This Chair is good for your health

Dr. Jeff Vallance explores the benefits of a 'wonder drug' called physical activity

Preserving and sustaining a rich natural resource

An international scientist comes to AU to enhance knowledge about the Athabasca River basin

Shredding an old idea

Leading the revolution to transform education

To dream, perchance to fight

Can violent video games help soldiers combat PTSD
ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY (AU) is Canada’s Open University, a leading online university focused on the future of learning. Based in Athabasca, Alta., we’re proud to serve more than 40,000 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 everywhere 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.
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Photo by Jessica Fern Facette

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From the editor

IN PREVIOUS issues of Open, we’ve focused on our students and alumni, and their many accomplishments. In this issue, we’re branching out to take a look at some of the world-leading research that’s happening at Athabasca University — research that takes us from the deserts of Qatar to the front doorstep of the university’s main campus, the Athabasca River basin. Along the way, we’ll meet some of the researchers who are helping make Alberta a world leader in health, distance learning and ecological research. And we’ll even take a side trip into space, where Dr. Martin Connors, already famous for discovering the Earth’s first known Trojan asteroid, is researching how space weather can have some pretty dramatic effects down here on the planet.

In Alberta, there are four Comprehensive Academic and Research Institutions, or CARIs, as they’re known, and AU is one of them. We’re part of the province’s focus on innovation in science and technology, ICT and life sciences, and we’re home to seven research chairs examining everything from learning on hand-held devices like smart phones to open educational resources and how to make post-secondary research and knowledge available, free, to anyone with access to the internet. We don’t have the space to tell you about every exciting project that’s underway, but I hope you’ll get a flavour of the work we do, and a sense of the potential that research offers.

This past summer, I had the pleasure of hosting Bob McDonald, host of CBC Radio’s Quirks & Quarks, and one of Canada’s leading science journalists, as he accepted an honorary degree from AU. During the course of the few days we spent together, I was struck by Bob’s intense curiosity about the world around him, a curiosity on full display when we visited Martin at his observatory in Athabasca. Simply put, Bob asks a lot of questions, just like our researchers here at AU. They’ll always be asking those questions, because that’s what curious minds do. And when they find the answers, we’ll be right here to share them with you.

Enjoy your read.

John O’Brien
Editor
NOTABLE NEWS

There’s much to report since the last issue of Open. Here are some highlights.

TEXTBOOKS ANYWHERE

FORGET DRAGGING bulky textbooks around. Athabasca University has begun converting to eTexts, which will enable students to access their books from their computers and mobile devices. AU will be fully converted to eTexts for most courses in three years. The first eTexts were rolled out this past fall, with more courses added over the winter. If students prefer the traditional paper textbook, they’re available for purchase directly from the publisher.

World-class design for world-class learning

THEY MAY WORK BEHIND the scenes, but that work doesn’t go unnoticed — by professionals or students. AU learning designers, the folks who develop the courses our students have come to love, captured two major international prizes for their work in course development from the International Council on Open and Distance Education and the Commonwealth of Learning.

LEADING IN RESEARCH

ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY announced two new major research chairs last fall. Dr. Junye Wang joined AU as Campus Alberta Innovates Research Chair in Computational Sustainability, coming to AU from the U.K., where he spent the past five years as principal research scientist at the Rothamsted Research facility. Dr. Jeff Vallance was named Canada Research Chair in Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Management. Dr. Vallance also serves as the Alberta Innovates – Health Solutions Population Health Investigator and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research New Investigator. Read more about their work in this issue of Open on pages 14 and 18.

Four graduate students, Giovanni Farias, Charles Bernard, Michael Procter and Cheng-Hsin received Alberta Innovates – Technology Futures awards. The awards support academically superior graduate students who are working towards a master’s or doctoral degree. The scholarship is designed to enable these students to succeed in areas of strategically important scientific research.
Notable News

SURGERY AND MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

IS THERE A LINK between Multiple Sclerosis and some kinds of minor surgery? A study by AU researchers published in *BMC Neurology* says there could be. But the study’s lead author, Dr. Shawn Fraser, cautions that a lot more investigation is needed before a definitive connection can be made.

MOVING WEST

LIKE MANY WORKERS, Canada’s premier labour journal has packed up and moved west. The early records of *Labour/Le Travail* now reside at Athabasca University. The university took over the production of *Labour/Le Travail* from Memorial University of Newfoundland in 2007.
Flooding closes AU Calgary

THINK A SIXTH-FLOOR LOCATION makes you safe from flooding? Think again. AU’s Calgary offices were closed for nearly a month last summer due to damage from the June flood. Employees were able to keep student exams and services on track thanks to some welcome help from our friends at the University of Calgary. Full service for students resumed at our downtown Calgary location on July 18th, but the cleanup continued well into the fall, as Bow Valley College continued to deal with the effects of the flooding.

SECOND LIFE, FIRST DEGREE, BIG CELEBRATION

IF YOU CAN GET A DEGREE ONLINE, why not celebrate that achievement online, too? That’s exactly what 40 AU grads, staff and guests did in June, on AU’s “island” in the virtual world Second Life. It was the university’s fourth annual online Convocation and it gave students who couldn’t attend the live ceremony a chance to highlight their accomplishments in a virtual way. The university is looking at new ways to hold a virtual celebration later this spring.

Comings and Goings

AFTER EIGHT years in the president’s office at AU, Dr. Frits Pannekoek has decided to retire. A new president to take the reins from the career academic, diplomat and historian will be announced in the spring.

MIKE BATTISTEL took over as Vice President of Information Technology and Chief Information Officer in July. He’ll lead a complete revamp of the university’s information technology infrastructure.
Saluting some of AU’s very best

Athabasca University students and alumni make their mark across Canada and around the world. Nothing illustrates that better than the accomplishments of our 2013 Alumni Awards recipients.

By Cathy Nickel

IN HER roles as a nurse, student, researcher, published writer, international presenter and university assistant professor, Katherine Janzen strives to do her very best. That philosophy inspires her to make a difference in her profession and in the community.

As an AU student, Janzen worked with Margaret Edwards, acting dean of the Faculty of Health Disciplines, and instructor Beth Perry to develop a theory — the quantum perspective of learning — which takes a holistic view of how people learn. She was invited to join the faculty at Calgary’s Mount Royal University, where she is an assistant professor guiding the next generation of nursing professionals. A current research project (with Beth Perry) aims to discover what exemplary oncology nurses do when there are no more options to save a patient’s life, and to share this information with new nurses and administrators. “What I’ve accomplished hasn’t been done in isolation,” Janzen says. “AU faculty helped me be who I am today as an educator and as a person. You don’t get anywhere in this world without the help of other people. AU has been life-changing for me.”

Janzen hopes to receive funding for another research project looking at student engagement in the classroom, which builds on her quantum perspective of learning theory. She is frequently published in peer-reviewed journals and speaks at conferences, including recent presentations in Washington, D.C., and Denmark. Locally, she serves on the Calgary board of the Youville Recovery Residence for Women.

Katherine Janzen
Master of Nursing, 2011 // Calgary, Alta.
GROWING A THRIVING BUSINESS DURING DARK ECONOMIC DAYS

NOT EVERYONE has the courage to grow a business during an economic recession. Moiz Bhamani did — and has a successful, multi-hundred million dollar company to show for it. Today, at the age of 29, he’s the Chief Executive Officer of Prime Real Estate Group, a fast-growing, full-service commercial real estate and investment firm based in Calgary. The company develops and owns business parks, shopping centres and office complexes primarily in Alberta (tenants include oil and gas companies, the federal government, Alberta Health Services and CIBC branches, to name few). It has recently expanded into the Saskatchewan market and is also making its first foray into the U.S.

In the MBA program, Bhamani tapped into the knowledge and insights of seasoned business leaders who had lived through recessions, putting what he learned to work immediately. “I wanted to equip myself with more ammunition for the future,” he says. “I was [learning] with others who had faced similar challenges in the past and I could learn from that.”

Navigating difficult waters shaped the company he has today, and instilled a culture where education is valued. While a student, Bhamani served for two years on the Council of the AU Graduate Students’ Association, representing the Faculty of Business. As an alumnus, he invites new MBA students to get in touch and learn from his experience.

EMPOWERING WOMEN AS THEY MAKE NEW LIVES IN CANADA

LUBNA ZAEEM devotes hundreds of hours each year to helping immigrant families make a smooth and healthy transition to their new lives in Edmonton. She is especially concerned about the challenges faced by children and youth, and the higher risk of domestic violence that women can face. “When people move to a new country, they have all kinds of dreams,” she says. “But they fail to recognize the challenges. It is different for every immigrant family, but regardless of where they come from, they will face challenges.”

An executive board member with the Islamic Family and Social Services Association (IFSSA), she chairs its Fostering Healthy Families initiative and is the resident provisional psychologist, empowering women to deal with changes and overcome adverse circumstances. Through IFSSA, she offers presentations and workshops to increase the awareness of issues and to enable organizations and mosques to establish programs to support their communities. She is also part of a volunteer group providing walk-in counselling services. “It is very difficult to keep part of our culture while also accepting part of the culture here,” says the AU alumna, who has become a beacon of hope for many women making this stressful and life-changing transition to a new life in Canada.
FUTURE ALUMNI AWARD

MAKING ROOM FOR COMPLEXITY ON A POLARIZING ISSUE

SARAH MANN is shedding light on a group of Canadians who often go unseen and unheard. Over the past year, she has focused on expanding the discourse around sex workers. “I want people to get a sense of what these workers are saying about their own lives,” she says. “The current debate can be vicious and polarized because it doesn’t allow for any complexity. People see only black and white, which gets in the way of addressing problems or creating a safer work environment.”

As a student, Mann’s efforts were both precedent-setting and award-winning, and she is making a vital contribution to scholarly research. Working as an AU research assistant while completing her MA, she was the first student to receive AU’s Barbara Roberts Memorial Award twice in a row. In an internship at the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives, she indexed stories and photos in a seminal lesbian pornographic publication, making it easier for academic researchers to access. She has several publications and articles to her credit, has presented papers and spoken at conferences and is working on a project involving the Scandelles, a Toronto burlesque group. She is currently engaged in a research project as a student in Brock University’s Master of Arts in Social Justice and Equity Studies program: online students’ disclosures of gendered violence.

“People see only black and white, which gets in the way of addressing problems or creating a safer work environment.”

SARAH MANN
AU's new brand – everywhere

BY NANCY DIAMONTE, AU DIRECTOR OF BRAND, MARKETING AND RECRUITMENT

BRAND CREATES desire — the desire to be associated with a particular product, service or organization. But what is brand? It’s a term that’s tossed around a lot, but isn’t consistently or widely understood. By definition, “brand” is a “mark” or symbol that differentiates a product or service from others, particularly from its competitors. But brand is so much more than just a logo. It’s the perception or feeling you get when you think about a particular product, service or organization. It’s what people say about you, both good and bad, when you’re not paying attention.

Athabasca University has a long history and a credible reputation, but in a rapidly evolving and competitive marketplace, reputation can’t be assumed; it has to be claimed and given shape every day. In an education landscape undergoing dramatic change, can AU compete? What are people saying about AU? Have we been paying attention? This was the starting point for researching AU’s new brand.

As early as 2006, we were gathering information about what people knew, felt and thought about AU. As we did, it became apparent that if AU were to continue to lead in online distance learning, we must differentiate ourselves by saying something our competitors couldn’t say. That something came down to one word – everywhere. AU is everywhere you learn, no matter where you are in life, your career or in the world. AU can help you get from where you are today to where you want to be. Everywhere. We focus on the future of learning, not merely responding to change, but leading the innovations that inform the change.

After several years of research, planning, consultation and design, we launched our new “everywhere” brand last fall to strong and immediate positive reaction. People instinctively “got” the open shield concept that reinforces AU’s mission to remove barriers to post-secondary learning so that everyone, everywhere can take part in the transformative power of education.

Bold, strong brands do better in tough economic times, and post-secondary education has had a tough time as of late. Good brands outlive those trying to be the latest new thing — and AU’s 40+ years of distance education history, combined with a fresh and bold brand, creates an innovative, quality learning experience…open for everyone...everywhere.
INTRIGUE AND DESTRUCTION IN SPACE

Funding from the Canadian Space Agency is enabling AU to learn more about powerful forces within the aurora borealis — forces that can cause significant harm to complex systems on the ground.

BY DIANE MORRISON

IT TURNS out that long-told tales of compasses spinning wildly during aurora borealis activity might, in fact, be based in truth. Scientists are learning that the heavenly auroras that glow and dance across the northern Canadian sky are beautiful, intriguing, captivating — and also potentially destructive.

Changes to the magnetic field caused by auroras are typically very small and detectable only with sensitive instruments, but the impact of "space weather" on large networks like telegraph lines was reported as long ago as the 19th century. Today, society relies on larger, more-expensive and more-complicated systems — among them communications networks, oil and gas pipelines, hydro-electrical grids and navigation systems — which are at greater risk of being harmed by forces that are part of auroral activity. It can be a major issue in Canada, where much critical ground and space infrastructure and services can be particularly affected by space weather because of our proximity to the magnetic pole.

The Athabasca University Geophysical Observatory (AUGO) is using magnetic forces as a doorway for understanding auroras and getting to the heart of their many mysteries. Ideally located in northern Alberta, AUGO has all-sky cameras as well as a network of magnetometers (instruments for measuring the strength and direction of a magnetic field) to measure the Earth’s magnetic field with extreme precision.

For more than a decade, AUGO has partnered with NASA and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in the THEMIS (Time History of Events and Macroscopic Interactions during Substorms) project. NASA launched the project and five identically-instrumented satellites in 2007, creating a unique constellation of satellites still operating today, and a comprehensive ground-based measurement network, which includes AUGO. This is providing
scientists with data to discover how Earth’s magnetosphere stores and releases energy from the sun.

AUGO is now expanding its work. In December 2013, it received $400,000 from the Canadian Space Agency to expand the Athabasca University THEMIS UCLA Magnetometer Network, known as AUTUMN, into eastern Canada, which until now had few of the magnetic field detectors needed to study auroras. The expansion is led by AU’s Dr. Martin Connors, former Canada Research Chair in Space Science, Instrumentation and Networking, and the discoverer of the first known Trojan asteroid associated with Earth.

Auroras are known to be similar at both ends of Earth’s magnetic field lines. In western Canada, where many instruments are already located, one end is in the ocean. In eastern Canada, one end is in Antarctica, where UCLA and other institutions plan to put magnetic detectors. “By being able to observe what is going on at both ends of the magnetic field, we will get a fuller picture of what causes the aurora,” Connors says.

The CSA grant will enable Canadian scientists to use instruments such as magnetometers, radars, radio equipment and special cameras to study the ionosphere (the upper part of the atmosphere made up of ions and electrons) above Canada, enhancing knowledge about the impact of space weather on Canadian infrastructure.

By detecting the magnetic field with great precision, and sending data back to AUGO immediately, AUTUMN’s magnetometers will have widespread impact — from casting light on how and where auroras are generated to allowing the warning centre at Natural Resources Canada to generate better space weather warnings. And all of it will be a step toward solving one of the Earth’s most mesmerizing mysteries. ■
Hello
مرحبًا
Mobilizing mobile learning in Qatar

A project offering training to Qatari workers in the oil and gas sector introduces the Gulf country to the benefits of mobile learning.

BY QATAR FOUNDATION, QATAR UNIVERSITY AND ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

A MOBILE learning project in Qatar, led by Athabasca University’s Dr. Mohamed Ally in collaboration with Qatar University (QU), is set to change the face of workplace training in the oil and gas industry in Qatar.

“This could be the first mobile learning application under development in the oil and gas industry worldwide,” says Dr. Mohammad Samaka of QU, Ally’s co-lead researcher on the project. “During our most recent literature review, a hunt for existing applications yielded nothing.”

It’s also a first in terms of mobile learning in the Qatari workplace. “There is no history of mobile learning applications utilized to train employees in the workplace in Qatar,” Samaka says. “This project is novel.”

Operating on a three-year grant under the Qatar National Research Fund’s flagship National Priorities Research Program, the project has developed training Qatari workers can access with a smartphone app while they’re on the job. The app helps workers master technical English specific to the oil and gas sector, and is being tested on employees at five different work sites of Qatar Petroleum (QP), the company that manages all of the thriving oil and gas activity in Qatar.

The training incorporates multimedia and accommodates people with varying levels of competence in English. There’s also a chat feature that allows workers to get in touch with peers who are working on the same lessons.

The design of the training app has been guided by the Framework for the Rational Analysis of Mobile Education (FRAME) model, which was originally a thesis project for AU instructional media analyst Dr. Marguerite Koole.

“It’s a very high-quality model; that’s why we decided to use it for the project,” says Ally, who was Koole’s thesis supervisor. “It’s very comprehensive. It looks at all aspects of learning with mobile devices — social, pedagogical, technical — and considers important components like user interface.”

Dr. Samaka invited Ally, a professor in AU’s Centre for Distance Education and known around the world for his expertise in mobile learning, to participate in the project after reading his book, Mobile Learning: Transforming the Delivery of Education and Training (available online at no cost through AU Press).

The first half of the project, which began in 2012, has been focused on developing the mobile training and rolling it out to QP employees. In 2014, the research team will analyze the effectiveness of the training and prepare papers and presentations. The project will conclude in 2015.

The research team is also required to create a model for expanding mobile learning into other sectors in Qatar. Ally explains that one of the features that will help with this expansion is the reusable nature of the interface templates and architecture the team is developing.

Samaka is confident that the benefits of the training app could extend far beyond the oil and gas industry. “We are currently testing mobile learning on QU’s foundation-level students learning English,” he says. “I am sure, once it is fully developed, mobile learning can be deployed into other areas of society, at school or university level, due to the nature of its interchangeable and adaptable content.”

THE QATAR mobile learning project has already been recognized for its excellence. In 2013, the project received an Honorable Mention in Mobile Learning in the Academic Division of the International E-Learning Association’s E-Learning Awards.

Using Mobile Technology for English Training in the Qatar Workplace (NPRP Grant # 4 – 125 – 5 – 016) is funded by the National Priorities Research Program of the Qatar National Research Fund (a member of Qatar Foundation). Athabasca University’s Research Centre provides research support for the project.
Imagine how much better life would be if you had access to something that could help prevent illness, make it easier to live with a chronic condition or recover after medical treatment. Something that costs nothing and is available to everyone. And that also can improve your appearance, waistline, energy levels and even how you feel about yourself.

It’d be powerful stuff and people would jostle to be the first in line to buy this miracle product. Except for one thing: we already own it. It’s called physical activity, and Athabasca University is helping to uncover and understand its great potential — and to develop ways to get Canadians moving and living healthier.

“Physical activity is a potent drug,” says Dr. Jeff Vallance, associate professor in the Centre for Nursing and Health Studies in AU’s Faculty of Health Disciplines. “It does so many good things for your body — and we’re learning that activity may have a stronger effect than some of the drugs doctors are prescribing for chronic diseases like heart disease and stroke. We’re so inactive and unhealthy as a nation, our rates of chronic disease are exceptionally high. We need to develop targeted and effective strategies that enable people to improve their health.”

Assessing the upside of physical activity and the downside of sedentary behaviour — essential information to inform, shape and implement those strategies — is the heart of Vallance’s research. He was recently awarded a prestigious Canada Research Chair in Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Management, which comes with $500,000 over five years and funds for research equipment, to focus more of his time on this urgent public health issue.

Vallance’s time is devoted to several projects. While his investigations started with a study that looked at ways to facilitate the physical activity behaviours of women with breast cancer receiving chemotherapy, he branched out to also look at the impact of sedentary behaviour on those survivors and, with colleagues from Australia, the impact of physical activity and sedentary behaviour on the quality of life of survivors of colon cancer and non-Hodgkin lymphoma. He has joined provincial colleagues as a principal investigator with the AMBER (Alberta Moving Beyond Breast Cancer) Study, which aims to discover how health and

For Dr. Jeff Vallance, physical activity and fun is a great combo for better health.
fitness relate to cancer mortality and recurrence. And he is the lead investigator of the ALERT (Alberta Older Adult Health Behaviour) Study exploring the associations between objectively assessed walking and sedentary behaviour on the health of older adults.

Ultimately, the impact of Vallance’s work will be measured in lives and in dollars. And given that more than one million Canadians are cancer survivors, and that by 2036 more than 25 percent of Canadians will be 65 years of age or older, he has the potential to make a difference in the quality of life of millions of people. Perhaps surprisingly, everyone stands to benefit because one of Vallance’s key pieces of work aims to address a flaw inherent in previous studies: the reliance on self-reporting to gather base data.

When people are asked to report on their own levels of activity, the results can be highly subjective. The best science, however, needs objective data. “People report activity rates as high as 50 percent, when research shows that’s not the case,” Vallance says, noting that fewer than 10 percent of Canadians actually get the recommended 150 minutes a week of moderate to vigorous physical activity.

“Conclusions are only as good as the measurements they’re based on. Using accelerometers (small devices that accurately measure study participants’ active and sedentary time throughout the day) and even pedometers (step counters to measure walking), we can be more objective and more precise. We’re not starting over, but we’re getting more detail and precision. We can see how activity and sedentary time is accumulated throughout the day — for example, the bursts of vigorous activity in someone’s day — or we can see the prolonged periods of sitting.”

More accurate, objective and nuanced data, he says, will “put the data cart back behind the recommendations horse” and can lead to different conclusions and recommendations about the amount and kinds of activity needed to improve health. He also believes better data will help health care practitioners motivate Canadians to hitch their wagons to another horse — one called “prevention.”

“We still have a treatment-based health care system, and are still focused on treating illness,” Vallance explains. “The dollars that go toward disease management greatly exceed the amount dedicated to preventive efforts. But promoting health and focusing on lifestyle can prevent 35-40 percent of all cancers, and late-onset diabetes is largely preventable through a combination of diet and exercise. But there is no incentive from the system to stay healthy.”

Knowing this, Vallance is optimistic that projects like one he and his wife, Dr. Lorian Taylor, a research lead with Alberta Health Services (AHS) Nutrition Services, are collaborating on will help be a catalyst to a heightened emphasis on health promotion. At Open publication time, Vallance and Taylor had just launched the Step Up for Health website, a 12-week randomized controlled trial tracking the walking behaviours and health of people at high risk for diabetes.

Vallance is looking forward to sharing the payoff from this project and the others in which he’s involved with all Canadians: more knowledge about and access to a better, free “wonder drug” that everyone can use to live a healthier life.

“A recent study in the British Medical Journal found that activity is just as (and in some cases, more) effective as many drugs used to treat chronic health conditions.”

DR. JEFF VALLANCE

GET A MOVE ON

YOU HAVE TO MOVE QUICKLY TO keep up with Dr. Jeff Vallance, whose research projects, passion for fitness and busy family life with three active children keep him on the go. He offers a few tips to inspire you to amp up your own activity level.

DON’T THINK ABOUT IT AS EXERCISE.

It’s not complicated — it’s just being active. Stand more. Walk an extra block to the office. Take the stairs. Do jumping jacks with your kids during TV ads. Join a beer hockey league. It all counts!

FEELING BLUE? GET IN THE PINK BY GETTING ACTIVE.

Physical activity is proven to boost emotional well-being and banish the blues. You’ll put a smile on your face and a spring in your step. Try a brisk walk every morning. You’ll find it becomes addictive — and it’s a great way to wake up.

IT’S NOT ABOUT THE SHOES.

Or the clothes. Or whether you’re having a bad hair day. Just get up, tie your laces and head out the door — walking down the street or around the block are the first steps to a new activity habit.

NOT A DIME AND ANY TIME.

Physical activity is a freebie and available to you 24/7/365 — no gym memberships required. Whenever activity works for you, get moving!
Top 4 questions from current students
(and where to get the answers)

Who do I contact if I’m unable to get hold of my tutor or Professor?

If you have any questions or concerns about your tutor, contact Learning Services Tutorial at tutserv@athabascau.ca or 1-800-788-9041, ext. 6196. Learning Services Tutorial may be able to address some issues immediately, such as tutor availability, technical problems, or compliance with academic service standards.

If you would like Learning Services Tutorial to contact your tutor on your behalf, you must provide permission by submitting a written request to tutserv@athabascau.ca.

Where can I meet other students in my course/program?

Along with Facebook and LinkedIn, The Landing: landing.athabascau.ca is a great place for you to create a group for students in your course or program. You can also find students on our student union pages: ausu.org and augsa.com. And of course you can head to Facebook as many students have started AU groups. Just search for Athabasca University in the search bar or visit our main Facebook page to start.

I’ve been inactive for awhile but need to be reinstated. How do I do this?

To become reinstated as an active student:
1. Go to the myAU page at my.athabascau.ca
2. Click on “change program” in the Manage Your Program section and complete the form to reactivate your status as either a program or non-program student. No application fee is required, but if you are having an evaluation completed, you may be required to pay the transfer credit evaluation fee.

If this is your first time logging in to myAU, your password will be your birthday in the format of YYYY MM DD.

I have a different question from these ones. Where can I find answers?

The AU website has a great interactive feature on the site where you can ask AU your questions. Visit AskAU here: athabascau.ca/contact.

For example, if you are looking to schedule, change or cancel an online exam, simply put the word “exam” in the ‘ask’ box and a list of exam related links appear on the page.
PRESERVING AND SUSTAINING A RICH NATURAL RESOURCE

An international scientist comes to AU to improve our understanding of reclamation and remediation of land and water in Alberta’s Athabasca River basin.

BY JOHN O’BRIEN
IN SEPTEMBER 2013, Dr. Junye Wang left his prestigious position as principal research scientist at Rothamsted Research in the U.K., the world’s longest-established agricultural research station, and headed to Athabasca University. Here he takes on the Campus Alberta Innovates Program (CAIP) Chair in Computational Sustainability and Environmental Analytics in AU’s Athabasca River Basin Research Institute (ARBRI) and a new challenge: modelling terrestrial and aquatic systems in the Athabasca River basin.

The basin is ecologically and economically vital for the development and sustainability of northern Alberta communities. Industrial development and climate change are affecting both the economic sustainability and the well-being of people along the river. While the oilsands offer huge economic opportunities, much remains unknown about the impact of resource development on the environment and society. With its home in the basin, ARBRI is uniquely positioned to set a world example for leading non-partisan efforts in research and policy-making around strategic and aquatic systems in the Athabasca River basin.

Dr. Wang will make a vital contribution to the understanding of reclamation and remediation efforts following resource extraction. Open asked him about his new challenge.

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY?

Alberta is really interesting, particularly the Athabasca River basin, because there is no other place that has to deal with water, oilsands, agriculture, environment and sustainability. My basic research on multi-scale and multidisciplinary modelling will benefit Albertans and Canadians by leading to integrated watershed management, and recommendations for land- and water-use decisions. The CAIP program provides long-term funding. This allows me to focus on development of an ambitious framework: the modelling framework of integrated terrestrial and aquatic systems.

WHAT IS THE FOCUS OF YOUR RESEARCH?

The primary research is to establish meaningful models needed to interpret data and environmental projections. This framework will bridge knowledge gaps of dynamic interactions among nutrients, such as carbon and nitrogen, water, pollutants, soil and oilsands, vegetation and climate.

A deeper understanding of the integrated systems including, but not limited to, the land and water, can determine future trends and relationships from multiple land-use activities in the basin. It can also identify key factors of the cumulative effects of agricultural and unconventional oil and gas production for watershed management and provide a new tool for how we might better use land to manage soil, air and water. This will provide analytical evidence to help guide land- and water-use decisions and make recommendations for policy and for oil companies.

HOW DOES THIS COMPARISON TO THE RESEARCH YOU LED IN THE U.K.?

I have over 30 years of experience in multi-scale and multidisciplinary modelling in energy, environment and sustainability. However, there are some differences between the U.K. and Alberta. The Athabasca River basin contains rich natural resources, both oilsands and wetlands. There are different soil and climate conditions. [Using the framework developed in the U.K.] we will expand the capacity of agroecosystem modelling and computational sustainability for assessing the environmental impacts of unconventional oil and gas (oilsands and hydraulic fracturing) production on the agroecosystem. We will also identify key factors for watershed management across Alberta and Canada.

WHAT ARE THE KNOWLEDGE GAPS IN THE CURRENT RESEARCH?

Land-use changes due to oilsands mining are strong determinants of soil degradation, absorption and diffusion of tailings pollutants. The whole life cycle of tailings and wastewater is poorly understood because of complex natural abiotic processes, such as soil absorption and filtration of chemicals, and biotic recycling via root systems and soil micro-organisms. Indirect effects from oilsands tailings could be detrimental, but there is a scarcity of data to verify current claims.

There are also major knowledge gaps in how tailings pollutants will degrade and diffuse through biogeochemical processes above and below ground once they are put into a reclamation site.

WHAT IS THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE RESEARCH AS IT APPLIES TO REMEDIATION AND RECLAMATION?

The framework will be developed further to study dynamic interactions among tailings pollutants, water, nutrients, soils, vegetation and climate as a system approach for reclamation management. The framework can be validated and calibrated using past data and then, using different scenarios, drive the model for assessments of reclamation practice. This will improve our understanding of reclamation, help identify key factors and processes, and predict the efficacy of current reclamation sites. We can learn from the results of modeling what we should measure, and what practices can be improved.

Dr. Junye Wang at Athabasca Falls, near Jasper, Alta.
IN THE oil, gas and petrochemical industries, a day’s work can be measured in the millions of dollars. So when high-tech machinery needs to be shut down for maintenance or upgrades, the impact on the bottom line can be high and the top priority is as clear as it is pressing: get things running again and get the job done right. That’s where Quinn Contracting Ltd. steps in.

Managing high-pressure, highly technical and potentially dangerous projects to clients’ demanding expectations is no small assignment, and over the past 40 years Quinn has grown from a modest family-run company to an industry
leader with as many as 1,800 employees on multiple projects across Western Canada. These days, the company has a new tool helping to ensure the success of its employees and of the company itself: a partnership with Athabasca University that is sparking continuous learning.

“Knowledge will be the backbone and driver of our success in the future,” explains Nicole Parrell, training and development coordinator at Quinn. “Our people need to do complicated things and do them well. Their safety hinges on knowing what they’re doing and why they’re doing it, which ensures that, at the end of the day, everyone goes home safely to their families.

“At the same time, we know that to move forward as a company, we need knowledgeable, experienced and proficient leaders. We can grow our own leaders by giving high-performing, high-potential employees the opportunity to acquire the knowledge to take on leadership roles.

“Education is a key part of our overall business strategy and of our employee-retention strategy, and will ensure we remain competitive.”

The centrepiece of Quinn’s knowledge-development strategy is the Field Management Development Program (FMDP), built and piloted in 2013. Depending on their role within the company, employees can earn one of four Quinn “seals” by taking pre-selected courses offered by eight different post-secondary institutions. The company sees completing courses in each of five different areas as essential for building the knowledge needed by well-rounded company leaders: human resources; project management; communication and contracts; business and finance; and performance management and productivity.

AU worked with Quinn to identify a total of 13 courses and already half of the 16 employees participating in the FMDP are taking advantage of AU’s flexible delivery to complete courses when it best suits their work and family schedules.

“We wanted to give our people the option of classroom training or working at their own pace,” Parrell notes. “AU offers a lot of flexibility, while meeting the company’s needs for providing courses we believe will be a benefit to our employees. It’s helping our employees move in the right direction for their own career growth, and it helps us retain people with in-depth knowledge about Quinn.

“Our aim as a company is to continually grow and improve and to provide better service to our clients — and education is definitely a cornerstone of that plan.

“Partnerships, like the one with Athabasca University, are exciting for our employees and company management. We believe it has great potential to add a ton of value by instilling knowledge that will improve our employees and our company.”

Learn how your company can grow its knowledge capital through a partnership with AU. Visit us at partners.athabascau.ca

NICOLE PARRELL
FROM DISCOVERY TO MARKET

The full potential of research is realized when people benefit from it in their daily lives. AU faculty are taking their great ideas where they matter most: to Canadian learners.

BY DIANE MORRISON

Informal assessment of the preschool readiness skills of children aged 3–5 consists mainly of interactive activities that the child completes on an iPad, using an app developed by AU’s Linda Chmiliar and now commercially available.
THE GREATEST research idea doesn’t serve much purpose if it’s not able to help people in some way.

“Transferring research innovations into the marketplace can have transformative societal impacts, improving quality of life as well as enhancing business productivity and job creation,” says AU’s Hadi Shaheen, educational technology industry liaison officer.

“Together, these research efforts provide industry partners with a competitive advantage, create jobs, improve technologies and help ensure future prosperity, while advancing research and improving the health and social welfare of Canadians.”

Partnerships between universities and the private sector are not new and, like other post-secondary institutions, AU has recently begun commercializing its research. Funding from the Industrial Research Assistance Program of the Government of Canada’s National Research Council (NRC), the Alberta Innovations Voucher program, industry and AU itself is making it possible.

Shaheen’s position, funded with an NRC grant, advances research and facilitates commercialization by supporting researchers who want to participate in joint research with companies, community organizations, not-for-profit organizations and governments. At AU, much of that work is being undertaken in online education and educational technology, a natural fit for Canada’s online university.

Linda Chmiliar, for example, an associate professor in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, is one of the entrepreneurs at AU. With a research grant from the Alberta Rural Development Network, her company, LMC Academy, has developed an app with Fission Media that provides an informal assessment of the preschool readiness skills of children aged 3–5. What makes iAM-Ready Pre-K Assess and Learn so unique is that the assessment consists mainly of interactive activities a child completes on an iPad.

“The app actually measures the child’s responses and tracks the items they get right or wrong,” Chmiliar explains. “Once a learning area is complete, the parent or educator can see a child’s profile.” The app provides teaching suggestions and also suggests other apps that can be used to help children improve in areas of weakness. “So the app, in effect, is a complete learning tool that helps the parent or educator identify what the child needs to work on and provides a way to help that particular child.”

With digital and technical skills in high demand in all industries, Shaheen believes the potential is great for products and approaches that enhance learning. A research team in AU’s School of Computing and Information Systems, comprising Drs. Vive Kumar, Kinshuk, Sabine Graf and Maiga Chang, has a number of online initiatives close to market presentation.

Their work centres on models of personalized and intelligent education systems designed to improve performance and support learning. These are based on computer programs that gather information on cognitive ability, how a student works on assignments and the difficulties encountered, to provide resources and exercises based on individual learning style and personal needs. Some of that same information can be used to improve instructor performance as well.

One initiative, Big Data Learning Analytics, takes data from any number of gathered is used to develop resources and support for learning in the online world.

Dr. Kinshuk, the NSERC/iCore/Xerox/Markin Industrial Research Chair at AU, believes that, for AU, commercialization means exposure, revenue, feeding further research, creating jobs and attracting new researchers. It also benefits students to see how their work is applied in the commercial world and gives them valuable work experience.

AU also gets an opportunity to build on its substantial experience and help lead the future of teaching and learning. In March 2014, the university hosted the EdTech Forum: Practices, Ideas and Experiences, showcasing educational technology research with long-term potential for commercialization. It provided networking opportunities for academics, students and industry to explore potential for collaboration and open dialogue — all aiming to take research out of the lab and into the market.

Learn more about Linda Chmiliar’s app to assess preschool readiness at the LMC Academy website: lmcacademy.com

With digital and technical skills in high demand, the market potential is great for products and approaches that enhance learning.
Shredding an old idea

The Internet transformed communication. Open Educational Resources are poised to do the same for education — and AU is helping to lead the revolution.

BY OMAR MOUALLEM
WHEN ATHABASCA University’s first students received their course materials for the school’s original course in 1973, World Ecology, the study manuals and guides, and especially the telephone tutors, must have seemed revolutionary. And they were, even if they’re quaint by today’s standards. Those correspondence courses were for many the first they’d heard of open education. Now, 41 years on, Athabasca University and other post-secondary institutions are taking the concept of openness further than those original students could have imagined.

Adult education hasn’t just become more open, but more varied, more flexible and more continuous — more people are engaging in lifelong learning, taking professional or personal courses throughout their lives. But education has also become more expensive, potentially undoing all the work done by AU and others to make it more accessible. Last year, the average Canadian undergraduate student spent $6,300 on tuition. It was a smidge over $500 in 1973.

Recognizing both the need and ability for education to be more accessible, UNESCO organized an international conference in 2002 promoting Open Educational Resources. These are educational materials that are in the public domain or openly licensed, meaning people can legally copy, use or share them. It was such an innovative idea at the time that the term “OER” was coined at that very conference. On the 10th anniversary of that conference, UNESCO released the Paris Declaration on OER, encouraging governments to support OER and to open licensing of any educational material produced with public funds.

So far, in Canada, only the British Columbia government has allocated funds in such a manner. As early as this year, textbooks for the 40 most popular post-secondary courses in B.C. could be offered to 200,000 students online — free — saving each of them hundreds of dollars in textbook fees. Although Alberta’s government hasn’t done the same, that hasn’t stopped Athabasca University from advocating for and leading the development of open resources.

“Everyone wants to make education more accessible and cheaper to students. Everyone has that goal.”

DR. ALEX KONDRA
"Certainly it will reduce costs to students," says Dr. Alex Kondra, acting vice president, academic, at AU, who is helping to find a sustainable method to create and deliver OER. "That's the biggest thing we're all targeting. Everyone wants to make education more accessible and cheaper to students. Everyone has that goal. And although it won't reduce course fees, it can reduce the costs of learning resource."

"Open system, open content, open university, the OER initiative — those are part of a multifaceted approach to openness," adds Dr. George Siemens, associate director of AU's Technology Enhanced Knowledge Research Institute. "And openness is part of the DNA of Athabasca University."

Siemens sees promise in UNESCO's landmark initiative, OERu, which could be considered the iTunes of e-texts, only free. It's a user-friendly portal to dozens of OER for courses as varied as Artistic Media and Developing a Business Plan. AU is one of 31 participating organizations, mostly post-secondary schools. "What each university does is entirely up to the university," says Siemens. "OERu is this connective hub that allows universities to jointly market and share courses they're running."

On OERu, many of the resources take the form of MOOCs — Massive Open Online Courses — which may be a familiar term for people since it's frequently used by the media (The New York Times declared 2012 "The Year of the MOOC"). These courses are offered free and to unlimited numbers of students. Imagine, for example, a football stadium with bleachers filled by students, and a lone professor at the centre of the field.

"The sheer number of students can be stunning," says Siemens. "For faculty, it's an opportunity to massage their ego, because you can teach as many students in one course as you taught previously in a 20-year

**OPEN + REUSABLE + ADAPTABLE = OER**

**OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES (OER)** are free and accessible learning resources available on the Internet. No matter what they look like or how they’re delivered, they share a common trait: openness.

According to Rory McGreal, the UNESCO/Commonwealth of Learning/International Council for Open and Distance Education Chair in Open Educational Resources at AU and professor in the university’s Centre for Distance Education, OER are flexible and adaptable for teachers and learners alike. Unlike most commercial resources, OER can be:

- augmented by integrating new material as it becomes known or available
- customized to reflect the ethos of any institution
- repurposed for any discipline
- aggregated to form lessons, courses and programs
- reformatted for different device platforms

In his role, McGreal is leading the global evolution of OER, creating an informal international OER network to support and empower instructors and researchers keen to advance the use of OER in higher education.

At Athabasca University, several faculty have begun the process of "deboning" their courses, removing the commercial resources and replacing them with appropriate OER. As more and more educators learn about, develop and deploy OER, the supply and the quality increases. This, in turn, leads to more sharing of resources among institutions and, ultimately, increased access to higher education for learners worldwide.

Learn more about how AU is helping to lead the OER revolution by visiting the AU UNESCO/COL Chair in Open Educational Resources website: [unescochair.athabascau.ca](http://unescochair.athabascau.ca)

Search for OER on the Commonwealth of Learning’s Directory of Open Educational Resources: [doer.col.org](http://doer.col.org)
“Openness is part of the DNA of Athabasca University.”

DR. GEORGE SIEMENS

cycle.” He should know; he invented MOOCs, alongside University of Manitoba colleague (and former AU tutor) Stephen Downes, in 2009. Apropos of its innovation, the course was Connectivism and Connective Knowledge.

Since joining AU, Siemens has continued researching and experimenting with MOOCs. He recently received an $861,655 grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (through AU’s Open Our World fundraising campaign) to coordinate a program that tries to answer the many questions education professionals have about MOOCs and their role in higher education. The funds helped create AU’s MOOC Research Initiative and organize the world’s first related conference in Arlington, Tex., late last year.

OER, and especially MOOCs, capture people’s imaginations because they conjure a utopic world where a CEO in his office, a labourer at home and a homeless man at a library computer can all share the same borderless world-class education. But Siemens is the first to admit that despite their revolutionary nature, the majority of current MOOCs are approaching pedagogy too traditionally. “It’s less about knowledge creation and more about knowledge duplication.”

Further, people have criticized MOOCs because they attract “fair-weather” students. With a dropout rate of over 90 percent, any perfect-world images one might conjure quickly fade away. Siemens comes to their defence, noting that if a student moves from one province to another for university, and then drops out, “that has huge psychological costs. But with MOOCs, you clicked a frickin’ button, so you can’t even compare dropout rates.”

Kondra, however, is more concerned with sustainable funding for OER. “People will build them, and they will come, but how do you maintain them? How do you renew them? How do you revise them? Where are the resources coming from? And until people can answer that question, MOOCs and OER are not sustainable.”

There are some options to monetize OER, but not in such a way that makes education expensive or undermines accessibility. Some of those options might be offer courses for free and then charge a student to have that coursework assessed, possibly toward actual accreditation, as some institutions involved with OERu have done. Corporate sponsorship is another possibility. Or, universities could give a scholarship discount or a set amount of credits for students who successfully complete the online resources. This is more than just using them as a loss-leader; it could potentially pre-select a strong candidate for learning and eliminate the expenses of supporting students who may not be ready.

“There is a variety of options but, really, nobody knows what the hell is going on with MOOCs,” says Siemens. “We’re all trying to figure out what this thing is, what it means for the university. Essentially MOOCs are the Internet happening to higher education.”
To dream, perchance to fight

Thousands of Canadian veterans continue to fight off nightmares after returning home from active duty. Does help lie in violent video games?

By DIANE MORRISON

THE DEPLOYMENT of 30,000 Canadian combat troops in Afghanistan from 2001–11 is the largest Canadian military operation since the Second World War. The federal government reported in October 2013 that as many as 5,900 veterans who will be released from duty in the next few years will suffer from a mental health disorder and at least 2,750 will deal with a severe form of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Some of those veterans will take their own lives — eight have died of apparent suicide in the first two months of 2014 alone.

It’s possible that much-needed help for veterans could come from a seemingly unlikely source: video games. Dr. Jayne Gackenbach, AU tutor and professor at Edmonton’s MacEwan University, is researching the impact of gaming on nightmares — which may have applications for dealing with
PTSD. Until recently, her research and writing has been centred on dreams and consciousness, and it’s only in the last decade that she’s turned her attention to video games.

According to Gackenbach, soldiers not currently dealing with PTSD who play aggressive video games on a regular basis experience fewer traumatic nightmares than soldiers who only play occasionally or who play less-violent games. Working with Dr. Evelyn Ellerman, associate professor in communication studies at AU, and former AU student Christie Hall, Gackenbach has learned that video games offer an opportunity for empowerment that transfers into dreams.

“These dreams are the most common element of post-traumatic stress,” she explains. Previous research has shown that traumatic memories usually remain unprocessed and the individual winds up experiencing the same memories repeatedly, causing significant psychological impairment. Addressing fears in a virtual world, in games such as “Virtual Iraq,” enables soldiers to conquer them and eliminate real physical and psychological symptoms. Fighting the enemy in imaginary realms, it seems, may numb soldiers and help them break free of trauma.

“My hope is to help people who may be suffering trauma with a potential way to move on,” Gackenbach says. Interestingly, her research suggests that the nightmare protection of video game play does not apply to female gamers, who have more, rather than less, threat in their dreams after playing the games. That’s the next avenue for her research. ■
The road to success travels through AU

No one knows more about the impact of an AU education — nor is more qualified to talk about it — than our alumni. Several of them do just that in our new viewbook, which introduces prospective students to AU. Meet four alumni here. Learn more about how AU helped them get where they wanted to go in life by visiting everywhere. athabascau.ca.

BY ERIN OTTOSEN AND CATHY NICKEL

THE STUDENT BECOMES THE TEACHER

RETURNING TO Canada after teaching overseas, Marguerite Koole (Master of Education in Distance Education, 2006) was won over by AU because she could study online and wouldn’t have to quit her job — and now AU is her job. Starting with a few courses, she gradually moved into master’s study, got to know AU faculty and staff and, “when a position came up, I thought AU could be a good place to be, so then I started studying and working at AU at the same time.” She finished her master’s thesis, a framework for analyzing and developing mobile education (essentially a comprehensive yet reasonably brief guide for developing mobile learning environments) and is now an instructor and an instructional media analyst in AU’s Centre for Distance Education.

“I’m blessed with being able to work with students, and they feed my intellectual curiosity,” Koole says. “I hope distance education continues to grow in such a way that it becomes more and more available to students around the world, and that it helps them better their lives.”
LEARNING TO BE A LEADER

“ALTHOUGH I loved my job, I knew there was no room for advancement. I wanted something more for myself.” An educational assistant at a public school, Megan Fertig (Bachelor of Professional Arts in Human Services, 2012) found that something at AU.

Self-paced courses enabled her to learn on her own schedule and to be in control of “when I learned, what I learned and how I learned.” And her degree prepared her for a more senior roles in child and youth care, social services and related fields.

And today? Fertig has transitioned from being an assistant director at an out-of-school care facility to taking on another administrative role. “I wouldn’t be where I am today if I didn’t have my degree,” she says. “And now I feel like I can accomplish anything.”

GROWING BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES IN IT

AFTER-SUPPER homework and late nights studying at his hobby ranch in the country have paid off for Blaine Zuk (MBA in Project Management, 2011). He moved from a successful career managing IT projects into consulting, and now has both a broader knowledge base and higher earnings as a result. He also has a ready-made network of colleagues forged as he and classmates built close ties while working online together.

“The MBA introduced me to a whole new world of colleagues in business who helped me grow not just as a business student, but as a more diverse and understanding person,” he notes. “Many of us stay connected to this day.”

Because he wasn’t the only one completing his studies while maintaining work commitments, he had a rich learning experience that offered immediate, tangible benefits. “It’s one of the bonuses of working while going to school — a lot of the students used real-case scenarios. By putting [your education] to use while you’re working, it makes it that much more meaningful for you.”
“WHEN I started reading about what Athabasca University was doing — how it was truly open — I wanted to support it.”

Diane Mitchnick (B.Sc. – Computing and Information Systems, 2012, and current student, Master of Science in Information Systems) values the opportunity to share ideas and perspectives with people from around the world, and believes AU, through its Open Our World campaign, is both expanding the opportunity to do so and making a difference in the world.

“I see AU as a leader,” she says, “and when I learned more about the campaign, I realized AU was investing in things that would benefit the community, and not just the university. Research underway at AU, for example, will help improve society in the future.”

Mitchnick’s own Master’s thesis/project work is a case in point. She’s focusing on health care analytics, looking at ways to use patient data to predict mental health diagnoses. “I like that AU was open to new suggestions for research. I was able to come up with my own idea within AU’s guidelines — and now I’m going to be able to make a difference, too.”

She decided to become a monthly donor, giving a small amount automatically every month to support the university, because it was easy and she knows her regular donations will add up over time. It’s a way to help open opportunities for students like herself, who want to pursue their own interests while maintaining their work and family commitments, and also to help those who might need to overcome financial barriers in order to follow their academic dreams.

“AU is a really good institution. They want to teach you more than what you can learn in a classroom. They want to teach you what’s out there in the world, and that broadens your horizons. Schools like this aren’t common — which is why Open Our World really resonated for me.”
Thank you!

ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY appreciates the donations you made in 2013–14. Your support is enabling us to Open Our World.

For a complete list of supporters since the Open Our World campaign began, please visit the Open Our World website: open.athabascau.ca

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STUDENT & ALUMNI NOTES

Highlights of the year that was for AU students and alumni since the last issue of Open.

2013

APRIL

GIOVANNI FARIAS, CHARLES BERNARD, MICHAEL PROCTOR and CHENG-HSIN receive Alberta Innovates – Technology Futures awards, which fund students to carry out scientific research that the Government of Alberta has deemed as strategically important to the province. Farias is a student in the Doctor of Education in Distance Education program, while Bernard, Proctor and Cheng-Hsin are completing the MSc in Information Systems. Their research is on information and communication technology, nanotechnology and omics.

STUDENTS AND ALUMNI TAKE part in Identity, Agency & the Digital Nexus, an international symposium hosted by the AU Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Edmonton funded by an SSHRC Connection Grant.

JULY

AMANDA MACLEOD, A BA STUDENT in Women’s and Gender Studies, wins the 2013 Bryon Paige Memorial Award. The award is given to AU students who have shown exceptional resourcefulness in overcoming barriers to pursue their education.

AUGUST

A PAPER BY MA – INTEGRATED Studies student JESSICA SCOTT-REID on how blogging helps students become better writers is published in TILT Magazine.

DR. ROSALIE HILDE, ONE OF THE first graduates from AU’s Doctorate of Business Administration, wins the 2013 Best Dissertation Award from the Academy of Management. Her dissertation is on the integration of Chinese immigrants into the Canadian workplace.

MAY

JOY ROMERO (MBA), VICE-PRESIDENT OF technology development at Canadian Natural Resources Limited, is interviewed by CBC when the federal government announces that Romero’s company, the National Research Council and Pond Biofuels are partnering on a project that uses algae to “eat” carbon dioxide emissions before they enter the atmosphere. The algae are then turned into biofuel.

SEPTEMBER

LISA MACNAUGHTON-DOUCET (Bachelor of Nursing; Master of Nursing) is published in the September 2013 issue of the Canadian Journal on Aging. Her article is titled “Determinants of Health in Discharge Planning for Seniors: Asking the Right Questions.”

ALMOST 90 GRADUATE STUDENTS from all of AU’s faculties share their research at AU Ingenuity, the second annual AU Graduate Student Conference. Get updates on the third edition of the conference coming in September 2014 at fgsconf.athabascau.ca.

GOLNAZ GOLNARAGHI, A DOCTORATE of Business Administration student, is a guest speaker at TedxMilton 2013. Her presentation is on embracing her “hybrid identity.” Golnaraghi calls the experience one of the best in her professional life.

THE 2013 AU VOLUNTEER SERVICE Alumni Award is presented to LUBNA ZAAEM (Post-Graduate Certificate in Counselling) in Edmonton. See Zaaem’s full story on page 7.
SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER

FIVE ALUMNI GRACIOUSLY AGREE to star in AU’s new viewbook, a publication that provides a brief overview of the university for prospective students. The alumni represent all five major areas of study at AU (arts, business, education, health care and science) and are Megan Fertig (BPA: Human Services), Blaine Zuk (MBA), Marguerite Koole (MEd, Distance Education), Kathleen Soltsys (Bachelor of Nursing; Master of Health Studies) and Will Chang (MSc, Information Systems). See full stories on our viewbook alumni here: everywhere.athabascau.ca.

OCTOBER

TRACEY COLLINS (BACHELOR of Nursing; Master of Nursing) is named the Kitchener-Waterloo Rogers TV Oktoberfest Woman of the Year in the Health and Wellness category for her pioneering work in street nursing. Collins takes care to non-traditional settings such as community kitchens, shelters, courts, parks and drop-in centres.

AN ARTICLE ON MINDFULNESS BY Wendy Charters (Master of Counselling) is published in the October 2013 issue of the Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy.

CHERYL SUTHERLAND’S BOOK Alchemy: A Geography of Love, is published. In the book, Sutherland tells the story of her life with partner Daniela Leca (Master of Health Studies), who completed her studies with AU while battling a terminal illness.

THE 2013 AU FUTURE ALUMNI Award is presented to Sarah Mann (MA – Integrated Studies) in Toronto. See Mann’s full story on page 8.

NOVEMBER

MOIZ BHAMANI (MBA) RECEIVES the 2013 AU Rising Star Award and Katherine Janzen (Bachelor of Nursing; Master of Nursing) receives the 2013 Distinguished Alumni Award at a reception in Calgary. For the full stories on these two exceptional AU alumni, see page 6.

THE CERTIFIED GENERAL Accountants’ Association of Alberta (CGA Alberta) welcomes 307 new graduates into the CGA membership. Eight of these graduates are from AU, and one of them, Maria Vallance (Bachelor of General Studies), is the class valedictorian and receives the CGA Alberta President’s Award of Distinction.

DECEMBER

MELISSA PAQUIN’s (BACHELOR OF Nursing) article on depression in orthopedic patients is published in the December 2013 issue of CARE, the magazine of the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta.

THE YOUNG ADULT NOVEL Jacky the Brave, by Jim Sellers (BPA: Communication Studies), arrives at a bookstore near you. The novel is about a boy who uses an unusual instrument to cope with the many problems in his adolescent life.

DEBBY CARREAU (MBA), CEO AND founder of Inspired HR Ltd., and Captain Jill Marrack (MBA), a deputy commander in the Naval Reserve, are recognized as two of Canada’s Most Powerful Women by WXN, the Women’s Executive Network.

2014 JANUARY

TRINA INNES (MBA) IS APPOINTED to the board of directors for the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. She has been the director of the Office of Sustainability for the University of Alberta since September 2009.

FEBRUARY

AU STUDENT MEGAN IMRIE (BA, Psychology) takes part in the Sochi 2014 Olympics. She competes in biathlon and her highlights include finishing 31st out of a field of 84 competitors in the women’s 7.5 km sprint, and being a member of the women’s 4x6 km relay team, which comes in 8th.

THE NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL and AU’s Faculty of Business host the Innovation and Productivity Symposium in Edmonton. Alumni and students take part in the symposium’s discussion of issues and challenges affecting Canada’s productivity levels.

FOR THE SECOND YEAR IN A ROW, a team of students from AU’s Faculty of Business make the top 10 percent of teams from around the world competing in the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME) Group Trading Challenge. Three teams of undergraduate and graduate students from the Faculty of Business participate in the competition, which this year has 385 teams from 208 schools.

MARCH

THE ALBERTA SPORTS HALL OF Fame announces that Carol Huynh (Master of Counselling) will be inducted into the Hall in May 2014. Huynh won the gold medal in 48 kg freestyle wrestling at the 2008 Olympic Summer Games in Beijing and the bronze four years later in London. She’s also been voted into the International Wrestling Hall of Fame, is the reigning Commonwealth Games champion and has won two Pan Am Games titles.
Face your dreams

BOB MCDONALD, HOST OF CBC’S QUIRKS & QUARKS,
has an uncommon ability to make science accessible, interesting and relevant. Athabasca University conferred an honorary Doctor of Science degree on McDonald at Convocation on June 8, 2013, recognizing his stellar achievements teaching Canadians about the world around them. He shared his story and words of wisdom with graduates and guests at AU Convocation. Following are excerpts.

“I AM a drop-out. I failed second-year university and didn’t know what I wanted to do with myself, so I became a truck driver and worked construction. So to see my name on a university diploma is just sweet.

“The reason I’m able to stand here today and speak to you and accept this honour, is because of the people who were in my life over all these years, who opened doors of opportunity for me. They gave me the encouragement. They said, ‘You can do this,’ even though I didn’t believe I could.

“Thanks to people who said, ‘Hey, why don’t you try this? Why don’t you give this a shot? You can do it.’ — and for some reason, I don’t know why, I always said, ‘Yes, I can do that.’ And every time I did, it changed my life.

“The first one was my girlfriend in the 1970s. She said, ‘The Ontario Science Centre’s looking for people. You’d be really good at this! Why don’t you give them a call?’ I drove to the Science Centre and talked to this fellow who hadn’t looked at my résumé yet, fortunately, because there was nothing on it. I said, ‘This is a fabulous place! I’d love to work here. I get to play with science, my favourite topic.’ I was always interested in science; I just wasn’t good at doing it. I was a terrible student.

“And he hired me on the spot. Not because of the degrees I had or hadn’t, but because of my enthusiasm, my desire to do it. And out of that, every once in awhile, the media would call and say, ‘Can you come on and talk about something that just landed on Mars or whatever?’ And I would say, ‘Sure!’ — even though I knew nothing about it.

“I got a phone call, ‘Hi, I just saw you on the morning program in Canada. I’m from New York City. I’m at a news network. Do you produce your own television? Because if you do, I’ll buy it.’

“I didn’t produce television. I was on television. So I said, ‘Yes.’

“And every time this would happen, people would say, ‘Would you like to host a television show? Would you like to run a television studio? Would you like to write a book?’ I’d always say, ‘Yes.’ And every time I said yes, I got really scared. I’d think, ‘What’s going on? What have I done? I’m not qualified to do this.

“You learn really fast when you’re scared. In sailing, we say, ‘The best way to keep a boat afloat is a scared person with a bucket.’

“The best way to beat that fear is to finish what you start. Get it done. But why am I telling you this? You just did it. You finished it. And it feels good, doesn’t it?

“It feels good to get it done, and that gives you the strength the next time to do it again. Because even though you’ve done it, and gotten yourself here today, it doesn’t stop. It doesn’t stop. There are always opportunities.

“Face your dreams! Your dreams! Not your parents’ dreams, not your professors’ dreams, not your friends’ dreams — your dreams. Just find out what they are, and face that direction, and keep facing it! Look for every new opportunity to take those small steps, and eventually you’ll head towards it, and you’ll get there. It might take you years. It’s taken me 30 years to get here. But you’ll get there. You’ll get there.

“Face your dreams.”

Listen to Bob McDonald’s full address on YouTube (search for “Bob McDonald Athabasca University”):
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