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About Athabasca University

ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY (AU) IS CANADA’S OPEN UNIVERSITY, a worldwide leader in online and distance education based in Athabasca, Alta. We’re proud to serve more than 38,000 students in 90 countries with courses and programs in the arts, business, health disciplines, social sciences, sciences and technology.

As an open university, we strive to help people overcome the challenges that can prevent them from attending traditional university — challenges like family and job responsibilities and not being able to relocate to go to school. Our open admission policy allows anyone 16 or older to study with us as an undergraduate student regardless of their educational history.

Open AU: AU news all year round

Keep up with the latest AU news all year round with Open AU, the online companion to Open magazine: open-au.com.

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Open Magazine
Open magazine is Athabasca University’s magazine for the university community: our students, our alumni, and our partners, staff, faculty and friends. If you’re thinking about studying with AU, Open is a great way to get to know us and learn about our achievements, projects, research, events and the people who make it all happen: our outstanding students, alumni, faculty and staff.

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Creative Director: Nancy Biamonte
Editor: Erin Ottosen
Design & Layout: Sarah Jackson
Photography: Blaise MacMullin
Other photographers as credited.

Writers:
Diane Morrison
Omar Mouallem
Cathy Nickel
John O’Brien
Erin Ottosen

Comments & Inquiries
Share your Open magazine comments and inquiries with:
Nancy Biamonte
Director, Marketing and Communication
open_magazine@athabascau.ca
780.421.5049

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ON THE COVER
Alumna Denise Blair, MBA (2010), in Calgary, Alta.
Photo: Blaise MacMullin
ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY IS NOT ONLY A UNIVERSITY — IT IS A PASSION. It is an institution that reaches people who otherwise might not be able to attend university or would have incredible difficulty in doing so.

At AU, we strive to remove as many barriers to learning as we can, and we’re proud to announce another initiative supporting this mandate: the Open Our World fund-raising campaign. This special edition of Open magazine is all about the campaign, and in these pages you’ll see stories that exemplify our passion for our work and that bring to life the four key areas for which we are seeking funding.

For our first key area, student awards, the remarkable stories of our students and alumni demonstrate the difference that awards make in their lives.

For Denise Blair (MBA, 2010), a full scholarship not only made it possible for her to complete her degree, but it inspired her to create a leadership program for at-risk youth (8). For Abraham Nhial Wei, student awards will help him overcome the latest barrier — financial — in a long line of barriers to education that he faced while growing up in refugee camps in Africa amidst war and poverty. Wei is pursuing a Bachelor of Professional Arts from his hut in South Sudan (22).

For our second and third key areas, learning innovation and research, we have stories on a number of projects that bolster both areas.

Dr. Kinshuk, AU’s NSERC/iCORE/Xerox/Markin research chair, shares the work he’s doing with Xerox Canada on personalized mobile learning — education delivered through smartphones that adapts to learners’ individual needs (21).

Dr. Mohamed Ally, another leader in mobile learning research and the chair of AU’s Centre for Distance Education, shares the findings from his study on the state of mobile learning in Canada funded by Rogers Communications (20).

Finally, the feature on the Athabasca River Basin Research Institute (ARBRI) reveals the institute’s plans for research on the Athabasca River Basin. The region encompassed by the basin includes an astounding diversity of flora and fauna, about 150,000 of Alberta’s residents and a wealth of oil, gas and other natural resources. ARBRI’s research, along with its efforts to improve collaboration among the many river basin stakeholders, will help to ensure the long-term sustainability of this region, which is undoubtedly one of Alberta’s most important assets (14).

In addition to research, ARBRI’s work clearly falls into our fourth key area: community service. And so does the work of two other initiatives: the Canadian Film Online project (18) and the Writer in Residence program (17).

In the past three years, I’ve personally donated nearly $95,000 to AU. I’ve contributed to initiatives that support our Centre for World Indigenous Knowledge and Research as well as our research in and creation of open-access educational resources. The reason I give is simple: I believe in AU. I believe in this university and what it stands for: breaking down barriers. I believe that AU can play a part in changing the world, and I share the passion for this university’s work that is also felt by our faculty, our staff, our friends and our partners.

Furthermore, I know my gifts are making a difference. And so will yours.

Frits Pannekoek, PhD
President, Athabasca University
2012 MARKS A SPECIAL MILESTONE for Athabasca University: the public launch of our first university-wide fundraising campaign, *Open Our World*.

For over 40 years, we’ve been working to remove barriers to post-secondary learning so that people anywhere in the world, no matter where they live or what other obstacles may stand in their way, can have open access to university education. With this campaign, we seek to reinforce our leadership in open-access, online and distance learning by focusing on four key areas:

**Student awards**

For many students, financial pressures can be an insurmountable barrier to learning. Bursaries, scholarships and other student awards help to break down the financial barrier and create more opportunities for people to achieve academic and career goals that otherwise would have been beyond their reach.

**Learning innovation**

AU is constantly expanding learning opportunities and embracing innovations, technological and otherwise, to remove barriers to learning. Learning innovation is essential for the university to remain on the vanguard of e-learning.

**Research**

Researchers in all faculties at AU are advancing knowledge in their respective fields and applying this research to AU programs and courses. We’re also recognized around the world for our leadership in distance education research.

**Community service**

Strong, healthy communities provide the framework for our success as a university. We are committed to building communities through a wide range of initiatives that foster collaboration, leadership and innovation.

Today, we stand at a crossroads. There is tremendous opportunity for AU as the world shifts to an economy based on knowledge as well as physical assets, but we are also challenged by the costs of developing our educational resources and by competition in the increasingly sophisticated field of e-learning. This campaign will ensure that we continue to open our world — a world of opportunity for learners and for the communities we serve.

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**Campaign timeline**

**2008-09:** We establish a goal of $30 million, and AU’s leaders kick-start the campaign with personal contributions. For information about their support for the campaign and for Athabasca University itself, see the message from our president, Dr. Frits Pannekoek (opposite), and the profiles of our current and past board chairs, Barry Walker and Joy Romero (4-5).

**2009-10:** Faculty and staff join the campaign (6).

**2010-11:** We plan and prepare for launching the campaign publicly and sharing our campaign vision with our friends, partners, alumni and the many communities we serve.

**2012-13:** We launch the campaign publicly and continue working towards our $30-million goal.

**2014:** The campaign concludes.

**The results so far**

Thanks to over 300 donors who share our vision for removing barriers to post-secondary learning, *we’ve already raised 73% of our $30-million goal*. Thanks so much to all of you! See the end of this issue for a full list of our donors.

To find out more about *Open Our World* and ways to give, please visit: open.athabasca.ca/2012
OPENING DOORS TO EDUCATION

Why the past and present chairs of AU’s Board of Governors support AU.

BY ERIN OTTOSEN

HELPING STUDENTS, HELPING SOCIETY

BARRY WALKER, CHAIR OF THE ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY BOARD OF GOVERNORS (2009-PRESENT)

FOR THE PAST EIGHT YEARS, BARRY Walker has served Athabasca University first as a public member of the university’s Board of Governors and then as chair of the board since 2009. But Barry has watched AU grow from the very beginning, and he and his wife Valerie are leaving a legacy with the university that will allow it to continue to grow and contribute to the success of students and society.

A chartered accountant, Barry has worked with clients in the Athabasca area since the 1960s, and his firm established a permanent office in Athabasca in 1985, a year after AU outgrew its original facilities in Edmonton and opened up its own permanent offices in Athabasca.

He watched the Athabasca campus grow with interest, and he and Valerie took AU courses both for the sheer joy of learning and for professional development in their respective fields: accounting and early childhood development. When he was invited to join AU’s board in 2004, he was happy to say yes. Within a year, he was chair of the board’s finance committee, and five years later, he was chair of the board itself.

In addition to serving on AU’s board, Barry has been an active volunteer for many other community organizations, and so has Valerie. In the last few years, they decided to take their community service in another direction by creating student award endowments for the two post-secondary institutions that have played a major role in their lives: Grant MacEwan University, where they’ve both worked as instructors, and AU.

At AU, there are two Walker family awards for students at the beginning of similar career paths as Barry and Valerie — one award is for accounting students, while the other is for counselling students who are focusing on services for children or youth in their practicum placement.

“We believe that in the long haul, the assistance you provide to students not only benefits the individual, but it benefits society as a whole,” says Barry. “Just as education helped Valerie and me become people who contribute to society, [assistance for students] sets them up to get their own education and become productive members of society who contribute in their own way. It might not be dollars and cents to educational institutions, but they will contribute to society. So we see our endowments as a way of giving back to society as a whole.”

The Walkers plan to continue adding funds to their endowments “as long as we’re around,” he says with a smile. They’ve also made a provision in their wills to top up the endowments with their estate.

“We want them to be a permanent legacy, not because we want any glory or any significant recognition. We’re not people who need the limelight,” he says. “What makes us feel good is just knowing this is happening.”

“We believe that in the long haul, the assistance you provide to students not only benefits the individual, but it benefits society as a whole.”
A LOVE FOR EDUCATION AND A LOVE FOR AU

JOY ROMERO, FORMER CHAIR OF THE ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY BOARD OF GOVERNORS (2006-09)

"WITHOUT EDUCATION, I'M NOT QUITE sure what my life would look like," says Joy Romero. "In my family I was that first generation that went to university. I came from a very modest background. Education is really what opened all the doors for me in my life and allowed me to provide for my family.”

Romero is an engineer and the vice-president of technology development at Canadian Natural Resources Limited. She also graduated from Athabasca University in 2006 with a Master of Business Administration. Even though her free time is rare, she’s never lost sight of her love for education and has always found time for education-related volunteer work. She’s served as a school trustee, for example, and participated in programs that help high school students transition to university.

"[I did a lot of work around] trying to remove barriers and getting people involved in education, which of course is what Athabasca University is all about," she says. So when she was asked to join the board of AU in 2002, she couldn’t resist the opportunity. Her final years on the board (2006-09) were spent as the chair, a position she likely earned "because I didn’t sit down," she says with a laugh.

It wouldn’t have been possible without the support of her family, who sacrificed some of their time with Romero as she attended to her board duties. “My husband Diego also shares my conviction towards education,” she says. “And we also believe in giving back. You receive a lot in your younger years, and then you reach a point where it’s your turn to give back.”

"It’s not just my husband and I,” she continues. “Our kids also respect that need to give back to community. They have a healthy respect for education and what AU stands for; so our whole family’s always been really comfortable with our commitment to AU.”

At one point, Romero, her daughter and her dad, who was in his 80s at the time, were all taking AU courses for vastly different reasons. Her dad was studying civilizations for personal interest. Her daughter was a visiting student from the University of Calgary taking AU courses to round out her degree. And Romero was working on her MBA, a long-time goal of hers that she didn’t muster the courage to pursue until she attended an AU convocation.

"I had no intention of doing my MBA any time soon, because I thought, I can't manage it, I don't have the time," she says. "But watching people convocate, and listening to their stories of what they overcame to graduate — I thought, if they can do it, I can do it... It was actually watching convocation that gave me the confidence to do my MBA. AU’s convocation is such an inspiring thing.”

The Romeros have created a bursary for MBA students in financial need. They’ve also contributed funds to scholarships for graduate students and are supporting the university with other long-term financial contributions.

"It’s important to always have some component of your life that’s giving back," says Romero. "I love education and what it does for people, and I really love how AU provides people with more options in terms of ways to learn. Giving to the university and serving on its board has been very rewarding for me.”
Giving back and paying forward

Why AU’s students and mission compel staff and faculty to give to their university.

By Diane Morrison

“I FEEL A SENSE OF PRIDE”

James d’Arcy, Registrar

James d’Arcy’s decision to donate to Athabasca University is a reflection of both his belief in AU’s mission to remove barriers to education and the opportunities he has received at AU because of that mission.

d’Arcy, AU’s registrar, completed his AU Master of Business Administration with the support of the university. “I incurred very little out-of-pocket expenses in the pursuit of my MBA, and I am grateful I was given that opportunity,” he says. “The MBA has strengthened my character, and it has definitely helped me in advancing my career.”

“I GREW UP WITH AU”

Serita Smith, Coordinator, Advising Services

Serita Smith has a connection to Athabasca University spanning 28 years. Both of her parents worked at the university, and she’s worked at AU for more than 15 years. “I grew up with AU being so much a part of my life. I believe that had a significant impact on my decision to donate,” says Smith, who is a coordinator of student advising services.

“I have [also] been working with students from a service perspective for so many years, and I have had the rare opportunity to meet some of them face to face. I wanted to do something for them, because if it weren’t for our students, we wouldn’t be here.”

Smith has been donating to student awards for three years now. “I was really pleased that I could decide where my donations would be used,” she says. “I like the flexibility of that.”

For her, donating has a pay-it-forward feeling, especially since AU’s employee benefits have allowed her to pursue her own higher education without having to pay for the majority of the tuition. “Because of this, I can afford to donate to help someone else achieve their goals,” she says. “The thought that I can contribute, even just a little bit, to struggling students’ education means a lot to me.”
THE ULTIMATE IN RESPECT

DR. JUDI MALONE, TUTOR, PSYCHOLOGY

WITH A 15-YEAR ASSOCIATION WITH Athabasca University, first as a student, then as a tutor and a member of the Board of Governors, Dr. Judi Malone knows a great deal about AU.

“This university is more than an institution or an employer for me. I was on the advancement committee of the Board of Governors when the campaign was first introduced, and it made sense to me. If I believe in asking others to support our mission, why not demonstrate that commitment myself?” she says.

Malone donates to student awards. “There are many important areas [to donate to], but awards make such a tangible and immediate difference in the lives of our students. Having sat on the Bryon Paige Memorial Award committee, I have reviewed student applications. I’m always in awe of their resiliency and strength. I know what a difference an award and monetary support can make.”

Participation in the campaign also fits with Malone’s values and reinforces her ongoing involvement with the university. “I support our vision to remove barriers that restrict access to and success in university-level study, and I see this as having potential beyond our individual actions. As Sartre said, ‘We must respect each other if we, as individuals, want to be as free as possible within a social order.’ Empowerment through education, through sharing and inspiring knowledge, is, for me, the ultimate in respect.”

"We watched careers being transformed, but more importantly, we witnessed lives being transformed. For over 11 years, I was privileged to be part of an organization that really made a difference ‘out there.’ It doesn’t get much better than that.”

WE WITNESSED LIVES BEING TRANSFORMED

MARILYN WANGLER, FORMER DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS, FACULTY OF BUSINESS

MARILYN WANGLER BELIEVES IN GIVING back, especially to an institution that has meant so much to her personally.

Wangler retired from her position as director of marketing and communications for the Faculty of Business in 2011. “While at the Faculty of Business, I witnessed, at a very personal level, the difference that Athabasca University made in the lives of our students and alumni,” she says.

“We watched careers being transformed, but more importantly, we witnessed lives being transformed. For over 11 years, I was privileged to be part of an organization that really made a difference ‘out there.’ It doesn’t get much better than that.”

Wangler says it felt great when she discovered that her donation had directly affected the life of one particular student, now a graduate, who was the first in her family to earn a post-secondary degree.

“I believe that the first person in a family who pursues post-secondary education will lead to the second, and the third, and the fourth and so on. I think it’s a great concept, and one that has so many beneficial domino effects for families and for society.”
DENISE BLAIR WAS WORKING ON A MARKETING PLAN assignment for her Master of Business Administration degree when the idea came to her.

“Something just clicked,” says Blair, the founder and executive director of the Calgary Youth Justice Society and a 2010 graduate of Athabasca University’s MBA program. “In a very real way, everything I had studied came together in this idea.”

Her idea? A program she would eventually name In the Lead. “It’s a leadership program for young people who are commonly referred to as ‘at risk’ — teenagers who are engaging in high-risk behaviour. But really, these youth are ‘at potential,’” she says.

“I saw a program that was different than any other.... What if we acknowledged [that these youth] have leadership capabilities because of their challenges and their ability to rise above those challenges? What if we’re overlooking young leaders with great potential simply because they’re not using their strengths in conventional ways?”

Blair envisioned a program where teenagers would be paired with adult coaches who would focus on their strengths rather than their weaknesses, listen and provide support, and ultimately believe in them.

But that was only half the idea. The other half was to partner with a company that would give their staff a professional development opportunity to volunteer in the program as coaches. “I needed a partner — a business partner — one that saw my idea not just as a compelling community investment opportunity, but a company that was ready to engage in a meaningful way with their people and values,” says Blair.

That company turned out to be Cenovus Energy, which is investing both human and financial resources in the program for the next three years.

“The outcomes have already been well beyond what we’d hoped for,” says Blair. “In January, we held a graduation ceremony for our first group of young leaders, and I asked the coaches to send me a list of the gifts or sparks or strengths they saw in their young people — and I had to edit some of them down because they were so long. We read the list for each one as they called the young person up to the front. You would have thought you were at Harvard. It was amazing. There were so many people in tears.”

“I learned a lot, both personally and professionally, from being part of the program,” says Megan Marshall, a volunteer coach and a community program advisor for Cenovus Energy.
“I saw a program that was different than any other.... What if we’re overlooking young leaders with great potential simply because they’re not using their strengths in conventional ways?”

In partnership with Cenovus Energy, Denise Blair (MBA, 2010) has launched a leadership program that combines the interests of the for-profit and non-profit sectors.
“I’ve been a mentor with other organizations, but the fundamental approach of this program — focusing on what is strong with youth, not on what is wrong with youth — was different and very appealing to me.

“A lot of making that shift in thinking comes through the coach training that happens before you’re matched up with your young leader,” she says. “So for example, if someone has previously been labelled as really stubborn, [you learn how to] turn that into a positive — perhaps they’re actually very persistent.”

“[For me and my] young leader, it gave us a clean slate right from the beginning. It made me look at all her amazing abilities and potential right off the bat and eliminated any judgment that could have happened.... And I think it created an environment for us where, because it was so supportive and encouraging and positive, a lot more trust could be created.”

Marshall says the program reinforced her listening skills and her ability to be flexible and think on her feet. And she’s carrying over these improved skills to both her personal life and her workplace interactions.

“The program supports leadership development for youth, but it also supports leadership development for the staff of Cenovus,” says Blair. “It’s a truly innovative partnership between the for-profit and not-for-profit worlds, and it was inspired by my Athabasca University experience.”

“Because of my MBA studies, I was able, for the first time, to develop a program through a business lens. And that made all the difference,” she says. “I used what I learned in marketing and ethical decision-making and human resources and leadership to really carve out what the program would look like. My MBA enabled me to transform my idea into a plan and then into reality.”

But more than that, Blair was inspired by receiving a full scholarship to complete her MBA. Without the Alberta Scholarship for Leadership in Community Service, a one-time-only AU MBA award made possible by a private donor and the Alberta Advanced Education and Technology Access to the Future Fund, she wouldn’t have been able to enrol in the program.

“From the moment I received the scholarship, I knew I wanted to pay it forward by applying what I was learning to making a difference in my organization and in the community,” she says. “It was never about what I could get with my education, but how I could give with my education.”

“One of the challenges for the MBA is tuition, which is equal to a lot of annual salaries in my sector,” she adds. “And for non-profit leaders, it’s an investment in your cause and your organization and making a difference in your community as opposed to furthering your own interest. There’s no salary increase after you graduate, as there would be in business.”

But Blair’s success with In the Lead demonstrates the creative and empowering possibilities that come about when leaders from the non-profit sector pursue an MBA. “If we build into the capacity of leaders in this sector, it also builds the capacity of these leaders to make a difference,” she says.

And in Blair’s case, that translates into making an incalculable difference in the lives of youth. “Some of the coaches in this program will be that one person who the young people will look back on and think of as the one who changed their lives,” says Blair.

“Because of Athabasca University, some kids who may not have made it are going to make it. I know their names.”

“Because of my MBA studies, I was able, for the first time, to develop a program through a business lens. And that made all the difference. I used what I learned in marketing and ethical decision-making and human resources and leadership to really carve out what the program would look like. My MBA enabled me to transform my idea into a plan and then into reality.”
CMA Alberta sponsors winning Faculty of Business teams

Sponsorship complements CMA’s recent accreditation of AU BComm.

BY ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY FACULTY OF BUSINESS

SPONSORSHIP FROM CMA ALBERTA recently enabled teams of students in Athabasca University’s Faculty of Business to compete in two different case competitions, and in March, two of these teams placed first and second in the 2012 CMA Alberta Board Governance Competition in Calgary.

“I want to sincerely thank CMA Alberta for sponsoring the Faculty of Business teams,” says Dr. Alain Ross, an assistant professor of e-commerce and one of the coaches for the teams.

“Their contribution was essential. Our students are from across Canada, and the travel costs would have made it hard for them to participate. But thanks to CMA, we were able to bring the students and coaches together for both a mock competition weekend and the competitions themselves,” says Ross.

“These talented AU students have gained immensely from their participation. They’ve developed new skills and knowledge that will serve them well, and I know they join in me in expressing thanks to CMA Alberta.”

“The CMA 2012 competition has been one of the best experiences I have had so far as a full-time undergraduate student of AU,” says Alexander Poulton, a member of the team that won second place.

In case competitions, teams are given a complex business problem, called a case, and challenged to come up with the best solution for the problem.

The sponsorship from CMA Alberta, which grants a professional designation in strategic management accounting, builds further on an already strong relationship between CMA and AU — in September 2011, after a rigorous three-year process, AU’s Bachelor of Commerce (BComm) in Accounting was the first online bachelor’s program to be accredited by CMA Canada.

“The accreditation process is difficult, and CMA Canada’s standards are high,” says Kara Mitchelmore, president and CEO of CMA Alberta and a student in AU’s Doctorate of Business Administration program. “Athabasca University deserves to be acknowledged for its high-quality programs and the flexibility it offers to students around the world.”

With the accreditation, students who complete the BComm with a minimum average of 75% are exempt from writing the CMA Entrance Exam. Instead, they enter directly into the Strategic Leadership Program™, which is the final step required to obtain the CMA designation.

“We’re pleased about the partnership we’ve forged with Athabasca University, and we look forward to working together in the future,” says Mitchelmore.

“The accreditation process is difficult, and CMA Canada’s standards are high. Athabasca University deserves to be acknowledged for its high-quality programs and the flexibility it offers to students around the world.”
**Investing in a healthy Alberta**

Edmonton Oilers scholarships support both AU nursing students and a healthy future for central and northern Alberta.

BY ERIN OTTOSEN

This spring, four Athabasca University nursing students who live in central and northern Alberta received some extra recognition for their hard work when they were awarded $2,500 scholarships. The scholarships were created through support from the Edmonton Oilers Community Foundation and were given to students with a minimum GPA of 3.6.

“We’re delighted that the Edmonton Oilers Community Foundation has recognized some of our most motivated, passionate nursing students with these scholarships,” says Dr. Margaret Edwards, acting dean of the Faculty of Health Disciplines at AU. “These students will be the nursing professionals that communities across central and northern Alberta turn to for health-care leadership in the future.”

Over 200 of AU’s 1,000 Bachelor of Nursing (BN) students live in central and northern Alberta, in communities large and small. The focus of the Edmonton Oilers Community Foundation on this region meshes well not only with the location of many of AU’s nursing students, but also with AU’s mandate, Edwards says.

“We strive to serve rural and remote populations both in Alberta and beyond, so it was extra fitting to work with the foundation on creating scholarships that would help our nursing students stay in their communities while they complete their degree.”

In Alberta, a bachelor’s degree in nursing has been the minimum educational requirement for working as an RN (registered nurse) since 2010. AU offers a Post-RN BN as well as a Post-LPN (licensed practical nurse) BN that prepares graduates to write the Canadian Registered Nurse Exam and apply for licensure as an RN. Two of the foundation scholarships were awarded to Post-RN BN students, while the other two were awarded to Post-LPN BN students.

“The investment from the Edmonton Oilers Community Foundation has had an immediate, positive impact on our students, and it will have a long-term impact on the quality of health care services for residents of central and northern Alberta,” says Edwards.

“The foundation strives to demonstrate philanthropic leadership in the areas of youth, education, health and wellness,” adds Natalie Minckler, executive director of the Edmonton Oilers Community Foundation. “The scholarships we provided for students at Athabasca University couldn’t be a better fit. It truly exemplifies our efforts to work together and make northern Alberta a better place to live.”

“**These students will be the nursing professionals that communities across central and northern Alberta turn to for health-care leadership in the future.**”

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**Caring for the Future**

Creating healthy communities through learning opportunities.

The scholarships from the Edmonton Oilers Community Foundation also support Caring for the Future, a fundraising campaign within Athabasca University’s Faculty of Health Disciplines.

This campaign complements the university-wide Open Our World campaign by raising funds for learning and research initiatives related directly to nursing, health studies and applied psychology.

For more information on Caring for the Future, visit: caring.athabascau.ca
AU’s new Hutchinson architecture award

Hutchinson family creates $2,500 award for architecture students.

BY ERIN OTTOSEN

THANKS TO AN ENDOWMENT FROM Ralph and Janet Hutchinson, students in Athabasca University’s new architecture program have the opportunity to apply for a $2,500 student award.

The Ken and Janny Hutchinson Architecture Award recognizes the professional and academic achievements of students entering the architecture program at AU. Two awards will be given to architecture students each year, with the first set to be awarded this fall.

The award is in honour of Ralph’s brother Ken Hutchinson, a leading Alberta architect who has specialized in heritage architecture, leisure centres, and business and municipal projects throughout Alberta for the last 40 years. In all of his endeavours, he’s been strongly supported by his wife Janny.

“Ken’s had an outstanding career as an architect,” says Dr. Frits Pannekoek, president of AU. “He’s defined many public spaces and restored many heritage buildings, but most importantly, he’s been passionate about supporting both female and minority architects in establishing practice.”

With that in mind, the award’s selection committee will give consideration to gender and minority equity, but all architecture students are welcome to apply if they meet the basic selection criteria.

“It’s supposed to be diverse enough to allow people an opportunity to explore how architecture fits in today’s life and life in the future,” says Dr. Lisa Carter, dean of AU’s Faculty of Science and Technology. “I’m thrilled we’re able to offer this award for our students. We’re so fortunate to have the Hutchinson family contributing to the promotion of architecture at AU.”

AU’s architecture program, the first online architecture program in Canada, was launched in 2011 in partnership with the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC). Called a Post-Baccalaureate Diploma in Architecture, the credential provides an alternative work-study path to professional architect licensure in Canada. The university is also developing a Bachelor of Science in Architecture as the pre-professional component of the program.

“The online architecture program is key to our mission of removing barriers to learning,” says Pannekoek. “In partnership with RAIC, we’re helping to facilitate the entry of internationally trained architects into practice in Canada, for example. And with our use of innovative online teaching tools, the program has a unique approach for helping students understand and appreciate the many facets of architecture.”

For more information on the Ken and Janny Hutchinson Architecture Award, contact Dr. Lisa Carter, dean of AU’s Faculty of Science and Technology: lisac@athabascau.ca

“IT’S DIVERSE ENOUGH TO ALLOW PEOPLE AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE HOW ARCHITECTURE FITS IN TODAY’S LIFE AND LIFE IN THE FUTURE.”

AU’s new Academic and Research Centre (ARC) in Athabasca.
A river runs through it

The Athabasca River is over 1,500 kilometres long, while the Athabasca River Basin is roughly 159,000 square kilometres.

Photo: Robert Holmberg
A river runs through it (Athabasca River Basin Research Institute)  |  Feature

**AU creates a hub for research and collaboration to help ensure a healthy future for the Athabasca River Basin and the communities that depend on it.**

*BY ERIN OTTOSEN*

ON WARM DAYS, WHEN THE WEATHER’S right, the Columbia Icefield meets the sun and melts. The melting is nearly indiscernible to human eyes, but the water that weeps away from the ice is enough to spawn not one, not two, but three major rivers: the Columbia, the North Saskatchewan and the Athabasca.

As the Athabasca River winds away from the icefield, away from the Rocky Mountains and the B.C./Alberta border, it begins a northeast trajectory that will take it over 1,500 kilometres almost to the Saskatchewan border and through virtually every major industry in Alberta. The first community along the river, Jasper, is a centre for tourism. Then comes Hinton, where the first of five pulp mills operates on the banks of the river. Also near Hinton are coal mines, more tourist attractions and oil and gas activity. Later, roughly halfway up the river’s path is Athabasca, with an economy fuelled by agriculture, forestry, oil and gas, tourism and education — the town is home to the main campus of Athabasca University, the only university near the Athabasca River. Finally, not long before the river ends its journey at Lake Athabasca, it passes by Fort McMurray and cuts directly through Alberta’s oil sands.

The river is also more than a single channel. It fans out through hundreds of smaller rivers and creeks and lakes to many more communities that also depend on the water it brings. [The river] fans out through hundreds of smaller rivers and creeks and lakes to many more communities that also depend on the water it brings.

“We’re so lucky as a university to be right at the centre of the Athabasca River Basin,” says Dr. Lisa Carter, dean of AU’s Faculty of Science and Technology and the interim director of ARBRI, which was launched in 2008. “It positions us perfectly for collaborating with all the basin stakeholders. Also, our online infrastructure gives us a virtual way to bring stakeholders together — very helpful considering the residents of the basin are spread across 159,000 square kilometres of land.”

“Everybody works in silos,” she continues. “This is what we’ve realized. It’s very typical. Everybody has great ideas, but people don’t talk to each other as much as perhaps they should. That’s why we decided ARBRI was going to be an arm’s-length collection of people who would share knowledge and bring in the biggest and the best ideas about the river basin and its management. Ultimately, we’re a collection of knowledge.”

One way ARBRI is collecting this knowledge is in the form of the Bibliography of the Athabasca River Basin (BARB). “BARB is extremely important,” says Carter. “Many different groups have repositories of information related to the Athabasca River and the basin, but these are sometimes not easily accessible for all stakeholders. I remember meeting once with people from one of the resource companies operating in the basin. They told us they had 10,000 reports sitting in a room and would have loved to have a centralized repository, so people could have easy access to them. That’s one of the reasons we’ve built BARB — so that we have an open-access, interactive repository database containing reports, papers, dissertations and any other data and information that has been collected about the basin.”

“That’s the fibre that’s going to bring about the interdisciplinary perspective on the basin that I’m really passionate about,” she says. “To understand the basin, you have to look at it not just from one perspective — you have to look at the whole picture. That’s what ARBRI is doing with BARB.”

In 2009, ARBRI received $200,000 from the Imperial Oil Foundation to develop the bibliography. “As a responsible energy supplier, our company has a duty to encourage innovative programs that engage the environmental awareness of Canadians,” says Cindy Christopher, manager of environmental policy and planning at Imperial Oil Limited.

“Accordingly, the Imperial Oil Foundation works with organizations that advance education, conservation and understanding in the areas of air, land, water and energy. [BARB] is a valuable resource in supporting researchers, stakeholders, educators, students and the general public in accessing information on this important watershed.”

Led by Tony Tin, the head of digital initiatives and electronic resources at AU’s...
Library, BARB now contains over 27,000 items within an open-access, searchable online database. So far, research assistants hired for the project have been populating the database, but Tin has a much grander vision for BARB.

“My ultimate goal is that BARB becomes the go-to place to access Athabasca River Basin materials online,” he says. “We would like external researchers and scientists to contribute, along with government, industry and the general public.”

Meanwhile, with other initiatives like the inaugural ARBRI Day conference held in Athabasca in the spring, Carter is working to bring about river basin research both by AU faculty and external research partners. “I’m trying to begin a dialogue and spark interest so that researchers think about how to integrate their unique skills with river basin research,” she says.

For example, Dr. Frédérique Pivot, an AU assistant professor of geography, does research with drones, planes that fly without a human pilot inside them. “[We’re talking] about using the drones to study things such as snowmelt and wildlife migration,” says Carter.

The Government of Alberta is also funding two new research chairs for ARBRI through the Campus Alberta Innovates Program. One chair is in hydroecology and environmental health, while the other is in computational sustainability and environmental analytics.

And with the Community Engagement Project, a new ARBRI project just beginning, ARBRI is reaching out to communities in the river basin to help them identify what they want their future to look like, how to get there and how to protect the river basin from a local perspective. The project is modelled on an earlier ARBRI initiative called A Study of Sustainability Options for Resource-Based Communities.

“The sustainability study] created a template that worked,” says Jim Sellers, project manager for both the sustainability study and the Community Engagement Project.

“What we did is our researchers met with stakeholders for the communities of Hinton and Grande Cache, and everyone worked through a list of questions that touched on all the social, environmental and economic needs of the communities.... This helped them boil down what was most important to them in terms of sustainability planning. We now have researchers looking into the priorities that were identified, and they’re developing specific recommendations that can then be tested with applied research.”

“It’s been very successful, because we’ve been working collaboratively with community stakeholders,” says Sellers.

The Community Engagement Project is funded in part through $250,000 donated to ARBRI in 2011 by the RBC Blue Water Project. It is also supported by the Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN), which has contributed $120,000 to ARBRI for the Community Engagement Project and the Hinton/Grande Cache sustainability study.

“The funding we’ve received from ARDN, the RBC Blue Water Project and the Imperial Oil Foundation has really helped us expand our work with Athabasca River Basin communities and stakeholders,” says Carter.

“We’ve been able to build relationships by working together, by bringing in people who otherwise might not sit at the table together.... This sort of collaboration is what we need to do to ensure a healthy future for the province, and it’s so exciting to me that Athabasca University is contributing to this collaboration through ARBRI. ARBRI will be, I think, Alberta’s legacy for future knowledge keepers and also for improving the life and sustainability of the province.”
Better writing, better health

New funder adds a fresh dimension to AU’s Writer in Residence program.

BY CATHY NICKEL

TOLOLWA M. MOLLEL KNOWS HOW TO write good stories, and he’s passionate about helping others do the same.

Athabasca University’s writer in residence for 2011-12, Mollel works with students of all ages around the world to elevate the quality of their writing. He occupies what he calls “the middle ground somewhere between cheerleader and critic,” providing invaluable feedback that helps students hone their writing skills.

“Writing is always tough, and you do much of it in isolation,” says the celebrated children’s author and dramatist. “It’s also very personal. I can’t write for people, but I can offer the good, honest, supportive advice that’s required of any mentor.”

Funding from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Alberta Foundation for the Arts made it possible to launch AU’s Writer in Residence program in 2010, and Scotiabank Giller Prize winner Joseph Boyden was the first author to hold the post. Continuation of those funds plus support from another community group is enabling Mollel to expand opportunities for even more writers.

Last September, ZoomerMedia committed to funding a new facet of the program that will engage people who have a lifetime of stories to tell: seniors. ZoomerMedia publishes Zoomer magazine for the Canadian Association for Retired Persons (CARP), Canada’s largest not-for-profit association for people aged 45-plus and those who care for them.

“Writing is seen as a key to healthy aging. It’s a tool that can be used to support mental health as people advance in years.”

In addition to helping more writers, expanding the horizons of the Writer in Residence program is also a way to build community, says Marilyn Dumont, a writing instructor in AU’s Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences who was instrumental in creating the program.

“It’s a wonderful opportunity to partner with all kinds of organizations,” she says. “Writing offers value to people from age 22 to 82, and the Writer in Residence program is a great resource for writers, students and faculty.”

Still in development, the ZoomerMedia aspect of the program is likely to include in-person and online talks by Mollel, web-conferenced workshops, virtual space on AU’s e-Lab that will enable CARP writers to connect and create their own e-portfolios, and writing-focused articles and videos for ZoomerMedia online and print publications.

“Working with them lets me spread my wings and think about different forms of writing,” Mollel says. “I can see how powerful writing can be as you get older.”

To find out more about the Writer in Residence program, visit: athabascau.ca/cll/writer-in-residence

FUNDERS
CANADIAN FILM ICON FIL FRASER LIKES TO JOKE THAT “when I was making movies, we needed cameras the size of Volkswagens.” Indeed, much has changed since his 1977 drama Why Shoot the Teacher? took a top prize at the Canadian Film Awards (now known as the Genies).

“Nowadays you can buy a couple thousand dollars of camera and editing equipment and produce screenable material,” says the Athabasca University adjunct professor and the creator of AU’s CMNS 610, a course that examines Canadian feature films and film policy. And, wouldn’t you know it, this area of Canada’s film industry — the government policies that try to boost it — is also seeing a major transformation.

“It was in the 1960s that the government started to develop film policies and funding programs. There was very little film production in this country before then,” says Dr. Evelyn Ellerman, an AU associate professor of communication studies. Today, she says, there’s a split in the industry between those who want government regulation and funding to continue and “the free market people on the other side who say it’s time to just back off and let the market look out for itself.”

This is why Athabasca University, with funding from the Canadian Heritage Canada Interactive Fund, is launching the Canadian Film Online (CFO) project this spring. The CFO project is a destination for commentaries, essays, databases, maps and video interviews conducted by Fraser, all covering the history and current state of the Canadian movie industry.

It’s one of many tools stored in AU’s new e-Lab. The e-Lab is a virtual lab space where students can create and update portfolios, find peer support, take tutorials, participate in workshops and find free software tools — “just as you would go into a physical lab and open up a cupboard, and there would be tools that you could use for various experiments,”
Canada Film Online project  |  Feature

Dr. Evelyn Ellerman has immersed herself in research for the Canadian Film Online project and is continually surprised by what she’s learning:

**Canada is the largest producer** of children’s animated TV programming in the world, exporting to over 160 countries.

**The perception that there’s no market for Canadian TV and film is wrong.** About $10 billion is spent on Canadian content in Canada every year.

**While Hollywood studios** might spend as much money marketing a film as they spend on making it, marketing budgets for Canadian films are about one-twentieth to one-fiftieth of the cost of production. And the cost of making a film in Canada rarely exceeds $5 million.

**English Canadian films garner** less than 2% of Canadian movie theatre screen time. French Canadian films? About 20% of Quebec screen time.

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**“These are the people who have been there, building [the Canadian film industry] into what it is.”**

Explain Ellerman, the e-Lab’s director.

The CFO tool will be a continually evolving resource for anybody studying Canadian film — people will be invited to submit commentaries, interviews and film entries to the CFO editorial board on an ongoing basis.

Fraser’s CFO interviewees include top broadcasting executives and professionals such as Richard Stursberg, former executive vice-president of CBC, and Norm Bolen, president and CEO of the Canadian Media Production Association. “We wanted to get that historical sweep of how changes in film policy have affected filmmaking in Canada, and these are the people who have been there, building it into what it is,” says Ellerman.

“As we go along, we will be looking at younger and younger people, so that we get to the heart of the current industry, which involves a mix of digital media.”

As part of the project, Ellerman and colleagues recently partnered with the Toronto International Film Festival to translate summaries of Canadian films into French for the festival’s Canadian Film Encyclopedia. A second partnership with Library and Archives Canada allows them to share information and add to the archives’ collection of over 1,500 full-length feature films. Fraser says this is especially important since funding cuts have limited the archives’ ability to track and locate films.

Fraser is optimistic about the Internet’s impact on Canadian film. Perhaps the only thing that hasn’t changed in his lifetime is the U.S.’s lock on Canadian theatres, where nearly 99% of screen time goes to American films. “But it’s not about the big screen anymore,” he says. “Hollywood owns the big screen, but now creative people can use technology that doesn’t cost very much and produce movies that are screened all over the world.”

Visit Canadian Film Online at [film.athabascau.ca](http://film.athabascau.ca) or through Athabasca University’s e-Lab: [elab.athabascau.ca](http://elab.athabascau.ca).

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**Things you didn’t know about Canadian film and TV**

- Canada is the largest producer of children’s animated TV programming in the world, exporting to over 160 countries.
- The perception that there’s no market for Canadian TV and film is wrong. About $10 billion is spent on Canadian content in Canada every year.
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- English Canadian films garner less than 2% of Canadian movie theatre screen time. French Canadian films? About 20% of Quebec screen time.
Where we’re at and where we should be going

AU study reveals the state of mobile learning in Canada.

BY ERIN OTTOSEN

WHEN CELL PHONES BEGAN TO colonize the planet in the 1990s, Dr. Mohamed Ally got excited. “Lots of people with less money living in remote locations don’t have computers, but they have mobile phones,” says Ally, the chair of Athabasca University’s Centre for Distance Education. “The way to deliver online education to people who can’t afford computers is to deliver courses and information on mobiles.”

“UNESCO has this goal to provide education for all by 2015,” he continues. “I think education for all is possible, and mobile learning is key to helping us achieve this.”

After seeing the potential of mobile devices to open up education opportunities for everyone, everywhere, Ally dove into the emerging field of mobile learning. With colleagues from around the world, he founded the International Association for Mobile Learning (IAmLearn), and in turn, IAmLearn launched the annual mLearn conference, the first academic conference devoted to mobile learning. More recently, he worked on a committee to develop international technical standards for the design of mobile learning materials — standards that have been endorsed and published by the International Organization for Standardization. And in January 2012 he and a colleague finished a study, funded by Rogers Communications, on the state of mobile learning in Canada, which suggests the country has a fair way to go when it comes to tapping into the potential of mobile learning.

The study surveyed Canadian organizations in 15 different sectors and found that uptake of mobile learning has been slow in Canada. Almost two-thirds of respondents indicated they’ve been using mobile learning for four years or less, while 47% reported that fewer than half of their students or employees use mobile devices for formal or informal learning. Nonetheless, there was also clear recognition of the benefits offered by mobile learning, such as just-in-time training for workers who are out in the field.

“For example,” says Ally, “a salesperson might need to learn about a new product. With a smartphone they could learn about it just before they need to talk to a client.”

The study makes several recommendations for how to advance mobile learning in Canada, and most respondents also indicated they plan to implement mobile learning — a move that Ally views as a necessity.

“[Mobile learning] should be standard, because students have mobile devices; they have tablets, iPads, PlayBooks … And the new generation of students; they all have smartphones. We need to meet their needs. They expect us to deliver learning on mobiles, because they do their business and socializing on mobiles.”

Ally plans to duplicate the mobile learning study in other countries. “I’m working with colleagues in South Korea, Africa, China and a few others so that we can do a comparison of the state of mobile learning in all these countries,” he says. “Maybe eventually we’ll have a book on the state of mobile learning around the world. [There is] lots of potential for future work.”

“Rogers provided funding to do a very important study, one that helps us move mobile learning ahead in Canada so [Canada] can become one of the leaders.”

For information on the mLearn 2012 conference to be held in Helsinki in October, visit: portal.ou.nl/en/web/mlearn-2012
Partners explore the frontiers of technology and education

Xerox Canada and AU learn from each other as they research personalized mobile learning.

By CATHY NICKEL

THE SAME MOBILE TECHNOLOGY THAT made social media ubiquitous is spawning a revolution in distance education, and an Athabasca University research team is on the forefront of the charge.

Dr. Kinshuk, AU’s NSERC/ICORE/Xerox/Markin research chair and a professor in the School of Computing and Information Systems, is leading a team that’s exploring the untapped potential of smartphones and other related devices for use in higher education.

They’re developing technologies that will create an enriched, highly personalized learning experience — one that adapts to students’ needs, puts course content in the context of day-to-day life, uses social networks and facilitates student collaboration for collective problem-solving. And it will all be offered in mobile delivery for students on the go.

As the research chair’s name suggests, AU isn’t going it alone. Xerox has been an AU partner for 20 years and made a major financial investment in the project in 2008. That plus other ongoing partnerships enabled AU to secure provincial and federal grants, which will keep the research chair running through 2015. Pleased with these developments and its ongoing relationship with AU, Xerox recently committed an additional $250,000 that will continue the research, once again creating the possibility to leverage further grants. This funding is also enabling AU Press to print promotional materials and increase awareness of its publications.

The partnership is a win-win-win relationship that can have a long-term and far-reaching impact on industry, the AU research team and learners.

“We’re particularly interested in furthering our understanding of content management technologies and applications. This will allow us to align our technologies with the fast-changing digital environment.”

With the overarching aim to increase access to education, Kinshuk’s team is now centreing its work on adaptive technologies. “We’re focusing on understanding students better and providing them with the kind of learning they need — personalized content, better interaction — that suits them and the environment they’re in.”

Xerox has opened the doors for AU’s researchers, inviting them to use the company’s newest technologies, particularly in the area of semantic technology and natural language processing, which facilitates the personalization of learning. Working together will also give AU the opportunity to implement aspects of its research with teachers and students in schools across Canada that use Xerox’s document management and intelligent workflow systems.

“Having a partner like Xerox makes our research lab bigger,” Kinshuk says. “It helps move research along more quickly, because we have the benefit of additional financial resources plus interaction with their researchers. It’s also a wonderful opportunity for students to see what kind of industry research takes place in a high-profile company.

“Working with industry and having a real partnership like this is a very good model for taking research forward. We hope it continues for a very long time.”
Abraham Nhial Wei at his office in Juba, South Sudan.

Photo provided by Abraham Nhial Wei
Abraham Nhial Wei, BPA student | Feature Profile

IT TAKES A GLOBAL VILLAGE

How Abraham Nhial Wei arrived at AU from his hut in South Sudan.

BY OMAR MOUALLEM

IN THE EARLY HOURS OF JULY 9, 2011, ABRAHAM NHIAL WEI was wide awake, by choice. Like millions in South Sudan, the 29-year-old feared that if he fell asleep, he would miss the moment when his country declared independence — or worse, that the declaration wouldn’t happen at all.

But that morning, it did, and tens of thousands of people rushed to the Dr. John Garang de Mabior mausoleum in the capital city of Juba. They ran to the site waving little paper flags and, once there, they formed drum circles and danced. Wei was among them.

Although he’s a journalist, he didn’t go to report. He went to experience it as a citizen who, at times, had to choose between his livelihood and his homeland. “The whole world was watching South Sudan,” he recalls, “and I was really proud to be a man who survived war and saw the new dawn of independence.”

Like South Sudan, Wei’s life was one wounded by prejudice and poverty, one that saw war, followed by peace, followed by war. But as the nation starts a new chapter, so is he, beginning with enrolment at Athabasca University. From his hut in Juba, where there’s no running water, but there is a modem, he’s logging on and working to obtain a bachelor of Professional Arts in Communication Studies.

“That degree is a stepping stone into a world of countless opportunity,” he says. “If you look at great men, people who have transformed this country, like John Garang — he was a highly educated person. I believe the greatest asset that you can have as a human being is your brain.”

Few people understand the value of education like Wei. He was a week old when his mother fled with him to a hideaway village to escape an abrupt war between the Sudan government and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army. Again and again, his family was displaced from one sub-Saharan country to another, but it was refugee camps that gave him the opportunity to learn, starting with his first classroom in Ethiopia — a privilege he earned only after completing prerequisite military training at seven years old.

If it weren’t for that camp, he says, he’d be an illiterate cattle herder like his father, a hardworking, loving man, but one who didn’t value learning. That’s why, in 2001, Wei and his brother made one of the hardest decisions of their lives: they left their family in South Sudan to live at a camp in Kenya and continue their education. Once more, he traded his citizenship for a classroom. He was 18, starting Grade 8.

It was there that he clicked his first mouse and saw just how open this world was becoming. “I was really amazed by the amount of information available on the Internet, and that not many [South Sudanese] people were using or accessing it,” he says. “I saw a beautiful opportunity to improve my society if I could learn more about media production and sharing information. Then I would be contributing to the development of my country.”

Fascinated by media and literature, he attended college in Nairobi in 2005 and earned a diploma in mass communications. While he was a student, he wrote for the Sudan Mirror about sports, arts, culture and the new Comprehensive Peace Agreement between northern and southern Sudan. His first job after college was with World Vision, where he was a communications officer. But early into his new career, he was itching for more schooling.

“As a father and husband, I had responsibilities, which did not permit me to attend regular schools like other young students,” says Wei. So he emailed his cousin, who was a student at the University of Alberta at the time, to ask if he knew of any online university that he could attend while working and caring for his young family.

His cousin did.

Twelve thousand kilometres away, Fran Holler opened an email from “the one and only” sub-Saharan applicant. “[Wei] had to go through the process of determining whether his post-secondary education in Africa would give him transfer credits,” says Holler, who is a portfolio mentor at AU.

“In his case, it didn’t transfer. Fortunately, the learning
he gained through his work experience could be translated into AU credits by producing a portfolio for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR).”

With help from Holler and other staff at AU’s Centre for Learning Accreditation, Wei compiled a portfolio using the e-Lab, a virtual lab space for AU students. He submitted an autobiography that left Holler speechless. The crux of his portfolio, however, was the learning statements — demonstrations of knowledge he claimed to have acquired through experience — along with evidence to support each knowledge claim. For example, he stated that he had collected, analyzed and edited information for organization heads and stakeholders. The evidence? His weekly reports for World Vision.

“It isn’t easy to dig into our experiential learning and pull out knowledge,” says Holler. “We don’t even know that we own this knowledge, and trying to articulate something that we don’t even know we own is really challenging.”

Most students complete their portfolios in about six months, but it took two years for Wei, as he juggled an intensely mobile job, a growing family and the occasional bout of malaria. Through it all, Holler was there to help.

“I can hardly find words to express my gratitude to Fran Holler for all her support and encouragement during the PLAR process,” says Wei. “There were days when I felt low, but Fran was always there to provide kind words of advice that helped to cheer me up and regain my focus. She would say, ‘Hey, Nhial, you have to keep your eyes on the goal. There’s a much better life ahead.’”

When Wei received his PLAR results in February 2012, he was overjoyed. Thirty-six credits is more than he expected, and it puts him more than a quarter of the way through his Communication Studies degree.

It also gave him the opportunity to deflate the doubts of his wife Anyieth. Unlike Wei, she’s a bit of a technophobe, and during those years he spent working on PLAR, she teased him about trying to get into an online university that, to her, was something akin to Hogwarts. “This online thing is very new to her. I doubt she’s used email more than 10 times,” says Wei. “To her, it didn’t sound like I was actually completing a degree online. I just told her, ‘Wait and see.’”

When he gave her the news about his PLAR results, she suggested they celebrate.

It’s now time to clear the next hurdle, tuition, for which he’s seeking scholarships and bursaries. But he won’t let that steal his focus.

“Now I’m in a position where I can help my country, where I can contribute to its development, because [of my] education — not like my father, praying that we can have rain so the crops can grow. See the difference?” he says.

“Even if it doesn’t rain, I can still survive.”

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**STUDENT PROFILE**

**NAME:** Abraham Nhial Wei  
**PROGRAM:** Bachelor of Professional Arts: Communication Studies  
**LOCATION:** Juba, South Sudan
Students giving to students

How the Athabasca University Students’ Union eases the financial burdens of students.

BY ERIN OTTOSEN

“Providing student awards is a great way that AUSU can help students in need and recognize those who demonstrate outstanding academics or leadership.”

Tamra Ross, executive director of AUSU. For example, when Slave Lake was devastated by wildfires in 2011, AUSU created the one-time Slave Lake Fire Bursary to help AU students living in Slave Lake.

One of the most popular and needed bursaries, says Ross, is the AUSU Computer Bursary. “Right now we’re giving away eight new computers per year. Students just have to demonstrate they’re in need, and they get a brand new computer from Dell with warranty.”

Each year, AUSU also awards nine $1,000 Overcoming Adversity bursaries to students dealing with financial hardship and exceptional circumstances during their studies.

“Awards is an issue that’s really dear to my heart,” says Tynes. “Over the past couple years we’ve been able to increase the number and amount of awards as well as make our application deadlines more frequent: four times a year now. I’m very proud of the improvements we’ve been able to make.”

For more information on student awards offered by AUSU, visit: ausu.org/services/scholarships.php

WHEN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS pay for their Athabasca University courses, they also pay a small fee to the Athabasca University Students’ Union (AUSU). For well over a decade now, AUSU has been giving some of this money back to students in the form of bursaries, scholarships and other student awards.

“AUSU exists to serve the undergraduate students of Athabasca University, so providing student awards is a great way that AUSU can help students in need and recognize those who demonstrate outstanding academics or leadership,” says Bethany Tynes, the 2011-12 president of AUSU and a Bachelor of Arts student majoring in English.

“Two of my favourite awards are among our newest,” she says. “The AUSU Returning Student Award recognizes that for many mature students, returning to formal schooling after a long time away can require substantial courage, while the AUSU Balanced Student Award is for those students who also have several other commitments, such as work, family and volunteering.”

Both awards consist of full tuition payment for one three-credit undergraduate course, and they target the many AU students who are juggling the responsibilities of adult life as they attend AU.

“We’re always looking at new ways to target those who are most in need,” says Tynes. “Two of my favourite awards are among our newest,” she says. “The AUSU Returning Student Award recognizes that for many mature students, returning to formal schooling after a long time away can require substantial courage, while the AUSU Balanced Student Award is for those students who also have several other commitments, such as work, family and volunteering.”

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“We’re always looking at new ways to target those who are most in need,” says Tynes.
Inspired by a son’s memory and donors’ support

DAWNE PRICE KNOWS A THING OR TWO about motivation. In 2013, she’ll graduate from Athabasca University with her Bachelor of Arts — the same year her son, Connor, would have graduated from high school were he still alive.

“I had always thought I’d take courses when my two boys were older,” says the 51-year-old mom who lives on a farm just outside Sangudo, Alta. “I started to think about it seriously in 2003 — and then Connor broke his leg in 2004.”

Life was never the same.

Diagnosed with the cancer that also took the life of Terry Fox, eight-year-old Connor put up a remarkable fight, losing his battle in November 2005. Through all of the doctor’s visits, hospital stays and treatments, he proved to be a magnet for positive people and a powerful inspiration to those around him.

“He was an honours student, very conscientious, and told me that one day he was going to get his PhD,” Price says of her mature-beyond-his-years son. “How many kids even know what a PhD is, let alone want to get one?”

After taking time to write and publish a book about Connor, she built on his dream by enrolling at AU. “I cried my eyes out when the first package arrived,” she recalls. “I wondered what I’d signed up for. I had been out of school for so long and didn’t know if I could still write an essay.”

She started slowly, “found her groove” and now has just a handful of courses left to go. She relishes AU’s flexibility. “I didn’t have to give up my life to do this,” she says. “I was able to work around my husband’s schedule and also be here for my [other] son, Colin.”

On those inevitable days when she questioned what she was doing, she found the motivation to continue in two places: Connor’s memory and scholarships from AU. She has received two Undergraduate Outstanding Achievement Scholarships, a Convocation Scholarship and an AU Award for Students Living in Rural or Remote Communities.

“If the scholarships hadn’t been there, then I wouldn’t be here,” she says. “This was a little ‘check mark’ that I’ve done well. It’s a perk that makes you want to succeed even more.”

Price used her scholarships as a reward, topping up the “fun” quotient of her degree by taking a few courses just for the sheer joy of it.

“I’m really thankful for these scholarships and the donors,” she says. “I hope they understand what a difference it makes for the people getting them. They’re not just cheques that are forgotten. I still have my letters that came with those cheques. They’re now part of who I am.”

So, too, will Connor always be part of who she is, and the memory of him and what could have been will make for an emotional graduation. “I know Connor would have done something pretty darn special if he’d lived,” she says softly. “His dream of a PhD totally would have happened. I’m doing this for him.”

Dawne Price goes to university in memory of her son Connor.

BY CATHY NICKEL

STUDENT PROFILE
NAME: Dawne Price
PROGRAM: Bachelor of Arts
LOCATION: Sangudo, Alberta
Gift from the heart keeps passion for learning alive

A gift from the heart | News

Emily Schuett (right) and Tara Friesen, AU’s manager of alumni relations and philanthropy, hold a picture of William Janssen, who made a $50,000 bequest to AU. (Photo: Chris Beauchamp)

Peace Country farmer makes a $50,000 bequest to AU.

BY CATHY NICKEL

WILLIAM JANSEN LOVED TO LEARN. A self-educated pioneer and long-time resident of Woking, a small community in Alberta’s northern Peace Country, he was excited by books and reading, committed to making his community better and keenly interested in young people.

When Janssen — Willy to his friends — passed away in June 2010 at the age of 85, his will brought those passions together in a poignant and meaningful way. Athabasca University was one of several local organizations he chose to support, receiving a bequest of $50,000 to enrich scholarships and bursaries.

“He was always reading and learning and always encouraging his neighbours and the kids in his life to read more and learn more,” says Tara Friesen, AU’s manager of alumni relations and philanthropy. “He appreciated how AU’s distance learning model made it possible for people to stay in the community and continue their studies.”

Janssen was good friends with his neighbour Krista Schuett, and he asked that Schuett’s daughter, 12-year-old Emily, present his bequests to recipient organizations. His wishes were honoured at an AU student and alumni event on Dec. 1, 2011. “It was quite heartwarming,” Friesen says. “Emily talked about how important education was to Willy, and it was clear that AU was very much part of a larger passion for him.”

Janssen’s generosity is a prime example of how, with planning, one individual can support a lifelong passion and help future generations to share in it.

“These are gifts that truly come from the heart,” Friesen explains. “Bequest giving is a highly effective way to support the causes you believe in and to keep your memory alive. With advance planning, you can look after your family’s needs and also help organizations do their work.”

The process is relatively simple. It begins with conversations with family, a lawyer or financial advisor and, ideally, the receiving organization. AU, for example, can help with bequest wording to ensure that wishes are properly carried out.

“Planning your will can give you peace of mind,” Friesen says. “You know that everyone is taken care of, and you don’t need to worry about it. And you create a legacy. When you give to AU, your memory lives on in the accomplishments of the students who are supported.”

“The amount of money doesn’t have to be large in order to make a difference. Philanthropy is a word everyone can embrace.”

To learn more about creating your own AU legacy, contact Tara Friesen at 1-800-788-9041 ext. 7319 or: tfriesen@athabascau.ca
WHEN DR. MOHAMED ALLY AND SUSAN Bainbridge visited a public school in Kathmandu, Nepal, in early January 2012, the last thing they expected to see was the entire community, the prime minister’s wife and the minister of education out to greet them. But they were bringing a very special gift with them — a donation of 48 laptop computers — and the Nepalese community was keen to show its appreciation.

“There were tears in the parents’ eyes, and the students started to shout and cheer when we showed them a computer,” says Ally, chair of Athabasca University’s Centre for Distance Education.

“Dr. Ally and I were smothered in garlands of flowers and greetings of ‘Namaste!’ We were hugged by grandmothers and children and their parents. It was really quite overwhelming,” adds Bainbridge, a doctoral student in the Centre for Distance Education.

The 48 laptops are being used to set up a computer lab at the Mansingh Darma School in Kathmandu, making it the very first public school in Nepal to have one. The computers, reconditioned units that were due to be retired from use by AU faculty, give the Nepalese students something their peers in the West take for granted: access to the internet.

The idea for the donation came out of an earlier trip that Bainbridge took to Nepal. While visiting Kathmandu, she asked a tour guide to take her to a local school. When she got there, she was shocked at how basic the facilities were — and there were no computers. She contacted AIU, and the idea to round up the used laptops was born.

The computers all have wireless capability, important for use in a mountainous country with poor transportation and infrastructure and little wired connectivity to the Internet. They also open the door to online education, which Ally calls the great equalizer. According to Ally, online education places students in developing countries like Nepal on an equal footing with their much better resourced peers in the developed world.

“Providing computers to students in developing countries will allow them to connect to the world,” says Ally. “Computers and Internet connectivity empower the new generation of students to learn in the emerging global education system of the 21st century.”

Ally is working with a group of educators from around the world to provide similar donations to other students in developing countries. He hopes that some of the students will eventually use the donated computers to take online post-secondary courses like those offered by Athabasca University.
Athabasca University gratefully acknowledges all our donors, who share our vision for removing barriers to post-secondary education.

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If we’ve missed someone, please contact Athabasca University Development and External Relations:

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We will happily update our records.

We will happily update our records.
The campaign for Athabasca University.

An institution like Athabasca University has never been more important. The career and life success of people everywhere hinges on access to post-secondary education. By giving people the opportunity to earn the credentials they need for economic and personal growth — wherever they live and work, whatever their circumstances — AU unleashes unprecedented potential.

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