Game plan

Canada’s top athletes keep their eye on the academic prize

A ticker for life
Transplant recipient takes gratitude to heart

Invisible wounds
Helping Canada’s veterans win the PTSD fight
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 the potential to study with us as an undergraduate student, regardless of their educational history.

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By now you know it’s not a secret; AU opens doors. To new ways of thinking, new ways of doing, new ways of getting ahead. And we do it with one mission in mind: accessibility for our learners. We’ve got your educational needs covered, but we aim to take care of other things, too. Our new marketing campaign sums this up nicely: AU gives you the TIME to do everything you need to do.

Our mission is working. How do we know? Because you told us. And you continue to tell us. Every year at Convocation, our newly minted grads tell us. Our alumni tell us with regularity and matching messages — that AU made things possible; that their achievements and successes wouldn’t have happened without our courses.

Many people, however, still want to know: “Why AU today, when online learning has become a staple offering at any accredited university?” The answer is simple — and especially evident when I look at the stories in this issue of Open. It’s because of our people; the students, faculty, staff and alumni who consistently wow us with the cool and innovative things they’re doing in their communities, their places of work and within their families. People like Staff Sgt. Jeremie Landry, an AU alumnus and 2016 Rising Star Alumni Award recipient whose advocacy efforts are helping the RCMP become a more inclusive and tolerant force nationwide (pages 22-24 “Mountie with a Mission”), and Dr. Lynn Corcoran, whose research can help young adults stay safe in their relationships (pages 14-16 “Texting and Talking, Facebook and Stalking”).

There’s never a shortage of AU stories. Just check out a Convocation sometime and you’ll hear them firsthand. Truth be told, the number of stories shared with me on a weekly basis would fill a magazine quadruple this size. But like you, we’re conscious of our time and budget. I’m confident the stories we’ve selected for you here will impress you. I hope they leave you thirsty for more. And that won’t be a problem — just tune in to the website, AU Newsroom (news.athabascau.ca) and subscribe to our social media channels. Our people and their stories never fail to inspire.
The height of things to come

**AU’S NEW PRESIDENT HAS HIGH HOPES FOR THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE WITHOUT BOUNDARIES**

by John O’Brien

Dr. Neil Fassina’s first task as Athabasca University’s president designate was to adjust the microphone at last August’s announcement of his appointment. At six foot five, the trim, athletic scholar has to look down — way down — on most podiums.

The second task for Fassina, who was officially installed as AU’s president on Jan. 11, 2017, is arguably going to be a bit more complex: leading Canada’s first open-and-distance university into a future crowded with competitors; both for students and for funding. But as he told the audience of more than 200 AU staff, dignitaries and community members that day in August, history is on the university’s side.

“We must not forget that the scales are tipped in our favour,” he said. “Our opportunities far outweigh our challenges and our strengths far outweigh our faults. We have the fundamental building blocks in place to rise once again to be a world leader in open, online, distance and digitally mediated learning.”

Judging from the applause, it was exactly the message the audience wanted to hear. Fassina, a native Albertan, comes to AU from the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology where, since 2013, he was Provost and Vice-President Academic. He holds a PhD in Management from the Rotman School of Business at the University of Toronto, and a BSc in Psychology from the University of Calgary. He is also a chartered professional in human resources (CHPR), and a designated director through the Institute of Corporate Directors.

And while the academic credentials are important, he brings a quality that no diploma can ever capture: an overwhelming optimism that infects everyone around him.

“As we have done before, we will rise to a leadership role as an architect of the future of accessible adult learning in Alberta. We will open doors to the power of knowledge without boundaries for our learners and their communities.”

A tall order from a tall guy.

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**FASSINA FACTS**

He’s not just a president. He’s a person with particular palates.

**SCRIBE:** Bryce Courtenay and his book *The Power of One*

**PLAYLIST:** electronic beats preferred (but will rock out to Metallica)

**GENERATION:** Doc Martens and fold ’n roll jeans

**JAVA:** large, McDonald’s, black, medium-roast, three or four each day (and sleeps like a bearded baby)

**STREAMING:** *House of Cards*, *Orange is the New Black*, *Justified*

**HIDEAWAY:** ski slopes in winter; Northern Ontario island hopping in summer

**SUPERHERO:** wife Krista, a.k.a. “the ultimate human being”

**MOONLIGHT JOB:** Certified Level-3 Wine and Spirit Education Trust (a.k.a. a bearded sommelier)

**AU BECAUSE:** “It’s going to provide you an opportunity to engage in learning — regardless of where you are, how quickly you can do it — and in your own way.”
Power play

At 32, Colin Priestner is the youngest
general manager in the WHL.
Naturally, he advances his skill set
online and on the road — by virtually
attending AU's Business of Hockey
Executive MBA program. Realizing
the program would "open doors
for me in the future and help me
understand the business," Priestner
is part of a changing tide in major
junior and professional hockey:
executives who take on traditional
hockey with a youthful vigour and an
advanced education.

Firsts to last

It was a year of firsts for the RAIC
Centre for Architecture at Athabasca
University. Last fall, it hosted the
first-of-its-kind virtual workshop
series, using Canadian-created
technology to connect students and
faculty from around the world to
showcase energy-efficient designs.
Faculty of Science and Technology
dean, Dr. Lisa Carter and Program
Administrator Carole Mason, received
Honorary Memberships in the Royal
Architectural Institute of Canada. Most
impressively, the Centre saw its first
student graduate. In early 2017, Allan
Colpitts received his Post-Diploma
Bachelor of Science in Architecture. [In
the photo (L–R): Dr. Douglas MacLeod,
chair of the Centre; Barry Johns,
architect and former AU board chair;
Dr. Lisa Carter.]
Nice to see you again

Making no fewer than five appearances speaking at AU community events this past year (including the January 2017 installation ceremony for new president Dr. Neil Fassina) was the Hon. Marlin Schmidt, Alberta’s Minister of Advanced Education. Schmidt offered his vote of confidence for AU’s important role providing open, accessible and distance education for learners across the province, Canada and beyond. The minister’s newly minted hirsute appearance? A scholarly look to congratulate AU and its students on building the country’s future. [Behind Dr. Fassina in the photo is (L–R): AU Board Chair Margaret Mrazek; Marlin Schmidt; Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater MLA Colin Piquette.]

Hairy legs and more

Fifteen years ago, now-retired AU professor Dr. Robert Holmberg and Dr. Lisa Carter, dean of Science and Technology, co-founded Science Outreach Athabasca to bring the wonders of science to the public, schools and communities, via instructor-led sessions on topics as diverse as drones, spiders, auroras and gold panning. As Carter puts it, Science Outreach is fuelled by the “collective power of everybody.” That includes the multiple volunteers, granting agencies and dedicated, long-time coordinator Linda Lindballe. As a result, science is more accessible — hairy legs and all.

Remembering a president

On a sad note, AU bids farewell to Dr. Terry Morrison, who served as the university’s president from 1985 to 1995. Anyone who was here during Terry’s tenure will remember his gentle demeanour and love of a good joke. Terry passed away in Surrey, B.C., on Dec. 15, 2016. He was 73 years old.

A cake odyssey

Last October, Dr. Martin Connors, AU professor of Space Science and Physics, welcomed Japanese academics for a week-long dig-up and re-route of decade-old scientific instruments, moving the campus observatory to its newer counterpart in the darker countryside. It was part of Connors’ and Dr. Kazuo Shiokawa’s ongoing research of proton aurora — whose invisible lights can be observed and their images manipulated straight from Japan (where Connors is on a research visit through May) via AU’s high-speed fibre-optic equipment. But for Connors, the highlight was the nightly portions of Japanese rice-curry served by his guests in the five-room, six-domed observatory. His culinary contribution? “My special Jamaican rum cake,” said Connors. “President’s Choice.” Straight from the freezer. [Pictured in the observatory kitchen (L–R): Heqiucent Xu, Kazuo Shiokawa, Yuya Tokunaga and Herbert Akihito Uchida.]
A study of change

Dr. Don Wetherell’s new book is out. *Wildlife, Land and People: A Century of Change in Prairie Canada* looks at the interactions between people and prairie wildlife over the course of a century of settlement and development, and the changes (some permanent) they brought about. Wetherell ran the Heritage Resources Management Program at AU until his retirement in 2013. He’s now a professor emeritus and, of course, an author.

Fire in his belly

Straight on the heels of his successful novel *The Jaguar’s Children*, Governor General’s Award-winning author and freelance writer John Vaillant is now devoting his time to AU as the 2016–17 Writer in Residence/Writer for Health, sponsored by ZoomerMedia Ltd. He’s working on his current piece of non-fiction: a yet-to-be-titled book about 2016’s devastating Fort McMurray fire. Slated for a 2018 release (at the earliest), Vaillant explores fire’s influences, both historically and culturally, in the context of the human quest for energy, juxtaposed with “our desire to master fire and control it.”

Time for your life, time for your degree

This past fall, AU unveiled its new brand marketing campaign. It shows how Athabasca University stands in a class of its own — how it breaks the barriers typically surrounding traditional, post-secondary education — by giving learners control over the timing and place of study. The ads depict AU’s flexibility factor, and how it enables learners to balance the demands of their study with work and life. Take the ‘Time’ to check it out [see back cover page for the full effect]!

A picture of contentment

Okay, it’s actually a picture of Peter MacKinnon — holding a picture of himself holding the hallowed Grey Cup. MacKinnon received the token of appreciation at a small AU staff gathering to say “thanks.” The university’s now-former interim president bade farewell last summer after two years at the helm. While he’s no longer with AU, he liked Alberta enough to become a resident. He now lives in the mountains, working on a new book about Canadian universities.
Dean says ‘diversify’

Alberta is a powerhouse in energy and agriculture, but it needs to diversify if its economy is going to thrive. Dr. Deborah Hurst, dean of AU’s Faculty of Business, brought together some of the best business minds in the province to talk about how to become a leader connecting the power of capital markets to small- and medium-sized businesses. Done right, this will spark investment in high-tech, green and advanced-manufacturing sectors, and help Alberta products enter international markets. The October symposium was part of AU’s Future of Learning series. [Pictured (L–R): Dave Mowat, president, ATB Financial; Darrin Hopkins, director, co-head, Public Venture Capital Division, Richardson GMP; Michael G. Thomson, president, Independent Capital Partners; Ungad Chadda, president, Capital Formation, Equity Capital Markets, TMX Group; Deborah Hurst, dean, Faculty of Business, Athabasca University; Leo de Bever, chairman, Oak Point Energy; Russell Kalmacoff, president, Rockmount Financial Corporation.]

Touchdown AU

The Ottawa Redblacks may have won the Grey Cup, but Athabasca University really scored. Check out the LED display. Late in the 4th quarter, Calgary Stampeders QB Bo Levi Mitchell threw an interception that nearly sealed the game for the Redblacks, a suspense-filled moment. However, the most exciting part (for AU anyway) was the Athabasca University ad on the LED signage during the play — kind of a big deal considering the 12.5 million people (10 million Canadians on TSN; 2.5 million Americans on ESPN) who watched the game.
ATHLETES are competitive at the best of times. Those who perform at the top of their sport worldwide are single-mindedly driven to excel — and that can make it difficult to fit post-secondary studies into schedules packed with training and travel.

Athabasca University and other universities across Canada now comprise the Education Network, part of Game Plan powered by Deloitte. The holistic program offers more-flexible education opportunities to Paralympic, Olympic and Canadian National Team athletes while they are still actively competing, and helps them transition into a new career when they retire from high-level competition.

“It’s not easy to integrate education into your training,” says Carrie Anton, assistive technologist for Access to Students with Disabilities. She knows the challenges first-hand. The Paralympian played on the national goalball team for eight years, winning gold in Sydney in 2000. “An athlete’s No. 1 focus is on training, eating, working out, psychology, physiotherapy and learning in order to peak at just the right time. It’s a life commitment, not a hobby. These aren’t weekend warriors,” she says.

Days that can start at 4 a.m. often have hours of training or competition, with only a little time open for non-sport activity. Most athletes put post-secondary education on hold because they simply can’t fit it into schedules that can be all over the map.

Come retirement time, there’s a whole new set of challenges, which can be compounded if an athlete doesn’t have the academic preparation to move onto a new career path. “Athletes are very goal-driven,” Anton notes. “And when they leave competition, it can be like falling off a huge cliff. Where do you go from here?”

This is why the Canadian Olympic Committee, Sport Canada, the Canadian Paralympic Committee and the Canadian Olympic and Paralympic Sport Institute Network, along with founding partners Smith School of Business, RBC and Morneau Shepell, launched Game Plan as a program and, most recently, its Education Network.

“Deferring a post-secondary education in pursuit of sport can make career transition difficult for many athletes,” says Jeremiah Brown, Game Plan national manager and London 2012 silver medalist in rowing. “Athletes who invest in their education and athletic endeavors concurrently often perform better in both spheres.”

AU is well-suited to making that possible because the holistic approach built into Game Plan is also built into AU, notes Jessica Scott, director of Partnerships and Student Recruitment. “Our education model is built on flexibility, so it fits well with what athletes need. They don’t have to uproot their lives or training schedules because they can take their AU education with them — whether they’re skiing in Switzerland or luge training in Calgary.”

Anton adds that Athabasca University gives these learners the option of studying when they have the time. “We aren’t making an exception for athletes, because this is what we do for all students — and we do it well. Many athletes have studied with AU in the past. We tell them: ‘AU will work for you because you make your education fit your life.’”

More than 600 athletes have used Game Plan resources since its launch in 2015. Learn more at mygameplan.ca.
AU is part of the team offering Canada’s top athletes a step up to the post-secondary podium

by Cathy Nickel

Retired Paralympian Amber Thomas is returning to the pool in a quest to represent Canada in international competition. She plans to take her AU studies with her.
TWENTY-ONE YEARS ago, on Monday, May 20, Dawn Marie Tremblay was a blonde, vivacious and athletic 22-year-old pursuing her goal of becoming a massage therapist. She had recently moved to Rocky Mountain House, Alta., from her family farm in Elk Point, after a two-year stint at Red Deer College. She and her long-time boyfriend, Brad, had decided to take their courtship to the next level and live together. The sports-driven and fun-loving couple was, in her mother Coral Tremblay’s words, “fit to the nth degree.”

Sadly, that athletic prowess couldn’t prevent doctors from declaring Dawn dead five days later in Edmonton’s University of Alberta Hospital — the aftermath of a car accident that left her in a coma. Before her life support was removed, however, Brad lifted his betrothed’s limp finger and slipped on a diamond engagement ring — while Dawn’s crushed parents, Coral and Remi Tremblay, watched and wept at their daughter’s bedside.

A day later, in the hospital’s cardiac ward, another family was rejoicing. Fourteen-year-old Kristy Plotsky from Medicine Hat got her wish: a vibrant new heart — a 23-year-old ticker, actually — Dawn’s — whose birthday would have been that same day. Plotsky’s battle with restrictive cardiomyopathy, a hereditary disease diagnosed six months earlier was over. She had been listed as high-priority on Canada’s heart transplant waiting list — the only girl from southern Alberta — quickly becoming a national media darling. She and her family could finally celebrate her second chance at life.

Today, Kristy Plotsky — now Thackeray — is a heart-healthy, 35-year-old social worker living outside of Calgary with her husband Wade and their teenaged twin girls, Shaylynn and McKayla. A decade earlier, when she was 24, Thackeray enrolled in Athabasca University to gain the requisite credits that would make her eligible for acceptance into the University of Victoria’s Bachelor of Social Work program. She says AU gave her a new “knack for online, self-directed learning,” and a fresh sense of self-worth — although she admits the eight-year juggle of school with motherhood, medical needs and a full-time job was a challenge. But then she’d often check herself and ask: “Who’s complaining?” After all, she’d certainly endured worse; at the age of two, daughter Shaylynn also became a heart recipient.

‘We’ve received the gift of life twice! My daughter wouldn’t be here — the three of us wouldn’t be here — if it wasn’t for Dawn’s family carrying out her wishes.’

Kristy Thackeray
Heart-to-heart

The indelible bond created between heart recipient Kristy Thackeray and the Tremblays revealed remarkable similarities between Thackeray and her donor, Dawn — everything from mutual idols to social values to a basic joie de vivre. “Dawn and Kristy share a genuine cheering-on of the ‘underdog,’” says Remi. “Unless you’re playing sports against her — then Dawn would kick your butt! … But then she would feel sorry about it, after,” he jokes.

Both were devoted fans of country singer Reba McEntire. When Thackeray’s medical beeper went off (shortly after landing at the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport) signalling that her new heart was ready in Edmonton, she and her family were en route to see the superstar perform at the Texoma Medical Center in Denison, Texas.

And last November 26, at Thackeray’s most successful book signing to date — at F.G. Miller High School in Elk Point (where Dawn attended) — Coral observed this uncanny happening:

“We stood back and watched Kristy meet friends and teachers of Dawn’s, and it was just like they’d known each other forever. It was amazing … and kind of ironic. I turned around when I heard my sister exclaim: ‘Oh. My. God. She IS Dawn!’”

Kristy Thackeray (L) and Coral Tremblay have an unbreakable bond

Photo by Wade Thackeray, 2014

It was after the twins’ birth that Coral Tremblay (Dawn’s mother) asked to meet Thackeray for the first time, in person. The latter’s mother, Margo, had initially reached out to Coral over the phone seven months post-transplant. Both families had figured out the other’s role from the start; local news reports of their respective stories made it “easy to do the math,” says Thackeray.

Remi Tremblay, however, wasn’t quite ready for a face-to-face. “It took us years, especially for me, to be able to meet Kristy; I wanted to be sure she was on the same page as us,” he explains.

When the two finally did meet on the 10-year anniversary of the transplant in 2006, “we knew we made the right decision,” he adds. “We’re thrilled to death [Dawn’s heart] went to such a sweet kid … an excellent kid. There was a lot more good that came out of it.”

Today, Remi and Coral view their daughter’s heart custodian with a unique and tender reverence. And, for her part, Thackeray concurs their first encounter was a portent of things to come. One might think the transplant trio was blood-related; they’re that close. Conversations which began as “careful talk” morphed through the years to include bi-monthly, chatty phone conversations, lighter fare on Facebook and planned annual visits.

“We care for her like a daughter,” says Remi. “She’s an amazing person to talk to. She’ll always have questions for us, like: ‘Was Dawn like this?’ or ‘Did she do that?’ Of all people, Kristy gets it.”

That “it” is an unwavering respect Thackeray shows for her donor. Whereas some transplant recipients might regard their donor as “an afterthought,” says Coral, Kristy leads with Dawn’s heart in everything she does, including at advocacy talks or book signings (Thackeray recently penned a book on her experience: Transplanting Hope: My Life — Someone Else’s Heart) — she makes sure to mention Dawn upfront.

“That’s always the first thing on her mind,” says Coral. “And the last,” Remi adds.

For Thackeray, doing otherwise isn’t an option. She stresses that everything in her life, especially her twin girls, has been possible because of Dawn.

“The ability to have kids with her heart is amazing. And we’ve received the gift of life twice! My daughter wouldn’t be here — the three of us wouldn’t be here — if it wasn’t for Dawn’s family carrying out her wishes.”

Photo by Wade Thackeray, 2014
When pondering the prototype of the human “bully,” society’s once-popular archetype of the burly sand tyrant named “Biff” and his pastime for picking on 98-lb. teen weaklings has evolved significantly from the beach scenes of 1950’s comic books. In fact, with the rise of technology, the “Biffs” of the past are the least of people’s worries; yesteryear’s bully has morphed and attached itself to a more sombre and serious trend: cyberbullying.

Vitriolic spewing is especially ubiquitous on social media. And many of us are complicit in some way — as perpetrators or inactive witnesses to attacks, or even as unwitting victims who stay silent post-blast. Calgary high school guidance counsellor Marc Osenton, an AU Faculty of Health Disciplines graduate, says part of the problem is the newer phenomenon of being “turned on all the time”—especially the teens he sees, who take to social media like birds to breadcrumbs.

While news about online bullying is rife in the media, it is rarely referred to in the context of the virtual workplace. At last September’s 2016 Graduate Student Conference, one AU doctoral student, Peggy Flanigan, shed new light on this lesser-known phenomenon. A senior manager with Calgary Police Service, Flanigan was one of 43 students who presented their research, in-person or online, at the Edmonton event titled Research Without Borders, hosted by the Faculty of Graduate Studies and the Athabasca University Graduate Students’ Association.

Flanigan’s presentation entitled ‘Does workplace bullying happen on virtual workplace teams?’ explored the phenomenon from an introductory standpoint with clear-cut definitions. She incredulously pointed out the lack of current research addressing the topic, and relayed her intent to explore the phenomenon further.

“There’s a lot of literature about virtual teams. But there is no literature — not one study — on bullying on virtual teams.”

“All of these are typical kinds of [workplace] bullying behaviours … You name it, it’s there in spades,” she posited. “People being talked down to, or behind their backs, [using] disrespectful, offensive, abusive, impatient or belittling language. If you see any of these … you’re actually seeing bullying behaviour on your team.”

Flanigan asked the audience to consider that “every single one of us has been on a virtual team.” Needless to say, people leaned in with interest. They were, after all, part of the Athabasca online community.
TEXTING AND TALKING, FACEBOOK AND STALKING

RECOGNIZING VIOLENCE IS THE FIRST STEP TOWARD STOPPING IT — AND PREVENTING TRAGEDY
by Cathy Nickel

‘You’re going to make mistakes and you’re going to cross boundary lines. This is part of growing up. But violence isn’t. There’s still a lot of stigma around calling violent behaviour what it is — and saying it’s not okay.’

EARLY in her career as a public health nurse, Lynn Corcoran met the young mother who would set the trajectory for a lifetime of work. Knowing something was wrong in the woman’s home, but not knowing exactly what, Corcoran used every tool she had to urge the woman to reach out. But it wasn’t enough. The husband killed his wife.

Tormented by “what if?” and “what can we do?” questions, for the better part of 20 years, Corcoran channelled her professional energies into educating and enabling nurses to identify and respond to the signs of abuse, and working in shelters to counsel men who had been violent.

Then came a fateful day in December 2011. On a highway outside Claresholm, Alta., a young man killed his former girlfriend and two others before killing himself. In a heartbeat, Corcoran realized that nurses likely wouldn’t have helped prevent the deaths of these healthy people who were in their early 20s. Just as quickly, she knew that the focus of her pending doctoral research would be on recognizing the signs of violence — and intimate-partner violence in particular — to empower young people and, ultimately, to help prevent tragedy. Her research, completed in early 2016, is especially timely and relevant in this online age, when anonymity is high and inhibitions can be low.
IT’S NOT OKAY
Insights gleaned from Dr. Lynn Corcoran’s research involving 18-to-29-year-olds can empower young people to navigate the relationship landscape more safely — and help their friends do so, as well. She offers some thoughts drawn from participants.

1. CALL VIOLENCE WHAT IT IS
   Know it when you see it. It’s not “unhealthy behaviour.” Call it as you see it. Be clear and direct.

2. LISTEN TO YOUR INNER VOICE
   If it bothers you or doesn’t feel right, it isn’t right. Trust your intuition, because you know yourself best. If it’s just a “funny feeling” in your gut, talk to someone. Your concern will become more concrete and conscious.

3. IT’S NOT YOU; IT’S YOUR PARTNER
   Don’t blame yourself. If your partner ridicules you or puts you down in front of others, it’s not a communication issue or a reflection of your ability to “laugh at yourself.”

4. STICK TOGETHER, STAY CONNECTED
   Look out for yourself and your friends by not isolating yourself, or keeping your concerns from friends, parents or other adults who can, and want, to help.

5. BE A FRIEND
   If you see something, say something — kindly, gently, directly and openheartedly. Be specific. Say what behaviour concerns you and why. It won’t be easy. Be courageous.

6. MIND YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE
   Think about how your words and pictures might have an impact on others, or what someone might do with your information. Pause before you post. Be deliberate. Be selective about what you share, and who you share it with.

7. MODEL GOOD BEHAVIOURS
   Show friends and family members what good relationships — and concern for others’ safety — look like. Lead by example.

8. RECOGNIZE WHAT YOU’RE READING AND WATCHING
   Be mindful of the media you’re consuming and the lens you’re looking through. Are you being inundated by images of violence? Take a break, unplug and go for a walk outside.

“Partner violence isn’t the same as bullying,” explains Corcoran — now Dr. Lynn Corcoran, Bachelor of Nursing program director in AU’s Faculty of Health Disciplines. “Bullying might involve several people and everyone tends to pile on. Partner violence centres on romantic or intimate relationships between two people and is often rooted in beliefs about gender. Other people tend to stand back, or don’t get involved.”

People also tend to believe partner violence happens to “others,” when in fact they could be experiencing it themselves — because this kind of violence hides in plain sight. Too few people recognize it for what it is, and young people, in particular, who are often in their first relationships, don’t know where the behavioural boundaries should be.

“We say ‘love is blind,’ and it’s true,” Corcoran says. “When you’re in a relationship, you can’t always see what’s happening. But the people around you can — in person and, today, electronically. So young people need to be able to recognize violence for what it is, realize what is happening, and say or do something, for themselves and for their friends. They need to know what it is so they can stop it.”

The ubiquity and reach of technology makes identifying violence all the more challenging. The concept of a “romantic relationship” is continuously being redefined. A new taxonomy of casual sexual encounters is being developed, possibly blurring the lines of consent and creating the potential for violence. Additionally, violence of all kinds — from war, to fighting in sports, to TV dramas — is being normalized through mainstream media. Social media make it possible for someone to stalk their partner 24/7, and can feed obsessiveness and fuel jealousy that can loop into increasingly extreme behaviour.

“As a young person, you learn through your own experience and the experiences of your friends,” Corcoran says. “You’re going to make mistakes and you’re going to cross boundary lines. This is part of growing up. But violence isn’t. There’s still a lot of stigma around calling violent behaviour what it is — and saying it’s not okay.”

Read the paper Dr. Lynn Corcoran presented to the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education at fhd.athabascau.ca/faculty/lcorcoran.
Lasting Connections

With Canada approaching 150 years strong prior to AU’s upcoming half-century milestone, it’s time to reflect on the diversity and boundary-free nature of the university and the nation by Neil Fassina
On July 1, 2017, millions of Canadians nationwide will ring in the country’s 150th anniversary with joyful celebration. It is a momentous time for this great nation and its more than 35 million citizens — many of whom treasure the boundless opportunities of freedom, fellowship and independence that living in Canada offers.

In reaching this national milestone, I can’t help but think of Athabasca University’s own upcoming and noteworthy occasion: our 50th anniversary, in three years [see “An AU primer” on page 19]. Through nearly a half-century, AU has solidified its reputation as a post-secondary institution which provides the freedom to pursue education and knowledge independent of barriers faced by learners (and online fellowship for those who choose).

**Over the hill, and not far away**

Our historical narrative is one which has, and will continue, to stress learner success. For almost five decades, we have been opening doors for individuals who, because of their personal circumstances, either cannot or choose not, to explore traditional face-to-face or classroom-based university environments. And throughout our history, we have chosen to do so without concern about our learners’ prior academic record. Rather, we enable people to demonstrate their own successes. By enrolling in our programs, they can show the world exactly what they are capable of as a consequence of their AU learning. Not surprisingly, many do extraordinary things and make a real, positive difference in the world.

AU prides itself on bringing learning to the learner, instead of the other way around. In many ways, we’ve created connections between people and knowledge — without boundaries — enabling learners to remain part of the communities in which they live.

And so, as we approach our big five-oh, it is my goal that we take some new and fresh leaps into the next 50 years; impressive ones that involve a reinvigorated focus on our academic mission as the world-class, open and online Canadian university. This will be especially important as we find ourselves in the midst of an increasingly competitive post-secondary era, across the country and globally.

**Balance is key**

I am committed to finding the right balance for Athabasca University, now and into its next 50 years. The post-secondary market is truly changing; new learning models are hitting it with unprecedented velocity. The newest delivery modes are being conceived even as I write! And they are not limited to just traditional universities — not even to post-secondary in general. Consider, for example, some of the newer commercial groups that have incorporated adult learning into their products. So it’s really about finding the balance among our educational tools and resources, teaching delivery models and human coaching capital, within

'It is incumbent upon us as people, as Canadians, to engage with and to share insights with each other...on a regular basis.'
the new and increasingly competitive Canadian learning environment.

The new educational models in the marketplace are as diverse as Canada’s own cultural mosaic — which leads to my next reflection: We are set to celebrate 150 years of national pride alongside the millions of new Canadians, multigenerational Canadians, and indigenous peoples who’ve all made Canada their “home and native land.”

It’s no secret that one of the most significant factors in this country’s multiculturalism is its history as an open and welcoming nation. Last year, Statistics Canada recorded an average of approximately 235,000 immigrants who come to Canada annually. Many come here in earnest to embrace (and to be embraced by) a better life for themselves and their families. This group of new Canadians adds fantastic diversity to our population, and strengthens the multitude of perspectives, ideas and cultural elements already present across our land.

Indeed, balance truly starts with people, and whether the Canadian roots being celebrated are new or run generations deep, it is incumbent upon us as Canadians, to engage with and to share our insights with each other — whether those conversations are educational, cultural or otherwise — on a regular basis. It’s simply in our DNA to do so. That’s what makes Canada so special and unique. It’s why we are celebrating 150 years strong in 2017. Canadians are welcoming and we are open.

I have said it before about AU: The “opportunities before this university far outweigh its challenges; our strengths far outweigh our faults.” I stand by this maxim. The great things we do, and will continue to do, at Athabasca University are only possible because of its 40,000-plus learners and community members — Canadians — with thirsty minds and connected hearts, representing all cultures, creeds and educational approaches. Together, they have made this institution unbelievably amazing, for almost half a century. Here’s to celebrating Canada AND an AU education, through this milestone year and the next 50 years!
INVISIBLE WOUNDS

CAN SEEING TRAUMA THROUGH A DIFFERENT CULTURAL LENS HELP MILITARY PERSONNEL WITH PTSD?

by Cathy Nickel

Canadian soldiers aboard a C-17 on their final approach into Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, Sept. 19, 2010. Photo by Cpl. Shilo Adamson, Canadian Forces Combat Camera
CANADA’S military personnel can be deployed anywhere in the world, taking part in active combat or serving as peacekeepers in dangerous conflict zones. Thankfully, the great majority come home safely. Some, however, return with an invisible wound: post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Dr. Ruth Stewart is intent on helping them heal.

Stewart is a medical doctor passionate about mental health, a 2016 Athabasca University Master of Counselling graduate, the wife of a retired fighter pilot, a mom — and doing a residency to become a psychiatrist. She lived in military communities across Canada for more than 16 years and knows the challenges military veterans and families face. None are more devastating than PTSD, which often lurks deep in the shadows and can be frustratingly difficult to treat.

“These people are my family,” she says. “And some have been through hell, especially in Afghanistan. There are so many stories about PTSD, how it impairs people’s ability to relate, and puts them in fight-or-flight mode where they see threats everywhere. They don’t want to appear weak, so they stuff their feelings down, and live with guilt, shame, regret, horror, anger, nightmares and more.”

Stewart vowed to do something about it. Having worked as a doctor on military bases, “I could see new patients relax visibly when they heard me using military terminology and saw that I understood some of what they were talking about,” she explains. “So I wondered if civilian assumptions about mental health and PTSD might be culturally specific, and not translate that well to military culture.

“There is a difference between military and civilian communities. And, even though civilian care providers are well-educated and well-intentioned, standard approaches can miss the mark.” Her master’s research explored why that might be, and yielded insights that hold the promise of better treatment results.

“My research showed that the civilian world is very individualistic, so PTSD is seen as a disorder of the individual brain. The military, however, is a collectivist culture, and military personnel conceptualize things differently.” Her discourse analysis was eye-opening.

“What hit home was how military personnel saw PTSD as a loss of communal belonging and communal identity,” Stewart explains. “Rather than the list of individual trauma symptoms that civilians focus on, their central loss was their progressive alienation and isolation.”

This learning may have major implications for how PTSD in the military and other collectivist cultures, such as among refugees, is treated. “If we work with the military or do relief work, and if we see PTSD, then we must think about how that cultural paradigm perceives loss and trauma,” she says.

“We tend to prioritize the individual symptoms and treat social networks as a secondary concern. But maybe we should be restoring group identity, social relationships and group functioning as a centerpiece of treatment.”

That, combined with a gradual shift in how PTSD is seen and treated in the military, has her feeling optimistic that invisible wounds will be better treated in the future.

Dr. Ruth Stewart received the 2016 Governor General’s Academic Medal – Gold, awarded to AU’s top graduate student. To read Stewart’s thesis, go to dt.athabascau.ca and search for “Ruth Stewart.”
MOUNTIE WITH A MISSION

The RCMP stands on guard more fiercely than ever. Athabasca University’s 2016 Rising Star Alumnus might just have something to do with it.

by Heidi Staseson

MANY of us know what it’s like to be on the receiving end of a co-worker’s or a teammate’s hostility. It can be an uncomfortable, anxiety-inducing spot. Even worse when it’s a superior with a penchant for passive-aggressive put-downs and non-verbal tactics. You try to be the bigger person. You maybe make the first attempt at a casual water-cooler conversation, only to be met with an ignorant stare, straight through you, like you were a ghost. Then the person simply walks away.

Now imagine how much more cringe-worthy that would be if the boss-bully’s beef with you is about one thing only (hint: it’s not your impeccable job performance). It’s also not your cheerful demeanour or your efforts to foster a positive team environment. Rather, those icy, freeze-you-out moments are because of your sexual orientation.

That’s what Staff Sgt. Jeremie Landry, detachment commander of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Cold Lake, Alberta unit, experienced early in his career. His livelihood at the time was thriving, both at home and at work. But there was one particular supervisor who wasn’t exactly sending sunshine Landry’s way.

“He treated me markedly different from the other members at the detachment. He didn’t have time for me, wouldn’t acknowledge me when I’d say hello to him,” says Landry.

It was a time when tensions stemming from stigma on the force were “kind of at their worst,” a phenomenon which Landry says is not the norm now. His former supervisor has retired and, today, the latter’s abysmal behaviour “has absolutely no place within the RCMP.”

“The RCMP recognizes that and has taken tremendous steps over the last few years to ensure a harassment-free organization, and to make sure that all employees feel valued and respected,” Landry asserts.

The move toward enhanced respect in Canada’s oldest, most pedigreed police force is, in part, because of people like Landry and his work peers, who have made social and cultural advocacy regarding respect in the workplace their main mission alongside their oath to serve and protect.
Landry is openly gay. He’s part of a work group called the Commanding Officer Psychological Health and Wellness Committee. It provides consultation to the province’s Commanding Officer (K Division Deputy Commissioner Marianne Ryan, who will retire this year) on ways to improve the psychological health and wellness of 4,000 men and women RCMP members across Alberta.

“Our goal is to reduce the stigma of mental health so that employees feel able to come forward and seek help, rather than suffering in silence,” says Landry, who has swiftly risen through the ranks of red — he’s been promoted three times in five years — and is one of the youngest Mounties to have done so.

“It’s exceptional what he’s attained,” acknowledges Deputy Commissioner Ryan. “In terms of our rank structure, Jeremie is at the highest level before he becomes an officer. And he has done it in a way that all of us in the RCMP would be proud to have done it. He has moved up the ranks by taking on bigger and bigger challenges — in every place that he has gone to, he has made it better.”

This past fall, Athabasca University named Landry its 2016 Rising Star Alumnus — one of the university’s highest awards and a reflection of his commitment to community service and passion for continuing education.

Over his 12-year career, Landry, a native of Nova Scotia with an RCMP lineage, says he is chuffed to witness the barriers of stigma (long dividing members of the RCMP “Old Guard” from their newer and more progressive counterparts) slowly but surely erode.

Two-and-a-half years ago, Ryan appointed Landry to the Alberta arm of the RCMP’s national LGBT advisory committee, which serves to support the rights of sexual minority employees. Initiatives like this, says Landry, only make Mountie momentum bolder and brighter, and he says that senior officers routinely thank him for getting the wheels of inclusion in motion.

“They tell me it’s good that it’s happening,” says Landry. “We’re going to continue to destroy those walls and barriers, and people are going to feel more like they can come forward and talk about it.”

Meet the three other AU Alumni Award recipients on pages 26-27 of this issue of Open. And read more about all four on the AU news site: news.athabascau.ca.

Revellers at last September’s 26th annual Calgary Pride Parade might have sensed a pleasant sea change permeating the air downtown. It emanated from the reddest section where 27 decked-out RCMP officers, donned in their finest scarlet, walked in solidarity — their shiny black boots reflecting rainbows galore — with Alberta’s LGBT community.

Leading the charge was “Top Cop” Deputy Commissioner and Commanding Officer Marianne Ryan — the first woman (and first openly gay staff member) to be appointed commanding officer in the history of the Alberta RCMP. Marching proudly alongside her was Staff Sgt. Jeremie Landry, detachment commander of Cold Lake Division, RCMP change agent and AU’s 2016 Rising Star Alumnus.

The day was a long time coming and marked the force’s debut at the parade, festivities further punctuated by the flying of the Pride flag at the Calgary RCMP headquarters.

Meet the three other AU Alumni Award recipients on pages 26-27 of this issue of Open. And read more about all four on the AU news site: news.athabascau.ca.
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Distinguished Alumni Award
Julie Lys
Master of Nursing, 2007

Sacred paths to educational success
When Julie Lys graduated from high school in Fort Smith, N.W.T., nursing wasn’t on her radar. Even though she had entered the hospital system as a teen (as a dishwasher, a housekeeper and finally advancing to candystriper) the lack of diversity in healthcare roles among her working peers was the catalyst for a change in career.

Lys, 55, is a nurse practitioner and educational health advocate. She still resides in Fort Smith, where she grew up among her cozy clan of a dozen siblings.

A fierce champion of her Métis heritage, she has made it her life’s mission to promote flexible education. Her sole target is Fort Smith’s aboriginal, Métis and indigenous youth, among whom she tries to instil a sense of passion, pride and a continuous desire to learn.

For Lys, education is the gateway to great things — “meaningful things in the community.”

Her standout moments? Getting to flip over the tassel of a high school graduate’s cap. Even better: watching them graduate from university; and to greet them again thereafter — back in their Fort Smith homeland, now armed with the tools to succeed.

Volunteer Service Award
Jacqui Empson-Laporte
Bachelor of Professional Arts, 2014

Giving has no limit
Planting seeds of hope keeps Jacqui Empson-Laporte’s feet firmly on the ground. She creates hope around others’ obstacles. Whether they’ve suddenly lost a loved one, or they’ve hit a financial rough patch, Empson-Laporte makes her reassuring presence known through her many volunteer roles.

As an initial crisis responder for Victim Services of Huron County in Ontario, she provides comfort, encouragement and next-step advice for people on the receiving end of domestic violence or tragedy involving loved ones. It’s an intense role — certainly not one possessing the levity of her other volunteer jobs, like the one at Budget Buddy, where she offers low-income families money and savings tips. But for this 44-year-old, Auburn, Ont.-based, full-time environmental specialist and mother of three (stepmom to two more), volunteering, is “one of the most rewarding things I have ever done.”

And while she lives and works in a green-space haven evoking retirement, she’ll likely have plenty more day planners to fill before the latter prospect happens. When it does, you’ll no doubt find her planting real seeds.
Our alumni say everything about the future of an education. Four outstanding AU ambassadors are living loud and making the grade — by providing hope, insight, encouragement and safety — in people’s hearts and in their communities by Heidi Staseson

**Future Alumni Award**

**Nina Sangra**

Master of Counselling, 2016

A pioneer in an emerging science field

For Nina Sangra, providing a therapeutic response to sexual trauma “feels like a calling.”

As a sexual assault worker with a Calgary-based community organization devoted to helping survivors of sexual violence, Sangra has worked in the field of sexual health promotion for more than a decade, both as an educator and as a counsellor. She works mainly with adults but her clients are as young as 12, and they span gender and ethno-cultural backgrounds. She works with between three and five of them daily — a privilege, she emphasizes, to be able to “join them on their healing journey.”

Sangra says she brings both her head and her heart to the job. Knowing her work contributes to grand-scale change is equally rewarding, and she strongly believes being a good therapist requires art and skill.

“My heart is in practice. As much as I love the academic part and I wanted to do a thesis, I [also] wanted to keep practising and working with people. I got to do that with AU,” notes Sangra, emphasizing her AU education helped secure a career path, straight out of her practicum.

But there are only three alumni here, you say? Read about AU’S exceptional fourth and final Alumni Award recipient, RCMP change agent Jeremie Landry (pages 23-24 of this Open) and the significant strides he is making to create a culture of respect and inclusion in Mountie territory, coast-to-coast-to-coast.

AND to learn even more about Jacqui, Jeremie, Julie and Nina — or to find out how you can nominate an outstanding AU alum for next year — visit the AU Newsroom at news.athabascau.ca, and enter ‘alumni awards’ in the search box. Your nominee could be profiled next year!
From milkmaid to master’s
by Edna Mattson | Master of Education: Distance Education, 2003

We were poor when I was growing up in Gladstone, Man., the oldest girl of six living children. I graduated Grade 12, but the only way I could get an education past that was to go into nurse’s training. It was at Grace Hospital in Winnipeg — the old, old apprenticeship type of program. I was in my early 20s. My mother told me that if I milked all 11 cows in the morning and in the evening, I could have the cream cheques to pay the tuition fee.

In my 30s, I did my Bachelor of Nursing through the University of Manitoba. I am a Registered Nurse in both Alberta and Manitoba. At a conference in Edmonton, I met Drs. Mohamed Ally and Patrick Fahy from Athabasca University. They were learning-centred, wanting a person to learn what he or she wanted to learn, to meet their own personal lifelong goals. In the past, I’d been in a fairly traditional educational setting where individual learning wasn’t the focus — paying fees was. AU was totally different. It was like I was in control of my learning. That blew me away!

I graduated with my Master of Education in Distance Education in 2003, and have continued to find a way to keep learning throughout my life. I tutor internationally educated nurses and, over the years, have tutored probably 1,000 students from all over the world. My house is a learning environment. I have a classroom in the basement. It’s all set up, digitalized, the whole bit. There is an examining table with a skeleton and I dress it up; that’s my patient. There is a map of the world with stickers representing where students are from. There are so many holes in my walls!

I want to return to AU to finish my doctorate. I’m 73. I want to publish again. I’ve published in American nursing texts and now want to publish my story.

I came from a farming family where girls were to get married to farmers. I want to say that Canada is here for you in terms of whatever education you aspire to have.

AU is what did it for me. I could publish because you gave me the permission and the structure and the strategies to undertake the studies and complete them.

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AU is what did it for me. I could publish because you gave me the permission and the structure and the strategies to undertake the studies and complete them. I value my life and it’s my privilege to be here. I want to encourage others. I want my grandchildren to have the same zest for living and learning, wherever they are in the world.

At one point in my life, I thought I was the last person in the world named Edna. It’s Hebrew. It means “rejuvenation.” That fits. Because through education, that’s what AU did for me.
Athabasca University Graduate Students’ Association (AUGSA) is a student-run, diverse, and multi-faceted organization that aims to meet your needs as a graduate student at Athabasca University.

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