Department of English knows how to start back to school term: A Softball Game and a Potluck!

What other way to start fall term than with a Student-Faculty Softball Game and a Potluck. The Student-Staff Relations Committee and the Graduate English Association (GEA) in the Department of English is hosting a pre-fall term celebration on September 8 from 4:00pm – 6:00pm at Dovercourt Park, Toronto. It is a traditional festivity that the Department of English celebrates every year. Exciting news this year is that the winning team will get deliveries of delicious pastries throughout winter semester.

Wajiha Rasul from the Department of English inquired about the origins of the softball game tradition in the Department of English from Matthew Sergi, Assistant Professor of English and a member of the Staff-Student Relations Committee. According to Matt, “the tradition grew out of the earliest days of graduate studies at the Department of English, when graduate students had to club at potential faculty mentors with bats to earn places in the program. One day, during the competition, because the ceremony was making too much of a racket, a distinguished older faculty member named Professor Softballington threw a rock at one of the graduate students. By sheer chance, the professor’s rock connected with one of the graduate students’ bats. The hit sent the rock flying into the air. As students and faculty watched the flying rock with awe, they realized that instead of fighting each other with bats, they could work together as a team: the first game of ‘softball’ was born. Now, the Student-Faculty softball game is a beautiful representation of the day when graduate students and faculty stopped hitting each other with bats and rocks and started working together. No, honestly, I have no idea how the tradition began.”

On a serious note, Matt informed the following about the traditional Student-Faculty Softball game at the Department of English.

1. What is the goal behind organizing student-faculty softball game every year? and what does student-faculty softball game symbolizes?

One of our keystone events, the softball game helps build a sense of community and fellow-feeling among students and staff. It gives us a sense that collegiality is not secondary to our research, teaching and service responsibilities but rather fundamental to all of those — the work we do in the humanities requires us to share experiences and be friends.
2. **This year’s winning team will get bi-weekly deliveries of delicious pastries throughout winter semester – Who came up with this fantastic idea?**

The idea came from a set of conversations between me and the GEA about whether the Student-Faculty softball game should be competitive. The kind of collegiality that we’re looking to build is founded on the friendly competition, even contention, which leads to the generation of new ideas. And we had a small bit of available money on both sides: surplus from the GEA’s planning fund for the event and a matching contribution from the Department. The prize is symbolic because it is a joint effort – we’re all putting our money where our mouth is, in a gesture of shared food as well as shared sport, both of which are so fundamental to community-building.

3. **What has been the biggest achievement accomplished by student-faculty softball game so far?**

Well, it tends to be the event that gets people to *show up*. Everyone is always so busy, and the Department so big, so getting everyone together as a community is an accomplishment indeed. This year, forty-seven people, students and faculty, have already sent in their RSVP for the event on September 8.

I think it’s the sharing of food — it’s not just a softball game but also a potluck — that gets people excited about the event. It’s a genuine good time. And thanks to the efforts of [Thom Dancer](#) to provide lawn games at the event, for those less inclined toward softball, the fun will be even more accessible to all.