

## The Rising of the YEAST

*John W. Chinneck. April 26, 2021.*

I joined Carleton University at an awkward time in the middle of an academic year: January 1, 1986. I was recently back in Canada after more than a year of backpacking around the world, mostly in Asia, and had arrived home with no money and no job. While visiting my brother in Ottawa I flipped through a Carleton University undergraduate calendar he had and noticed that Carleton had a department like the one in which I had completed my degrees at the University of Waterloo. I called the department chair from a phone booth (remember those?) on a freezing November day and an hour later I was sitting in his office being interviewed. I got the job offer the next day and started work in the Department of Systems and Computer Engineering a month after that. Hiring procedures sure have changed since then!

It's hard to integrate when you start mid-year like that. I mostly sat alone in an improvised office that used to be a small lab (there were perhaps 100 electric outlets in the room) and worked on papers. But I didn't meet anybody. As September approached, I prepared courses on my own. It was lonely. It went on like that for a couple of years.

There were a couple of other young assistant professors in my department, and at Faculty Board I noticed that there were some in the other departments too. But there just didn't seem to be a way to meet those people. Everyone was working away in their own silos. The gulf between departments was particularly big: when would you ever interact with those folks?

I thought back to a social group that I had helped organize in my residence during my undergraduate years. The main activity was going out together to a favourite seedy bar to consume mass quantities of draft beer and greasy food. There were membership cards and goofy T-shirts and some outrageous rituals. But it was effective: people met and formed friendships. Some even married years later.

As juvenile and off-beat as it was, I had an idea: could something like that work at Carleton? Could it bring together the newer engineering faculty members so they could interact, make personal connections, break down silos, forge friendships, commiserate about students, trade advice, etc.? I decided to give it a try. Thus was born the association of *Young Engineering Academic Staff* (YEAST), all less than the age of 40.

Step one was to recruit representatives from each engineering department. I cold-called a few people until I found like-minded individuals and we all began to recruit in our various units. By mid-fall 1988 we had identified 30 YEAST and began brainstorming. There was to be a new Hierarchy of Life in Engineering (Fig. 1):

- **YEAST:** Young Engineering Academic STaff (less than 40 years of age)
- **MOLD:** Middle-aged or **OL**Der engineering academic staff (40 or older)
- **SPORE:** Support Personnel **fOR** Engineering
- **SLIME:** Special Lecturer **I**nvited to **M**eeet the **E**ngineers



Carleton University  
Memorandum

Date: 13 October 1988

To: ALL YEAST (There are 30 of us)

The YEAST Executive  
(John Chinneck (3826), Marie-Anne Erki (5548), Tad Kwasniewski (6753), and Moyra McDill (2752))

From:

Re: Announcing:

(1) The New Hierarchy of Life in Engineering

YEAST: Young Engineering Academic Staff (<40 years old)

MOLD: Middle-aged or OLDER engineering academic staff

SPORE: Support Personnel FOR Engineering

SLIME: Special Lecturer Invited to Meet the Engineers

(2) The First "Yeast Rising"

Where: Faculty Club

When: Thursday, December 1, 1988 (tentative date)  
4:30 p.m. until ??

Why: To celebrate and/or drown our sorrows with respect to the end of first term

ULTIMATE GOAL: Friendship, support and finding co-authors for research

Cost: You buy your drinks, we'll pass the hat for "nibbles"

What to do: Let one of the Executive know you would like to come

(3) Suggestions for a Motto are:

(i) Rise and Ferment  
(ii) We Put the Rise in Engineering  
(iii) Break the Mold

(4) Current Suggestions for a Logo have been censored by the executive.

:kcs

JWC Spruce Riordon  
MOR.

Figure 1: Establishing YEAST

Our first "Rising" on December 1, 1988 (Fig. 2) was great fun! The then-Dean of Engineering, Spruce Riordon was our first SLIME, and was given strict instructions: a *short* address, humorous if possible, followed by consumption of free drinks provided by the YEAST for as long as he liked. SPICE (plural of "spouse") were also invited. People laughed and mingled and made connections. Success!

# REMINDER !

## CARLETON UNIVERSITY MEMORANDUM

ATTENTION: All YEAST  
ANNOUNCING: 1st YEAST RISING  
WHEN: Thursday, December 1, 1988 at Faculty Club  
4:30 - 8:00 p.m. until ???  
HOW MUCH: HOWMUCH = f(HOW MANY)  
HOWMUCH ~ \$5.00 + cash bar  
WHO: All YEAST  
SPICE (plural of spouse) are cordially  
invited to join the YEAST @ 6:00 p.m.  
FEATURING: Dean Riordon, SLIME  
(Selected Lecturer Invited to Meet the  
Engineers) will give a five minute  
presentation on his life as MOLD.  
SAD NEWS: Dr. Steen Sjolander, YEAST, will  
officially join MOLD before the first  
YEAST rising. Special drumming out  
services will be held in Steen's honour.  
WANT TO COME: Your department rep will find you.

### SCHEDULE:

4:30 Bar Opens. Contest Begins  
5:00-5:02 "Why YEAST?" by J.W. Chinneck  
5:02-5:05 Presentation of membership cards  
6:00 Contest closes. Meeting open to SPICE  
6:00-6:05 "Life as a Mold" by SLIME lecturer, Dean  
Spruce Riordon  
6:05 Promotion to MOLD of Steen Sjolander  
6:30 Contest winners announced  
8:00 Official Adjournment

Figure 2: The first meeting announcement.

Membership cards were given out at the first meeting. These were the classic small envelopes of Fleischmann's yeast (Fig. 3). One was mounted in a frame and given as a thank-you gift to the



Figure 3: YEAST membership card.

SLIME. Many members put theirs in small frames and displayed them in their offices. Mine hung proudly on my wall for years.

We generally held 2 meetings per year, right after classes ended in the fall and winter terms. It was a chance to let off some steam and have a little fun.

It was great fun to interact with the SLIME. These were generally upper administrative types that a young assistant professor would never have a chance to meet in the ordinary course of things. Here are some of the SLIME and the titles of their addresses:

- December 1988: *Spruce Riordan, Dean of Engineering*, “Life as a MOLD”.
- March 1989. *Sydney Wise, Dean of Graduate Studies and Research*, “MOLD on the Big Cheeses at Carleton”.
- November 1989. *Robin Farquhar, Carleton University President*, “The Head on the Carleton Brew”.
- April 1990. *Malcolm Bibby, incoming Dean of Engineering*, “Prime SLIME: Engineering in Ferment”.
- November 1990. *John ApSimon, Dean of Graduate Studies and Research*, “A True Confession: My Name is Really ApSlimon”.
- April 1991. *Pauline Jewett, Chancellor*, untitled remarks.

OK, we made up the titles of the talks for the SLIME, and the remarks were usually extemporaneous, but we made sure to get several drinks into each SLIME before they spoke, so they were always amusing.

It became a mark of distinction among the upper administration to be cool enough to be invited as a SLIME. It made me laugh to visit the office of a Dean or even the President and see a framed packet of Fleischmann's yeast on the wall!

The only SLIME who missed a meeting was Pauline Jewett, who was ill with terminal cancer on the date of her scheduled appearance. However directly after the meeting several of us piled into a car and went to her apartment to present her with her framed YEAST membership and a giant bouquet of balloons. There may have been singing. I think it gave her quite a boost to open the door to this enthusiastic group of youngsters, a little tipsy and loud though we were. A ray of sunshine in a bleak time.

We made sure to have fun. There were traditions like silly tie day on the last day of classes (my tie was in the shape of a fish), and the annual presentation of the Lazy Boy Chair in Engineering winner (“signposts to success are a work style emphasizing comfort and the ability to work with your feet above your head”). There were contests (worst photo of yourself ever taken, most outrageous student/prof story, best caption for a cartoon). But my all-time favourite was the song-writing competition. This was my entry:

*Young Prof in Hell* by John Chinneck  
(to the tune of “Heartbreak Hotel” by Elvis Presley)

Now my class is very noisy,  
I always have to yell.  
That’s when I think that I must be a  
Young prof in hell.

CHORUS: I’m just a young prof baby, ooh  
I’m just a young prof  
I’m just a young prof, sent to hell.

Although I worked all weekend  
The marking isn’t done.  
So I drink another coffee, and I  
Flunk another one.

CHORUS

I just gave back the midterm  
There’s crying everywhere  
I can’t go to my office, fifty  
Students waiting there.

ALT. CHORUS: They all want more marks baby, ooh  
Just a few more marks  
From the young prof, sent to hell.

My seminar’s a failure  
My research didn’t sell  
I’ve got no chance at tenure, I’m a  
Young prof in hell.

CHORUS

Now PhDs you hear me  
I know of what I tell  
If you think that teaching’s easy, be a  
Young prof in hell.

ALT CHORUS: I’m just an ex-prof baby, ooh...

Other entries in the song contest included:

- Kevin Goheen: *It’s Not Easy Being Dean* (to the tune of Kermit the Frog’s song *It’s Not Easy Being Green*).
- Moyra McDill and Alan Oddy: *If I had Tenure* (to the tune of *If I Had a Hammer*)

Things changed in 1991 when my daughter was born. Children take up a lot of time and so organizing the YEAST events passed on to others at that time. As so often with this kind of thing, unless there is a key person driving the effort, it gradually fades away. And so it was with the YEAST. But it sure was fun while it lasted. I expanded my contacts, made lifelong friends, and met a lot of interesting people.

So now I throw this story out into the world, hoping that the idea takes root somewhere, sometime. I would love to see the next generation of YEAST rising again!