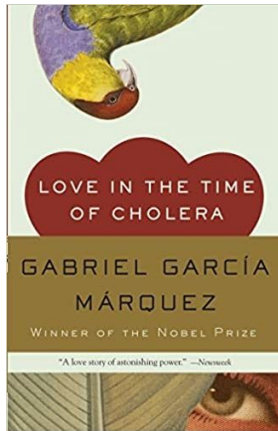
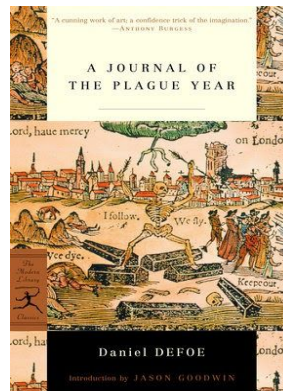
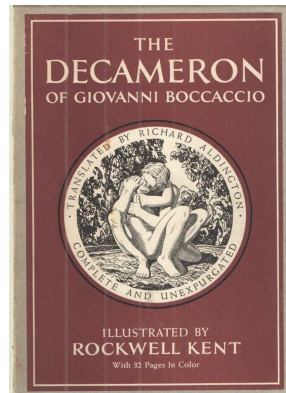
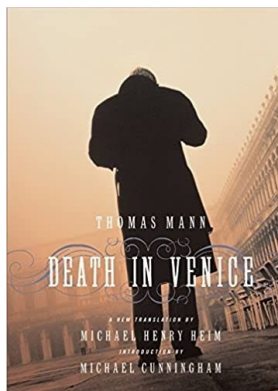
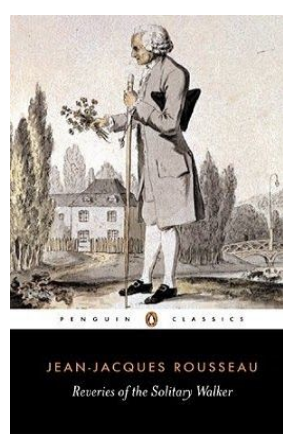
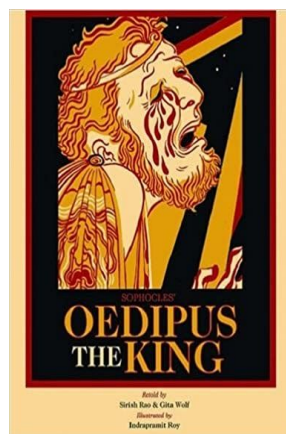
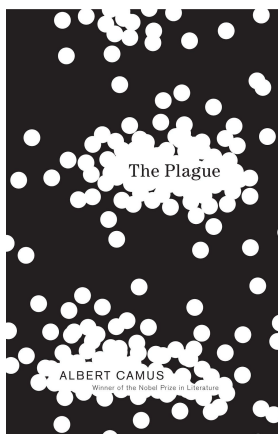


Image source:  
Goodreads



(left to right)  
Image source:  
Goodreads, Biblio,  
Penguin Random  
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(left to right)  
Image source:  
Amazon, Goodreads

## Shameful Indulgence in the Time of COVID-19

By: Cristina Serverius, Department Manager

Hi everyone!

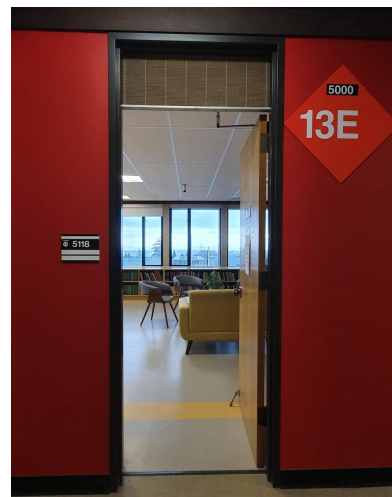
I will preface this by saying that I am rightfully ashamed of what I'm about to express... I am enjoying this time! There, I said it. Never in my life have I felt more balanced! Now part of my newfound peace may be due to the evaporation of the arduous and much-hated daily commute up to Burnaby Mountain, which, for me, involves well over an hour of bus and Skytrain rides each way. In the past weeks, I have redirected most of that commuting time to beach walks at Jericho and Spanish Banks. Maybe you are starting to see my point now.

On top of that, rather than my lunch diet of beige food carelessly selected from the Mackenzie Café offering, I now indulge in dolmades, hummus, artichoke spread, and olive tapenade on ciabatta from my local Greek deli. Granted, some of this food still qualifies as on the off-white spectrum, but while the eyes can't detect the difference, the taste buds sure can.

What I haven't been able to improve on, however, are the hallway antics of my colleagues, feeling desperately needed because I am the keeper of the coffee, and the liveliness of students passing by the office on their way to and from class. I miss everyone!



Above: Jericho Beach (image source: [Great Runs](#));  
Right: a look into the Humanities common room (image credit: Sara Wong)



## Challenge and Opportunity

By: Samir Gandesha, Associate Professor and Director of the Institute for the Humanities

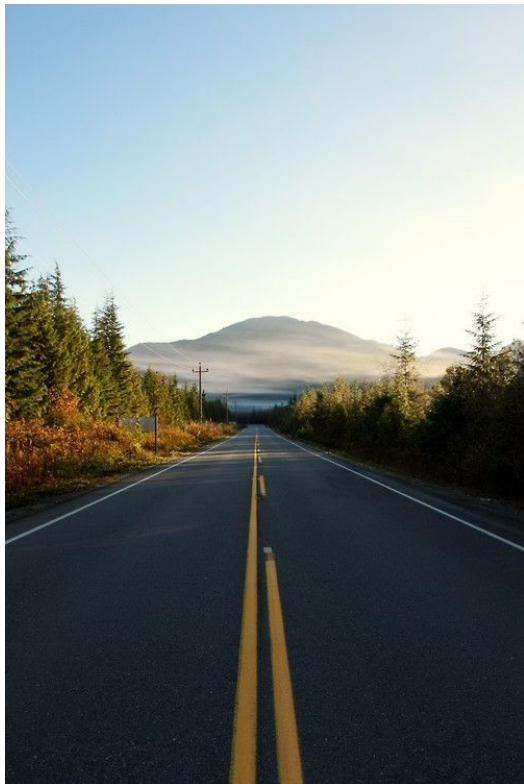
The COVID-19 pandemic presents everyone, though particularly students, with some serious challenges and, dare I say, unique opportunities. The challenges are pretty clear. For those with pre-existing conditions, this can be a time of anxiety, fear, even terror, at the prospect of contracting the virus. For others, the challenge principally has to do with uncertainty about employment, being separated from family and friends, coping with isolation, and so on. These issues have to place even more pressure on students, many of whom are already struggling to cope with life at the best of times.

How, then, can one therefore possibly speak of "opportunities"? Well, this extraordinary time of isolation can also be a time for reflection on what (and who) is truly important in our lives; who we are and want to be; it is a chance to take stock and re-evaluate, to set and perhaps alter priorities and establish or re-establish structure in our lives. Let me focus on the latter point as this would be my advice, based on my own experience and practice, as to how to survive these difficult times. I think it is vital during this period of lockdown (which is slowly, cautiously lifting) to structure one's day deliberately. It is important, in my view, to allocate ample time to reading, quiet reflection and possibly meditation, connecting with others via phone, FaceTime, Zoom, Skype, etc. as well as physical exercise such as at-home workout routines cycling, jogging or even walking.

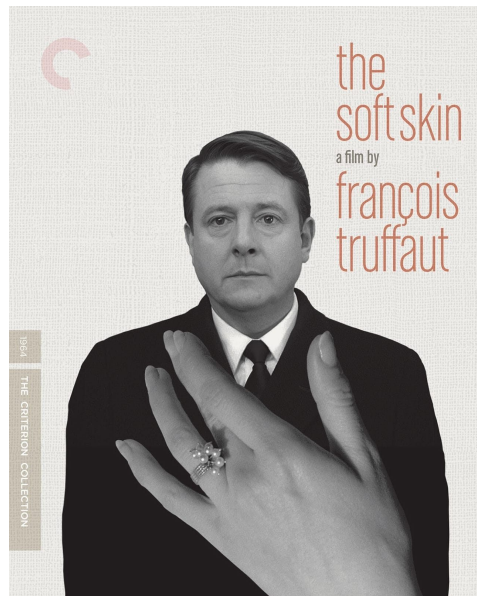
It goes without saying, of course that one must be careful to obey physical distancing and other public health protocols whilst doing so. My typical day consists of making espresso upon waking up (inevitable paradox: on occasion, I need to have had a shot before I am capable of making one!), attending to chores in the kitchen, reading (I've got at least six books on the go, some of which are half-finished novels such as Don Quixote and Ulysses and biographies of Deleuze and Guattari that I've meant to finish years ago as well as more recent books such as Capital and Ideology by Thomas Piketty!), walking the dog, working on my book and assorted articles and then in the evening cycling or punching the heavy bag set up in the garage, and then connecting with friends over a glass of wine.

Later, I settle down to another installment of French New Wave films on Criterion—the other night I very much enjoyed the gripping Francois Truffaut's masterpiece *The Soft Skin* (1964). I repeat this with minor variations such as shopping for myself and for an elderly friend and colleague who is in strict self-isolation owing to age and pre-existing conditions.

I also get out for the occasional drive with my son who will take his road test in a few months (I'm relieved that the roads have not been too busy these past weeks!). I've also got various "home improvement" projects on the go as well, such as refurbishing my deck and fixing the back fence. I find that this routine helps me to stay calm and balanced through the pandemic.



*Image source: Pinterest*



*Image source: The Criterion Collection*



*Image source: Tumblr*

## The School of Aristotle, Ancient Greek Rhetoric, and Law

By: David Mirhady, Professor and Undergraduate Chair

Although most of my teaching at SFU is devoted to classical mythology and the ancient Greek and Roman epics and tragedies where they are found for the first time—where I can rely on my knowledge of ancient Greek and Latin to guide students even though the courses are in translation—my research is devoted to three areas: the School of Aristotle, Ancient Greek Rhetoric, and Law.

This summer I'm at work first on Aristotle's School, the Peripatos, and one Peripatetic in particular, Clearchus, who came to Athens from his home in Cyprus, Soloi, and undertook research on a variety of areas, as all the Peripatetics did. Clearchus wrote works on ethics, cultural history, and natural science. I'm editing a book with contributions from a dozen scholars that collects and comments on all the ancient evidence for Clearchus.

Once I've sent in the Clearchus book, I'll turn to rhetoric. At SFU we've published an online source collection of all the writers who wrote on rhetoric—the art of civic persuasion—before Aristotle published his magisterial *On Rhetoric* about 330 BC. It's available at <https://www.sfu.ca/anewradermacher.html>. Connected with that work I'll be working on a paper on Isocrates' teachings for a conference I've been invited to in Athens in March 2021.

I'll also be shepherding through the publication process two papers that relate to Greek law. The first, "The Torture of Prometheus", discusses how the ancient Athenians' understanding of torture in legal processes are reflected in the Prometheus tragedy. The second, "The Rhetoric of Commercial Law in 4th-Century BCE Athens," discusses several innovations in law that the Athenians introduced to accommodate their reliance on the grain trade and how these appear in law court speeches that discuss them. I'll also be updating our online bibliography on Greek law, <http://www.sfu.ca/nomoi.html>.

## Untitled

By: Meghan Grant, Undergraduate Advisor

Hi all!

I always described myself as being a bit of an introvert. This entire experience has revealed that I actually think I may be more of an extrovert! Who knew? I have discovered just how important those little daily interactions are whether they are smiling at someone on the very overcrowded bus up Burnaby Mountain, saying good morning to all the amazing people in our department, and most of all, all the wonderful students who would stop by my office to say hi, eat lunch, or talk about upcoming events.

I love to be active and not having my gym has been a challenge. I go for a lot of runs and to the chagrin of my neighbors, I have converted my outdoor space into a temporary gym. I have had to get pretty creative with household items.

During this, I have no attention span for any shows or movies but listen to podcasts, read, play Friday night trivia online, have regular video chats with friends, spend hours looking for and listening to new music, and also have been doing some creative writing.

Despite all this, I still struggle to fill my days. I really had no idea just how busy I apparently like to be! I also think that my cat has had just about enough of me.



Image source: [Digitsole](#)

## "Booking" it Through the Pandemic

By: Emily O'Brien, Associate Professor

Since the semester ended, I've been doing my best to carve out small spaces where I can close the door temporarily on the stress and unknowns we're living in. I've been doing that most successfully by plunging into absorbing books.

Right now, I'm reading one of the greatest Italian novels of all time: *The Leopard*, by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa. Beautifully written, the book transports me to a totally different world; and when I put it down and re-enter my own world, that brief trip leaves me feeling refreshed. At the same time, it gives me something else: a chance to visit my beloved Italy – something I'd planned to do in person this summer.

Reading is also a family activity in my house. Last week I finished *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* with my eight-year-old son (we think the book is better than the movie – and we love the movie!). Whether you have a child in the house or not, I highly recommend re-reading a book that was one of your favourites as a kid. A familiar book is like an old friend, and over the last few weeks I've had many wonderful reunions in my childhood library. My son has now moved onto the Narnia chronicles, and re-reading them alongside him continues to be one of the highlights of my day!

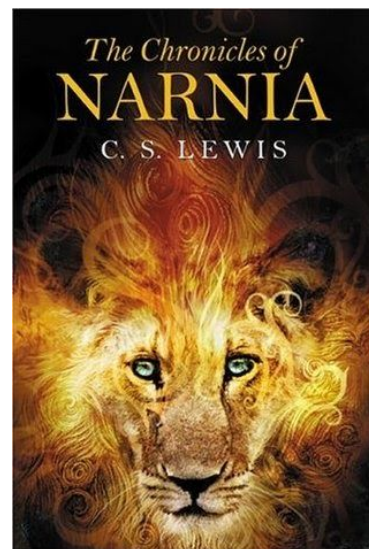
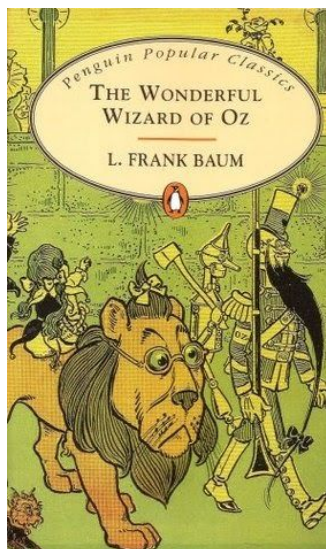
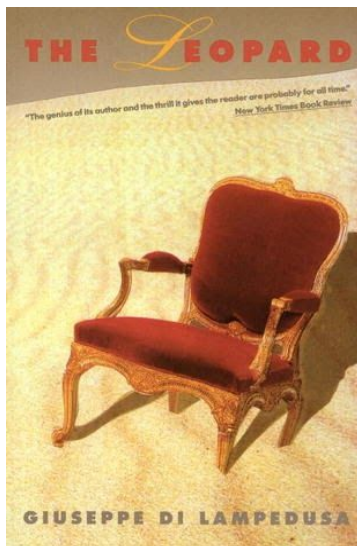


Image source: Goodreads

## Looking at Things Differently: Buddhist Ethics Applied to Today's Challenges

By: Paul Crowe, Associate Professor and Department Chair

During the summer semester I am looking forward to working with a large group of students in “HUM 331 Special Topics in Asian Religious Traditions,” on how Buddhist perspectives can address some of the difficult ethical questions we face today and, for the most part, have always faced. Two defining features of courses in the Department of Humanities are that firstly, we discuss and debate some of the most fundamental questions faced by people from varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and secondly, when doing so, we rely heavily on texts and works of art of enduring importance as our points of departure for conversation and critical reflection. This semester we are delving into teachings associated with the Buddha, meaning “one who is awakened,” partly through reading a perennially popular text titled Dhammapada. Compiled in the third century BCE, it is found in a collection of texts within the Pali Buddhist canon known as the Khuddaka Nikāya (Minor Collection) and provides insights into ethics situated in basic daily Buddhist practice.

My courses always open conversations between differing cultural perspectives and between the past and the present. When we share our various cultural perspectives through great works of literature and art, we expand our intellectual toolbox and our capacity to adapt and to address challenges. Darwin observed that species survive, not because they are the “fittest,” but because they are able to adapt to shifting ecological factors; this adaptive response rests in genetic variation. In a similar way, the survival and flourishing of human communities also rests on variation—in part, on our ability to solve problems through an imaginative variety of means.

In HUM 331 we will become better able to understand why, for example, Theravada Buddhists might hold very different positions on sexual identity, reproductive rights, economic and social justice, and ecologically sustainable human activity, among others. Part of my motivation for teaching is the firm conviction that if we understand each other better, we are more likely to foster more peaceful, just, and mutually respectful societies. If you take one of these courses be prepared not only to master new information but, more importantly, to challenge your own assumptions and to open up to hearing alternative ways of coping with life’s challenges.



## Pisces

By: Jennifer Chou

Recipe: <https://www.veganricha.com/vegan-coconut-caramel-energy-balls/>  
(if it says almond butter, you can sub peanut butter instead)

What it is:

These are delicious energy balls that I love to eat after a quick run or at-home exercise session! It has healthy ingredients and no sugar – the recipe uses dates instead!

Why I love it:

Okay, when I say it's easy to make, I mean it. You just toss everything into a food processor and shape it into balls. Then pop them in your fridge and that's it!

Fun ways to change up the recipe:

I ran out of shredded coconut so that's not a mandatory ingredient, especially if you don't like coconut. Sometimes I like to add these things to the recipe:

- Protein powder (I have chocolate)
- Crushed walnuts
- Crushed almonds
- Chocolate chips



Image source: [Vegan Richa](#)

Jokes:

What do you call it when a con man secretly plots to illegally download movies?  
A con's piracy!

What do you call an educated nut?  
A macademia! (academia hehe)

What's the difference between a dirty transit stop and a lobster with breast implants?  
One's a crusty bus station and the other's a busty crustacean!

A pirate walks into a bar with a steering wheel sticking out the front of his pants. The bartender looks at him and asks, "Hey, you know you have a steering wheel sticking out of the front of your pants?" Pirate looks at him and says, "Argh it's driving me nuts"



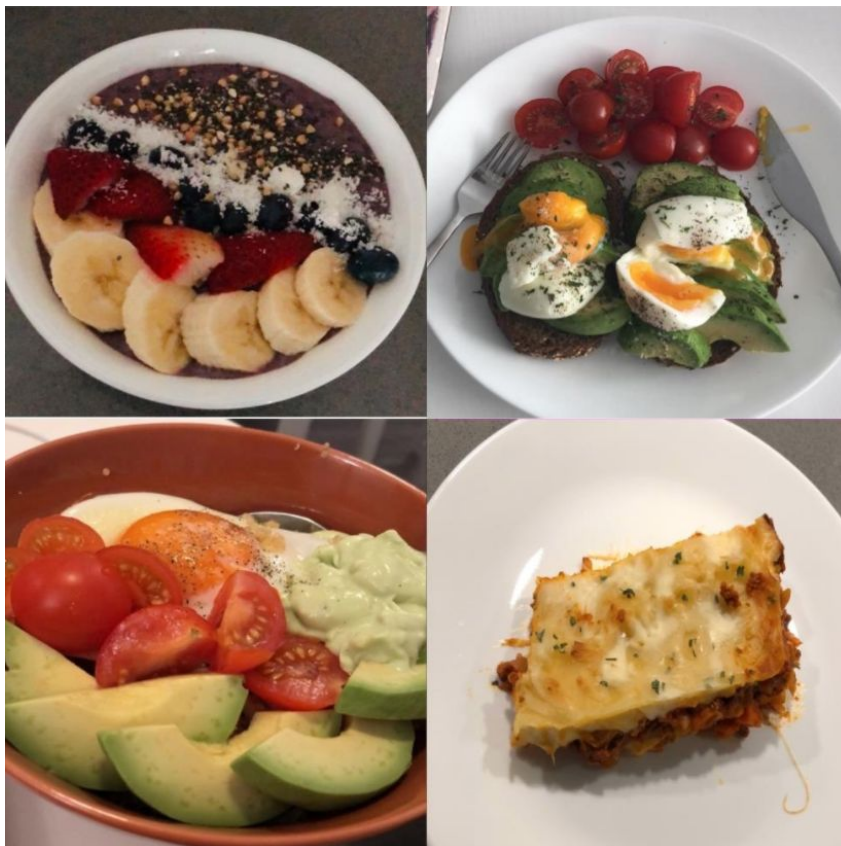
GIF source: [Tenor](#)

## Once Upon a Time in Vancouver

By: Sharon Goh

Life has changed drastically in the pandemic. I've never imagined that I would be able to stare at my computer screen for the whole day, minus the sleep. It has been this way since March, when the city was told to self-isolate as much as possible. While I do enjoy binging the TV series "Lost", I've been slowly turning into a couch potato and it does get tedious. So, I've decided to try out some recipes that I've been putting off for the longest time. I mean why not? It's fun and it distracts me from the current situation.

- 1) Acai Bowl
- 2) Avocado and Egg Toast
- 3) Chorizo Bowl
- 4) Lasagna



*Images taken by author*

## Coping Through Gardening

By: Nim Basra

During these unprecedented times, people have been finding ways to cope with the rapid and constant changes taking place in our lives and in our world. I am grateful that over the past couple of years, Embark Sustainability has inspired and encouraged me to use gardening as a tool to help manage stress and find happiness. Through quarantine, I have been actively using the skills I have learned to grow vegetables, herbs, flowers, and some fruit. Being able to see the progress of my plants has given me something to look forward to everyday and takes up a lot of the spare time I now have. Recently, gardening has become a family activity in my household, as my parents and siblings also enjoy planting and seeing our garden grow. I am glad we get to spend time together and that they support my passions. Being productive in my garden makes me feel less hopeless during times like these and reminds me that better days are ahead.

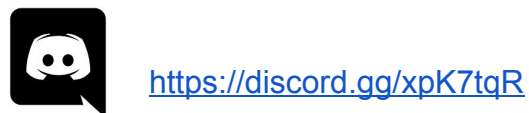


*Images taken by author*

THANKS FOR READING!



*Image credit: Jennifer Chou*



We want to hear from you!

In these strange times, it's hard *not* to feel isolated. Help us re-engage the SFU community by sharing your experiences with this pandemic! Email your submission to [hum-pres@sfu.ca](mailto:hum-pres@sfu.ca) to be included in the next edition of "Community Over COVID".