Meet Scandinavian Club President Bart Romanek

Scandinavian Studies Scan continues its interview series with current and former Scandinavian Studies students by interviewing the current President of the University of Alberta’s Scandinavian Club, Bart Romanek. Bart was born in Poland and immigrated to Canada at a young age. He has spent most of his life in Edmonton, where he attended school.

Q. What stage you are in your studies and what are your majors?
I'm technically going into my fourth year of study, but I've completed enough credits to probably be considered fifth year. That is partly because I have two majors, and partly because I'm a bit of an overachiever. I expect to graduate at the end of the winter 2017 term with a Bachelor of Arts Combined Honours in Scandinavian and Classics.

Q. What brought you into Scandinavian Studies?
I came into Scandinavian Studies in a bit of a roundabout fashion. You could even say that it came to me. I started post-secondary in the fall of 2013 with the intention of just learning Swedish. Sweden has fascinated me for quite some time, but I'm not entirely sure when that began. My interests have always tended towards Europe, likely because I come from a city named Tarnów in Poland.

In 2013, on a whim, I decided to teach myself Swedish, so I downloaded a self-teaching application to my phone. Once I was hooked, I did a little research and found out that the U of A offered classes in Swedish. I decided to apply to Open Studies at the U of A to learn Swedish, got accepted, quit my job, and started school with the intention of learning the language and moving to Europe.

It's not an exaggeration to say that my Swedish class changed my life. I was taught by the amazing Marianne Lindvall, who introduced me to the possibility of Scandinavian Studies. I had never even heard of this area of study, and it was so unique and in line with things that interested me (languages, history, culture, mythology, etc.). I decided that I should pursue a degree in the area. Going into my second year, I became the president of the Scandinavian Club, and began working with Dr. Natalie Van Deusen, who had a further deep impact on my academic career.

Q. What aspect of Scandinavian Studies particularly appeals to you?
My original interest was mainly in Sweden and language learning. I love languages, particularly ones considered unique or non-mainstream. Norse mythology has also held my interest since I was quite young, and continues to do so. Since beginning to work with Dr. Van Deusen, I’ve also discovered my love of medieval manuscripts, which also feeds into my love of unique languages as well as Norse mythology.

Q. What courses have you taken to date?
Swedish 111, 112, 211, 212; Scandinavian 341 (Norse Mythology), 342 (Vikings & Sagas), 399 (Crime Fiction), 399 (ABBA), 399 (Folklore), 399 (Children's Literature), and 551/552 (Old Norse); and I'm currently taking Scandinavian 399 (Film) and 499 (Modern Icelandic).

Q. How do you see Scandinavian languages or studies fitting in with your career plans or aspirations?
That's tricky to answer. As Scandinavian Studies is such a unique field, it's difficult to find directly relatable work. However, my plan is still to move to Europe and continue my studies at the graduate level. I'd love to work in manuscript or historical research, or perhaps as a consultant or translator. I'm not sure where I'll end up, but I do know that I just want to keep learning.

Q. How/why did you connect with the Scandinavian Club?
I first became part of the club through Marianne Lindvall, who encouraged students to take part in club events. I was nervous at first but I soon got to know the other Scandinavian Studies students and felt quite welcome. I was elected president of the club at the end of my first year and this April was elected for my third consecutive term. After 31 years, the Scandinavian Club, along with the Scandinavian Program at the U of A, was in a transitional period. I saw a job that needed doing, was able and qualified to do it, and opted to take the reins.

Q. What do you see as the purpose of the club?
I see it as a social and educational extension of the U of A Scandinavian Program. Class time rarely allows students to connect with each other meaningfully or put what they've learned into practice. It's my goal to foster a sense of community within the Scandinavian Program, and provide a space to explore and celebrate Scandinavian culture. Also, the Scandinavian Club works symbiotically with the program, as participation in one often leads to participation in another. It's also a great place for students to put into practice what they've learned in the classroom.

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Q. How does the club try to achieve these objectives?
It’s really been my intention to offer a multitude of ways for students to be involved, as different things appeal to different people. The club has its weekly, Thursday afternoon meetings, held since its inception, as well as a number of parties throughout the year. Our biggest draw is definitely our Facebook group, with over 200 members, but we also have a mailing list for those not on Facebook, and an Instagram account. We also put on bi-weekly movie nights, usually in a Scandinavian language with English subtitles, and a language practice lunch during school hours. This year, I’d also like to try to get a study support activity set up.

Q. Does the club have some so-far unfilled objectives or wish list aims?
I’d really love to get a speaker series set up, but the club does have limited resources.

Q. What benefit have you personally drawn from being part of the club?
Being part of an amazing Scandinavian community on campus and off. I’ve made some great friendships through the club, and I’ve felt incredibly supported because of it.

Q. Have you had an opportunity to visit or spend some time in Scandinavia – if so, where and when?
I haven’t yet had the opportunity but this fall I’m planning a trip to Iceland for my birthday in October. I’m also hoping to continue my studies in either Sweden or Iceland in the future.

Q. When not involved with Scandinavian Studies, what are your other interests?
I volunteer with a theatre production company, Sorry, Not Sorry Productions, which was voted third best theatre production company at Edmonton’s Fringe Festival last year. I work part-time at the Art Gallery of Alberta, assisting in public programming. I also like to play my guitar occasionally and am interested in music production.

The other half of my degree sees me involved with the study of Ancient Rome and the Latin language. Also, I love history, particularly anything medieval or earlier. Any remaining time I have usually goes to my cat, Bella.

The Scandinavian Studies Association and The Canadian Institute for Nordic Studies Present

How Pioneering Scandinavians Helped Build Edmonton and Area
A talk by Dr. Ken Domier

Dr. Domier retired as Professor of Agricultural Engineering at the University of Alberta. He is an amateur historian with a special interest in the contributions made by early Scandinavians in Western Canada. His lecture will focus on the roles Scandinavians played in the development of Edmonton and adjacent areas from 1890 to 1930.

Sunday, October 16, 2016 – 2 p.m.
Nordic Room
Dutch Canadian Centre
Home of the Scandinavians
13312 - 142 Street, Edmonton

Coffee and refreshments will be provided. There is no charge for this event; however, tax-receivable donations will be gratefully accepted to the University of Alberta's Scandinavian Professorship Endowment Fund. (Please make cheques payable to The University of Alberta, Scandinavian Professorship Endowment Fund.)

For more information, please contact
Nordahl Flakstad 780-444-9199
email nflakstad@shaw.ca

ALL are welcome!

New Executive

At its Annual General Meeting on May 24, the Scandinavian Studies Association (SSA) elected its 2016-17 Board of Directors. The Board consists of (l. to r.): Roger Bruce (Treasurer); Nordahl Flakstad (President); Don Sjoberg (Director); Ken Domier (Director and Past President); Benjamin Garstad (Vice President); Valerie Vale (Secretary); and Chris Head (Director). At the AGM, Gail Helgason and Louise Johnson stepped down from the Board. Louise served as SSA Secretary for all but a few years of the Association’s 26-year existence. Throughout that period, the Association has supported the University of Alberta’s Scandinavian Studies Program by various means, including extensive fundraising efforts.

Recognition and Reappointment

Dr. Natalie Van Deusen, the Henry Cabot and Linnea Lodge Professor of Scandinavian Studies, has been recognized with the University of Alberta’s 2016 Faculty of Arts Undergraduate Teaching Award (Early Achievement).

Dr. Laura Beard, Chair of the Department of Modern Languages & Cultural Studies (MLCS) noted that Dr. Van Deusen, who joined the U of A in 2012 had “an excellent year across the board in teaching, research and service.”

In another development, the MLCS announced an extension of Dr. John Eason’s appointment’s as lecturer in Scandinavian Studies. The University originally hired Dr. Eason, whose assignment includes teaching Norwegian and Swedish, in 2014.

Contact Us

For additional information about the Scandinavian Studies Program and the Scandinavian Studies Association, check https://uofa.ualberta.ca/modern-languages-and-cultural-studies/undergraduate-program-information/areas/scandinavian-studies or contact the Association’s President, Nordahl Flakstad
email: nflakstad@shaw.ca
phone: 780-444-9199.