

SPRING | 2016 NO.9

OPEN

A MAGAZINE FOR THE ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

Boomtown Belize

Jungle hides secrets of
once-bustling Alabama

+
Providing Comfort
Helping the Caribbean
aboard a mega hospital ship

The Power of Story
Change the narrative,
change history



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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.

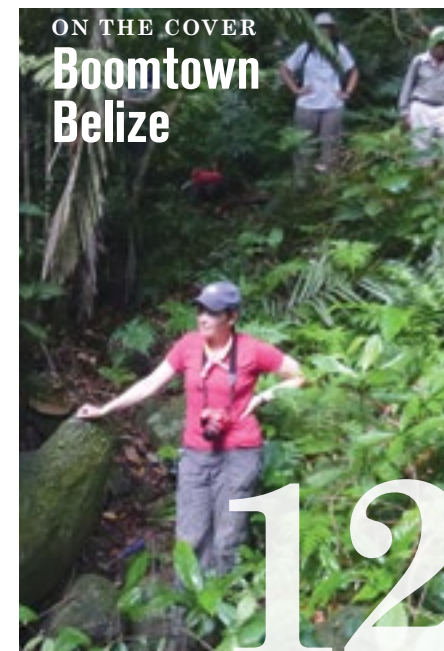
As an open university, we strive to help people everywhere overcome the challenges that can prevent them from attending traditional university — challenges like family and job responsibilities and not being able to relocate to go to school. Our open admission policy allows anyone 16 or older the potential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

Keep up with the latest AU news

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athabascau.ca
- AU NEWSROOM**
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The AU world view

Photo courtesy John O'Brien



Open. Online. Everywhere. At Athabasca University, it's bigger than that, though. It's our mission and our promise. And we like to reflect it in everything we do. We're open to everyone who wants a post-secondary education. That's our core mission, and it's no accident that the magazine you're holding is called *Open*. Online is obvious, and who isn't these days? We moved online quite a few years ago, and pretty much everything we offer is available virtually. But this issue is about the third of those three pillars: Everywhere.

And we really mean it. We're everywhere. In this issue, you'll read about some exciting new research that may help clean up tailings ponds in Alberta. It's amazing what a few little bugs can do when they get their glow on.

We'll take you to the jungles of Central America where Dr. Meaghan Peuramäki-Brown is using 21st-century technology to solve a 10th-century mystery. And we'll take you on board a U.S. Navy hospital ship where Dr. Kimberley Lamarche spent part of her summer fulfilling a continuing promise to people in the Caribbean as part of a military humanitarian mission. We'll also take a side trip to a school in Nepal, to a new program in Greece and to the boreal forest in Northern Canada and Finland, where some noted Canadian filmmakers are marking the end of a long and storied career bringing tales of the wilderness to the big screen.

Oh, and one last thing before I forget. We've completely re-designed the magazine for this issue. We've tried to make it brighter, more readable and to bring you a few more stories, in a smaller space, with some awesome photography. Everyone is busy these days, and there's a lot competing for your attention. We hope the new look will make *Open* more accessible, and will make for a much better read — everywhere. Enjoy.

John O'Brien
Managing Editor

**'We really mean it —
we're everywhere.'**

READ ON

Open is only the tip of the AU story iceberg. Check out our website for more great reads, and don't forget to follow us on Facebook and Twitter. You'll find all the links inside the front cover of this issue.

OPEN

SPRING 2016 NO. 9

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

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HIGHLIGHTING THE NEW AND NOTABLE FROM ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

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Photos: Athabasca University



Flying to must-read heights

It may be her first novel, but it's making a very big splash on Canada's literary scene. Dr. Tracey Lindberg's *Birdie* made the *Maclean's* Bestsellers list for fiction and CBC Radio's Canada Reads list of five finalists. Lindberg is a professor of Indigenous Studies at Athabasca University's Centre for World Indigenous Knowledge and Research.



Keepin' it green

After 37 years in Saskatchewan, it took a move to Alberta for Peter MacKinnon, interim AU president and dedicated Roughriders fan, to get his hands on the Grey Cup. He's proudly holding the CFL's top prize thanks to a surprise visit to the AU campus by a few Edmonton Eskimos players last fall. Unfortunately, watermelons weren't on sale that day.

Seeking winged beauties

They may look like they're having fun, but these kids are actually doing science. Armed only with nets, these boys were taking part in Science Outreach Athabasca's annual butterfly count. Our aspiring lepidopterists snagged 132 specimens representing eight species ... down from previous years probably because of the hot dry summer.



10 years of living history

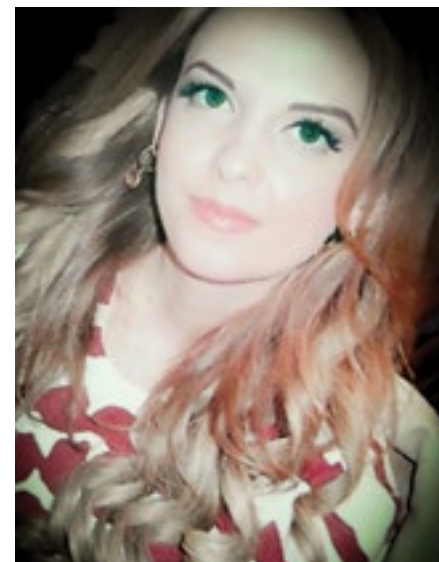
No, she isn't getting ready for the zombie apocalypse. Heritage Resources Management student Erica Tsui is examining a First World War-era respirator ... or as the rest of us know it, a gas mask. The HRM program celebrated its 10th anniversary last fall, commemorating a successful decade of delivering distinctive heritage education to students like Tsui.



Photos: Athabasca University

Graduating in Greece

The pursuit of knowledge is as much a part of Greece's history as its passion for art and great food. So no surprise, then, that AU's Master of Education in Distance Education program has been accredited by the country's universities. Natalia Antonopoulou is one of the first two Greek students to graduate from the only English-language master's degree offered fully at a distance.



Dulcet tones of retirement

Now that he's retired, there's lots of time to get hammered. Okay, that was a stretch, but Dr. Terry Anderson's dulcimer — a musical instrument that uses hammers to strike strings — sure is. The well-known AU professor called it a career last spring, giving him time to pursue his musical passions.



That's three As, eh?

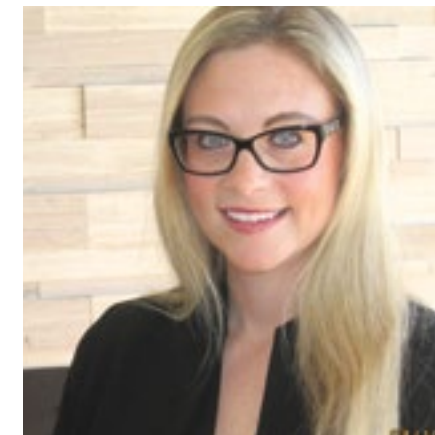
The man with the big smile and the cool scarf is AU's Dr. Mohamed Ally, visiting a school in Nepal. A few years ago, he spearheaded an effort to set up a computer lab for kids at the Mansingh Dharma School in Kathmandu. Last year, they asked him back to say thanks — by naming the lab after AU!



Photos: Margaret Edwards (ExecuTrek); Mansingh Dharma School; Melain Swift (Kelava)

Happy #10

Tin is the traditional gift for a 10th anniversary and Canadian Virtual University/ Université Virtuelle Canadienne (CVU-UVC) has proved its mettle. AU is one of 11 national universities in the consortium, which offers online learning to 5,000-plus students worldwide. Something else worth celebrating: it helped fund education for students in CARICOM (Caribbean community) countries. Two very good reasons for AU to raise a toast to CVU at a festive fête in Ottawa last October.



On the ExecuTrek track

Dr. Margaret Edwards, dean of the Faculty of Health Disciplines, spent two June 2015 days in Valcartier, Que., experiencing life as a reservist through the Canadian Armed Forces ExecuTrek program. AU is popular with reserves and regular forces personnel because they can take their studies with them wherever they go.



X marks the spot

AU's student organizations rallied cross-country learners to make sure their voices were heard during Canada's federal election. AUSU and AUGSA teamed up with the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations to take part in the gung-ho, grassroots *Get Out the Vote* campaign. Fun fact: AU's coast-to-coast representation was unprecedented among all participating universities — with pledges coming in from Whitehorse to St. John's.

Talking fast

Forget *Cards Against Humanity*, the new party game for grad students ought to be *Say-Your-Thesis-in-180-Seconds-or-Drink*. Libations weren't on hand, however, last April when Master of Counselling student Kathleen Kelava became AU champ of the international 3MT (Three-Minute Thesis) Competition. Her knack for tight talk placed her in the running at the western regional competition at Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops, B.C. (What else has Kelava been up to? See page 27 for the answer.)

GRABBING HOLD

Support resource helps AU students keep their heads above the school-work-life waves. by Heidi Staseson

Mental health snapshot

- **1 in 5** Canadians will experience a mental health issue over their lifetime
- mood and anxiety disorders affect about **22%** of Canadians
- **3 million** Canadians live with depression at any one time
- **2 in 3** people experiencing a mental health challenge do not seek treatment because they fear judgment and rejection
- **81%** of Canadians say they are more aware of mental health issues today than five years ago
- **70%** believe attitudes about mental health have improved
- **57%** believe stigma has been reduced

Sources: Partners for Mental Health, Bell Let's Talk, Ceridian HCM

Photo: iStockphoto

OF A LIFELINE

Being a student can be stressful at the best of times, and when you add family and work responsibilities to the load — as many Athabasca University students do — it might feel like you're drifting out to sea. AU's students' organizations are offering a LifeLine that can help.

The AUGSA and AUSU (representing graduate and undergraduate students, respectively) recognize the importance of mental health in students' success and now offer access to a high-quality support resource with a free, 24/7/365 emotional well-being program.

'That's why [we offer] the Student LifeLine service for our students at AU. We feel it's that important.'

Ross Tyson

'Early statistics tell us this service is absolutely something that was missing for [undergraduate] students at AU.'

Shawna Wasylyshyn

Student LifeLine is available to AU's 46,000 students worldwide. It comprises a toll-free hotline and website support that connects students to a network of more than 3,000 certified professionals — face-to-face (not available outside Canada), on the phone, or via video counselling. Students could be studying in Toronto, holidaying in Newfoundland or working in Vancouver and have access to Student LifeLine.

AUGSA President Cynthia Gordon says it's important AU's student organizations look at mental health as a whole: "We've got a population with a lot more on their plate, generally speaking, than your traditional bricks and mortar schools."

She notes that AU students' needs tend to be different and more complex, pointing to the university's typically older demographic, which means students are juggling full-time jobs and family responsibilities when they take on the added responsibilities of school.

Ross Tyson, AUGSA executive director, concurs. "The master's and PhD students are generally working, balancing a career with a family, have car and house payments — and the list of 'ands' goes on. That's why [we offer] the Student LifeLine service for our students at AU. We feel it's that important."

AUSU president Shawna Wasylyshyn saw how successful the program was among AU graduate students and spent about a year championing the cause for AU undergrads. She believes the program is strongly needed, noting that undergraduate students address the same home-work-school issues that face graduate students — and many Canadians.

"You might just feel hopeless, or that there's no help for you," she says. "But if that help sort of fell into your lap, you might think 'this is exactly what I need.' Students, like everyone else, get the holiday blues. And after the holidays, some of them are trying to figure out how to pay their holiday bills, and now that we're in the midst of an economic downturn, there's all that!"

Early metrics show the program is working. Statistics from the first three months of service alone indicate there

were more than 800 visits to the Student LifeLine website, with the Depression Centre among the most popular features. This interactive program teaches students coping mechanisms while providing them with strategies for dealing with anxiety and depression.

Wasylyshyn says she's not surprised by the uptake, adding that undergraduate students also completed 45 self-assessments from the site, the most clicked-on topic outlining depression indicators.

"These early statistics tell us this service is absolutely something that was missing for [undergraduate] students at AU — and that we've done a good job getting it into the hands of the members. Along with the continued support, the use of the service will probably only increase." ■

Check out Student LifeLine at LifeWorks.com or call 1.877.418.1537.

Reaching out

In the Student LifeLine's first three months, AU undergrad students:

- logged more than **800** visits to the Student LifeLine website. The most-common topics searched were related to personal, mental health and relationship issues
- accessed **228** online LifeArticles. The most-common topics included effective time management, ideas for living within your means and choosing a counsellor or therapist
- completed **45** self-assessments. The most frequent was "Are you experiencing symptoms of depression?"
- accessed **30** podcasts
- opened **18** Student LifeLine support service cases (five used the online depression centre, six used face-to-face counselling, seven used immediate telephone support, two used telecounselling)

Source: Ceridian HCM

WATER WORLD

DIVING BELOW THE SURFACE TO SEE WHAT'S STRESSING THE ATHABASCA RIVER
— AND THE ORGANISMS THAT CALL IT HOME

by Heidi Staseson

Athabasca University's newest research chair knows a thing or two about river basins. And that's a good thing, since he'll be studying one of the world's longest. Dr. Chris Glover has spent the past seven years researching and lecturing in New Zealand and is looking forward to tackling the challenges facing the Athabasca River Basin.

Glover, who has a PhD in Environmental Science from King's College (London), is AU's Campus Alberta Innovates Program (CAIP) chair in Hydroecology and Environmental Health. While here, he'll ramp up another seven years of research as a member of the Faculty of Science and Technology, helping to advance knowledge of the river basin and matters related to watershed biology.

“The big challenge with working in ... the Athabasca is the changing nature of the river.... It's not a small piece of water.”

“Most of my work will focus in the space between what's going into the river and the effects on the ecosystem as a whole,” says Glover. “I'll look at how contaminants and other stressors associated with the basin are going to impact the river quality and organisms that live there.”

Part of that ecosystem includes microbes and invertebrate animals — small things darting around that people don't even see, like little crustaceans and copepods, water fleas and fly larvae. There is also a variety of fish, including salmonids such as trout and walleye.

The stressors Glover mentions are key to his ecosystem research. They include a variety of chemical contaminants potentially being leached into the river via the oil sands. They also comprise variables such as changing temperature and water flows, often associated with industrial processes, and from mining activities and agriculture (which contributes pesticide and nutrient run-off), forestry, and pulp and paper milling.

With a river as long as the Athabasca, the types of stressor agents will be determined based on location. “Really, I think the big challenge with working in a river basin like this is the changing nature of the river as you go from one end to the other. It's not a small piece of water.”

Glover says his plan is to make headway toward understanding how chemical contamination and other kinds of stressors influence the health of the organisms that live in and rely on the river basin.

“You do what you can. Any little bit is going to help.” ■

The 1,200 km Athabasca River, which flows and fans out from the Rockies northeast to the Peace-Athabasca Delta and Lake Athabasca, is teeming with life beneath its surface. But, like many river systems around the world, it's also under stress from development and pollution.

STRAIGHT FROM MIDDLE EARTH

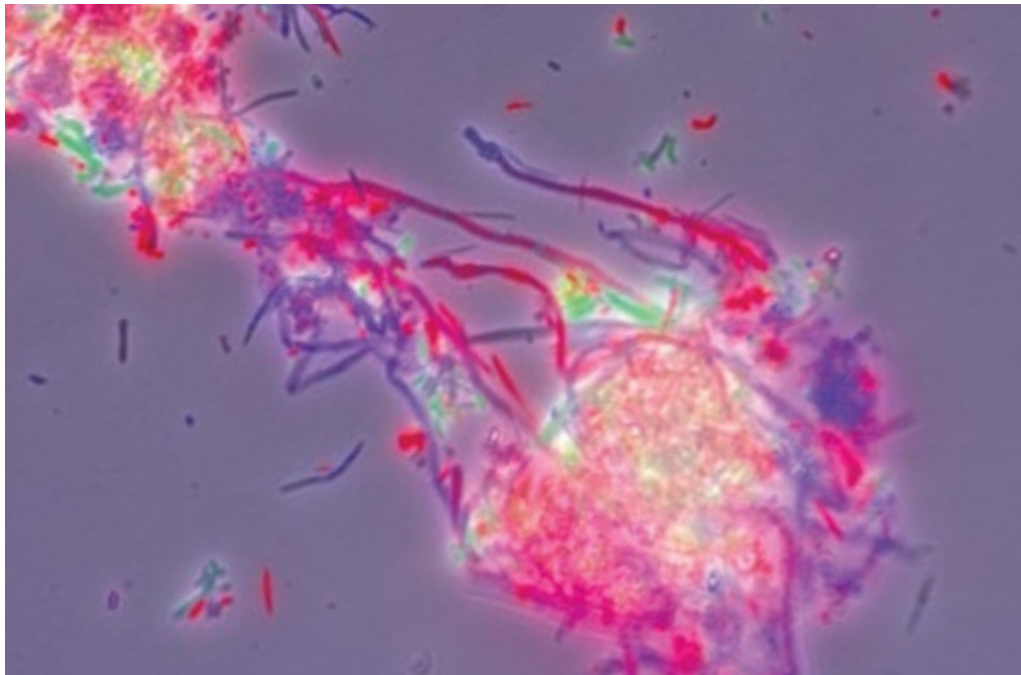
New Zealand's Dr. Chris Glover is no stranger to Canadian science and did post-doctoral work in the country for a couple of years. He says Canada is not much different in terms of the basic problems water bodies face, noting that sustainability of water resources is just as important as it is in hobbit territory.

“But please don't call it that,” he says.

“New Zealanders sometimes object to being compared to characters in *The Lord of the Rings* — although basically almost everybody from New Zealand was in the film. I went to a car rental agency in Edmonton the other day and the sales person asked, ‘Where are you from?’ When I told her she said, ‘Oh, I love *Lord of the Rings*!’ That was literally the first thing that came out of her mouth. So we spent five minutes talking about *The Lord of the Rings* — that's all she really cared about; that's all she knew about New Zealand.”

Despite the similarities between the two countries, Glover points to one big difference: research funding. “In New Zealand, nobody wants to fund important research that looks at environmental problems; they turn a blind eye to it. Whereas in Canada, I think there are a lot more opportunities to fund research. People are more willing to acknowledge environmental problems — and so they are willing to do something about it.”

photo by Christy Dean



A BUG’S LIGHT

WHEN ‘WHAT’S IN THE WATER?’ IS THE QUESTION, MICROBES GLOW THE ANSWER

by **Cathy Nickel**

They’re everywhere. Around you, on you and even in you. And they’re about to be put to work for you.

Microbes — conversationally called “bugs” — may be incredibly small, but Athabasca University’s Dr. Shawn Lewenza, environmental health associate professor, thinks they have big potential. His research in the cutting-edge field of synthetic biology (a blend of engineering and biology) is looking beyond what makes bugs tick, to how they can be used for innovative new biotechnologies.

‘If we can ... transform [microbes] into effective biosensors ... that could help keep drinking water safe and our natural environment cleaner.’

“Bugs are living organisms, and I’m exploiting their natural properties to detect environmental toxins,” he says of work he and colleagues are doing to investigate transforming microbes into biosensors to identify pollutants in water.

“By implanting the genes from naturally luminescent bacteria into other bacteria that use contaminants as a food source, we can engineer bacteria that light up in the presence of toxins.”

Given the importance of water safety, biosensors can be designed for use in detecting pharmaceuticals in municipal wastewater, and for a host of nasty chemicals in oil sands tailings ponds. Biosensors can glow green, red, yellow or blue in response to multiple toxins in the water. That information, when combined with more knowledge about how microbes metabolize toxins, will possibly lead to bioengineered bugs that are better able to degrade those chemicals. Most

importantly, they could potentially get to work more quickly and efficiently, and even remediate water polluted by “recalcitrant” chemicals that are notoriously difficult to remove. The ideal result? Water that was once contaminated could be clean.

“Thousands of different microbes occur naturally in tailings ponds,” Lewenza explains. “Degradation is happening all the time on its own. But if we can find the degradation genes, we can possibly stimulate bugs to increase their efficiency. We’re looking at how bacteria respond to specific environmental pollutants, and then how we can stimulate them to degrade those pollutants.”

The implications could make a world of difference to Alberta’s waterways. “We can’t store contaminated oil sands wastewater indefinitely,” Lewenza says. “Water safety, water availability, climate change ... these are all important issues and if we can develop the potential of biosensors, microbes can help ensure water is cleaner and safer for everyone.”

“If we can exploit the great diversity of microbes in the environment, and transform them into effective biosensors, we can create a technology that’s readily scalable and affordable — and that could help keep drinking water safe and our natural environment cleaner.” ■



Intrigued by the potential of microbes? Check out Dr. Shawn Lewenza’s blog at synbiosmart.com and read about engineered microbes that detect disease and produce medicines.

THE SYN BIO BOOM

Biosensors are only the beginning.

Dr. Shawn Lewenza says industry is starting to look into the potential of bioplastics produced by microbes grown in fermenters, biofuels made from grasses or wood waste, and biofoundries (turning bugs into factories to “brew” drugs like morphine).

AU | AT A GLANCE

A QUICK LOOK AT THE STATS SHOWS THAT AU LIVES UP TO ITS MOTTO:

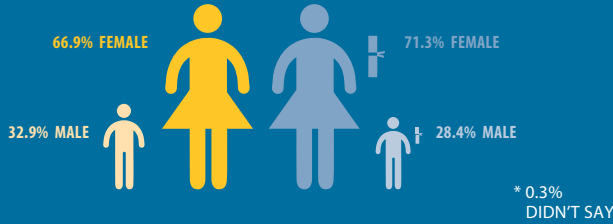
open. online. everywhere.

35,803 Undergrad Students
67,748 Undergrad Courses

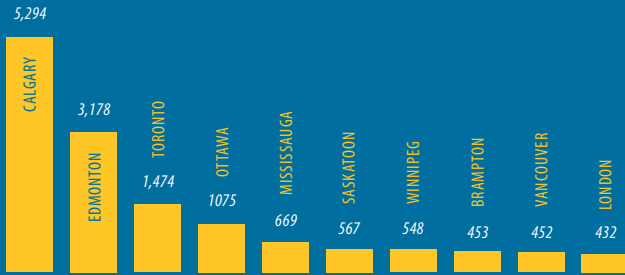
4,118 Grad Students
9,666 Grad Courses

DEGREES AWARDED SINCE 1972

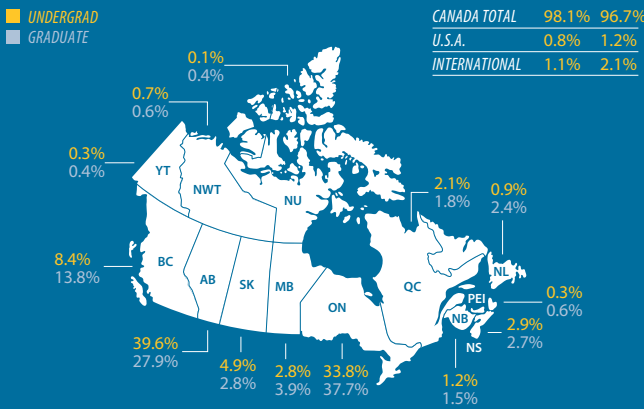
- 6,509 Humanities & Social Sciences
- 5,469 Health Disciplines
- 506 Science & Technology
- 6,613 Business
- 730 Distance Education



TOP CITIES FOR AU STUDENTS



PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS BY LOCATION



BOOMTOWN BELIZE

DO THE MAYA OFFER LESSONS ABOUT OUR RESOURCE-FUELLED,
BOOM-AND-BUST URBAN ECONOMIES? by John O'Brien

It looks like any other stretch of jungle in the shadow of the foothills of the Maya Mountains in central Belize; lush, green and mostly overgrown, criss-crossed by streams that empty into Waha Leaf Creek, which winds its way east to the coast.

But, 1,300 years ago, it had an acropolis, temples and pole-and-thatch housing for hundreds of Maya who lived and worked here. Elites and non-elites alike were drawn to this important Maya manufacturing and trading centre. This place — called Alabama — may have been an early boomtown.

Boomtowns fascinate Dr. Meaghan Peuramäki-Brown, an archaeologist and assistant professor in Athabasca University's anthropology program. "My hometown of Thunder Bay, Ont., was originally a boomtown," she says. "[It] has undergone several boom-and-bust cycles since the beginnings of the fur trade. I've long had an interest in the history of the community and the reasons for its successes and failures. I suppose this interest 'bled' into my research."

This led her to the jungle of the small Central American country on a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada-funded project to see if Alabama (see sidebar) was what archaeologists call a centre of "rapid resource-based urbanism" — what the rest of us would call a boomtown.

Dr. Meaghan Peuramäki-Brown stands next to one of many massive granite boulders in the surrounding Maya Mountains foothills.



Dr. Meaghan Peuramäki-Brown takes a closer look at the architectural conditions at the Alabama ball court, which is overgrown by jungle.

It certainly has all the makings of one: evidence of rapid construction and occupation; little of the garbage normally associated with construction in slower-growing Maya settlements; important urban features including plazas and a ball court; its location along an important trade route at the political and economic frontier of Maya civilization; and, its extensive use of local granites in construction (Maya settlements were typically constructed largely of limestone, which was used only in sacred structures in Alabama) and corn-grinding implements.

In addition to the usual tools of the trade — brushes, trowels, tape measures and the like — Peuramäki-Brown brings a high-tech approach to the site: 3D imaging. She, along with AU's Colin Elliott, manager of web projects and services, are imaging artifacts from the site, so students, most of whom will never visit Belize, can practise basic methods of archaeological investigation usually taught only in the classroom.

"It will allow students to manipulate the object in multiple directions, record characteristics such as colour and measurements, and create section drawings," she says, adding that she and her small team of students and fellow researchers have scanned a few basic artifacts so far, mostly ceramics and obsidian (volcanic glass) blades. She hopes to add to this 3D collection on future expeditions starting this summer.

If Alabama does turn out to be an ancient boomtown, Peuramäki-Brown hopes researchers can derive some lessons for modern boomtowns, including some in Canada.

"The opportunity to study an instance of ancient rapid resource-based urbanism is

'Studying ... ancient rapid resource-based urbanism is compelling, as it provides an innovative way of addressing topics such as urban planning, local and regional economic and sociopolitical organization.'

compelling, as it provides an innovative way of addressing topics such as urban planning, local and regional economic and sociopolitical organization, and the shifting relationships of households to larger civic authorities," she says.

Unlike modern boomtowns, no one knows why Alabama died out around 1000 AD. Perhaps it's because Maya civilization shifted toward the northern areas of Mexico's Yucatan peninsula around that time. Or it may be something else entirely. The Maya left no written records at the site, so the answers, if they exist, lie somewhere below the jungle canopy, waiting to be uncovered, scanned and studied.

Meaghan Peuramäki-Brown will be back in a few months looking for those answers — and for the lessons the ancient Maya may have for today's boomtowns. ■

WHY ALABAMA?

It may have been sweet home to thousands over the centuries, but Alabama is not a Maya word. Alabama (the word means "cleared forest" in the Muskogean language) likely got its moniker relatively recently because it was the plantation site of the Waha Leaf Banana Company, which was headquartered in Mobile, Alabama.

PROVIDING COMFORT

FULFILLING A PROMISE TO CARE FOR PEOPLE IN THE CARIBBEAN ABOARD THE WORLD'S LARGEST FLOATING HOSPITAL by *Open* staff



USNS Comfort is the largest hospital ship in the world, a distinction she shares with her sister ship USNS Mercy. With 1,000 patient care beds, 80 ICU beds, 12 operating rooms and even its own oxygen-generating plant, Comfort is equipped for every type of medical care, from routine to life-saving. Operation Continuing Promise 2015 ran April to September 2015.



Photo courtesy Kimberley Lamarche



Dr. Kimberley Lamarche (above at 35 Field Ambulance in Sydney, N.S.) helped bring essential medical care to many children as part of Continuing Promise 2015.

It's 05:15 on a hot, sunny May day. United States Navy Ship Comfort is anchored four nautical miles off the coast of Nicaragua. Hundreds of personnel head to shore at Puerto Cabezas. Hours earlier, an advance team performed a minor miracle, transforming a school and its field into a “pop-up” medical clinic and surgical screening centre. Almost 1,000 local residents wait patiently for health care they never expected, and likely never imagined.

Through the daylight hours, babies get checkups. Children and adults see medical professionals for the first time. Elderly people get their sight back. Skin conditions are treated. Scores of lab tests are completed, biopsies done, diagnoses made, drugs prescribed and dispensed. Hundreds of people are treated on site. Others, some chosen by local health providers and others who have waited in line for days, are screened by the Comfort's surgical team. About 100 will go to the ship the next day for surgery and recovery.

Amidst it all is Dr. Kimberley Lamarche, Athabasca University alumna, associate professor in the Faculty of Health Disciplines, nurse practitioner and Canada Reserve Force medical platoon commander at 35 Field Ambulance in Sydney, N.S. Those last two roles led to Captain

Photos of USNS Comfort and Operation Continuing Promise 15 courtesy United States Department of Defense



LEFT: A child recovers on board the Comfort following surgery to repair a cleft lip, performed by Operation Smile physicians taking part in Continuing Promise 2015. Every patient treated on the Comfort had someone by their side. RIGHT: The promise extended beyond on-site medical clinics to include experts from the Comfort meeting with local health providers to increase capacity, construction engineers building school roofs and veterinarians helping ensure the health of animals vital to community economies.

Lamarche becoming one of only 18 Canadian Forces members invited to join 1,200 medical personnel taking part in Continuing Promise 15 — and becoming the first Canadian nurse practitioner ever deployed clinically with the U.S. Navy.

“It was like nothing I’d ever seen. The need was like nothing I’d ever seen. And it was like nothing I’d ever done,” Lamarche says of the brisk pace and diversity of cases she handled over four weeks. “People forward of our arrival scoped out the needs. On site, we broke

it down: ‘You need a check-up.’ ‘You need treatment for a tropical disease.’”

Continuing Promise, a biannual, dual-purpose training and humanitarian medical mission for global citizens in need, was an extraordinary opportunity for Lamarche to demonstrate the capability and credibility of nurse practitioners on military missions, and to affirm their place as part of a new wave of health care professionals.

“This was the best example of what a military nurse practitioner can do — and the difference any nurse practitioner can make,” she says.

The 2015 exercise served more than 120,000 patients in 11 countries in the Caribbean region, and Lamarche was in the thick of it as part of forward operations in Jamaica and Nicaragua. Patients presented with everything from chronic disease management issues, to urgent health concerns, to tropical diseases, to rare conditions seldom seen in North America. Lamarche assessed needs,

treated those her team could and referred others to on-site specialists.

“Sometimes, we were able to change lives on the spot,” she says, recalling a delightful woman who hadn’t received medical care for 80 years whose life changed immediately when her cataracts were removed and she could see for the first time in years.

“But other times, we had to give families some very difficult news, and tell them there was nothing we could

“This was the best example of what a military nurse practitioner can do — and the difference any nurse practitioner can make.”

do. It was heartbreaking to tell a family that all of their children had an invasive cancer made worse by the sun, and their children would die.”

It was, she says, a profoundly moving and rewarding experience, both personally and professionally. “I saw more, did more and learned more during my time aboard the Comfort than I did over the past two years.

“I was exposed to the highest quality of international medical professionals and took part in continuing medical education during under-way periods at sea — experience and information I can share with my students and my reserve medics.

“Most importantly, I had an unbelievable opportunity to make a difference in people’s lives.” ■

FROM THE LOGBOOK

May 12, 2015

The transit from Jamaica to Nicaragua was rocky, which was interesting. Medication was required!

On the ship, for this rotation, in addition to our own crew, we have Operation Smile on board, repairing cleft lips and palates. We would see the children playing while they wait for surgery, and the relief on the faces of their parents, knowing their children were in good hands.

I have been off-ship for my daily work and I’ve seen many things that have made my heart melt — especially the little kids. Seeing children the same ages as my daughters, giving them hugs and Canada stickers (from home) goes a long way in helping to break down language barriers.

The medicine is fascinating. Through our subject matter experts, I’m seeing presentations that we would never have the opportunity to observe in North America. Things like tropical medicine and humanitarian health-provider resilience. It’s been a great learning opportunity for me, and a good experience to share our care with the local population, some of whom have never seen a doctor in their entire lives!

The most challenging aspect of this mission stop is the language; the patients do not speak English, and only 20 to 25 per cent speak Spanish (which I do not). The local dialect is called Misquito and it makes patient care challenging. Where possible, volunteer translators were provided to us and, in some cases, these were local medical students who were very eager to learn.

Nevertheless, I sure wish I had paid more attention to *Dora the Explorer*. :(



Photo: Athabasca University

SAVING THE FOREST

RESPECTED ALBERT FILMMAKERS INSPIRE ACTION THROUGH A POWERFUL FILM AND SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY AWARENESS by John O’Brien

It stretches from Newfoundland and Labrador to British Columbia, into Canada’s northern territories and through Scandinavia and Russia. It’s home to a staggering diversity of wildlife, billions

the world’s largest ecosystems and green space for countless forms of wildlife. They want to encourage Canadians to protect at least 50 per cent of this precious place, and are doing so through

“We’re losing the forest at a rapid rate. Canada has been listed as the No. 1 country in terms of forest degradation, the way we are consuming it.”

Albert Karvonen

of trees and some of the most spectacular vistas on Earth. And it’s under threat.

The boreal forest is the subject of Albert and Pirkko Karvonen’s final film, *The Forest is Calling*. The prominent Alberta filmmakers have called it a career after more than 120 nature films, documentaries and multimedia productions with an impassioned plea to protect Canada’s boreal legacy. “We’re losing the forest at a rapid rate,” says Albert. “Canada has been listed as the No. 1 country in terms of forest degradation the way we are consuming it.”

The Karvonens are lifelong outspoken proponents of wildlife preservation, and say it’s critical we do what we can to protect Canada’s beloved boreal forest — one of

the power of filmmaking and a \$250,000 donation in 2012 to Science Outreach — Athabasca, to promote science awareness of the Athabasca region. Their latest hour-long, high-definition film takes viewers along

with the Karvonens on a months-long, spectacular nature-infused trek through the majestic boreal forests of Alberta and Finland (where Albert’s roots lie). The film debuted last spring at AU’s main campus in Athabasca, to a warm and enthusiastic reception from the audience — for the film and for Albert and Pirkko.

Dr. Lisa Carter, dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology, couldn’t be more proud. “We at Athabasca University, and the citizens of Athabasca and beyond, are beneficiaries of the valuable legacy that Albert and Pirkko have provided through the stories they weave of the natural world and its residents.” ■

Giving what you live

Albert and Pirkko Karvonen’s passion for nature is reflected in their art, their words and their deeds. Their inspiring donation to Science Outreach — Athabasca to advance science and awareness — and to empower future generations to take better care of the natural world — is a true investment in the future.

Donations to student awards, research and priority initiatives at Athabasca University deliver equally great returns, and have the potential to transform lives and communities. For more information about how you can share your life’s work and create a living legacy through a gift to AU, please contact development@athabascau.ca.



THE KIDS ARE GOING TO BE OKAY

IT'S NOT EASY BEING A PARENT THESE DAYS. A NEW ROADMAP MAY HELP NAVIGATE ONE OF LIFE'S MOST IMPORTANT — AND CHALLENGING — JOURNEYS **by Cathy Nickel**

In the 1950s, Dr. Benjamin Spock was the parenting guru. Barbara Coloroso proclaimed “kids are worth it” in the 1990s. The Tiger Mom roared to life in 2011. There’s never a shortage of advice for parents, and figuring out what’s right for today is no easy task. But help is at hand: Athabasca University researchers are looking into an approach that has the potential to revolutionize parenting and shift the tides in families and communities for generations.

‘This is how we build the core relationship that will be there every day of a child’s life into adulthood, and lays the foundation for future relationships with their own children.’

Dr. Gina Wong

Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research funding to develop a team and a plan to conduct Canada’s first study of the eight-week Circle of Security intervention, an internationally recognized parenting approach that’s based on emotions, rather than on behaviours.

“We have high expectations of ourselves as parents, but instead of looking at difficult childhood behaviours as something to be managed or even extinguished, Circle of Security enables parents to understand and respond to their child’s emotional needs,” Rempel explains.

In essence, the approach changes the question from “What’s wrong with my child?” to “What is my child feeling to act this way?” Based on developmental neuroscience research and attachment theory, Circle of Security aims to help parents be “good enough” instead of “perfect.”

“People may think parenting comes naturally, but that isn’t the case,” says Wong, noting today’s parents are raising children at a time of massive societal change and unpredictability, in an increasingly hyper-sexualized culture, and must deal with issues ranging from bullying and

gender identity, to pervasive social media and an economic downturn.

“As parents, we need to figure out what’s right for our kids,” she says, noting that tools to better understand what underlies a child’s behaviour are especially important in those heat-of-the-moment situations when tensions run high. “Instead of yelling ‘Stop it! Go to your room!’ and leaving a child to deal with difficult feelings on their own, parents are encouraged to “be with” their child and figure out what’s going on emotionally.

“They’re encouraged to follow their child’s lead, but also to remember that they’re still parents, and kids need them to be parents,” Wong says. “There are times when parents have to take charge. This is how we build the core relationship that will be there every day of a child’s life into adulthood, and lays the foundation for future relationships with their own children.

“Ruptures occur in every close relationship, and making repairs with our children shows we are bigger, stronger, wiser and kind — that we never let go of the importance of the relationship.”

More than 50 years of research proves that children who are securely attached to their parents benefit immensely — from better relationships with friends and better aca-

ademic achievement, to greater confidence and improved ability to handle stress — and the effectiveness of the 20-week Circle of Security initiative is well-established. Rempel and Wong’s research is looking into the impact of a compressed, eight-week program that may be more accessible for some parents, and more scalable for community providers.

‘There’s an amazing transformation with parents. And it goes beyond parenting.’

Dr. Gwen Rempel

juice and then testing them,” Rempel notes. “It’s a facilitator-driven process. And just as parents who participate in Circle of Security create a safe environment for their children, we need to create that kind of environment for parents who take part.”

When they do? “There’s an amazing transformation with parents,” she says. “And it goes beyond parenting. Because Circle of Security is about relationships and connections, it changes how people look at life and how they interact with family members, spouses, friends, colleagues ... everyone.”

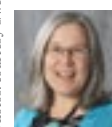
The researchers’ first step is building the corps of trained facilitators to lead randomized control studies across Alberta and B.C. to assess the “before and after” difference. “This isn’t simply giving parents 3cc of parent

SHARK MUSIC

In one Circle of Security exercise, parents look at a picture of a bucolic scene, while listening to beautiful music. Then they look at the same picture and hear the music from *Jaws*. Although only the music has changed, most swear they’re looking at a different picture.

It’s a reminder that most parents learned from their parents and their own experiences of growing up — and everyone has “shark music” playing in their heads that influences how they see what’s going on around them.

Photos: courtesy Gwen Rempel and Gina Wong



For more information about the Circle of Security model being researched by Drs. Gwen Rempel (left) and Gina Wong (right), and how it can have a positive impact on families, visit circleofsecurity.net.

THE POWER OF STORY

THERE'S MORE TO A GOOD STORY THAN MEETS THE EYE. IT MIGHT EVEN CHANGE EVERYTHING YOU BELIEVE IS TRUE **EV** by Cathy Nickel



Photo: Steven Price

What

is history except story on a grand scale? It is arguably the triumph of one person's narrative over another's. There's always an urge to define ourselves in the world, but what story are we hearing? How has it been shaped? Who owns it?

In those few questions lie inspiration for Esi Edugyan, celebrated author of *Half-Blood Blues*, winner of the 2011 Scotiabank Giller Prize, shortlist nominee for the Man Booker Prize, Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize and Governor General's Award for English language fiction, winner of the 2012

'The vast majority of people have great minds for storytelling, but they need to know how to shape it.'

Walter Scott Prize for historical fiction — and Athabasca University's 2015–16 writer-in-residence and writer for health in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

In helping new authors develop their skills and craft great stories, she relishes the time to pause and connect with other writers. "As a writer, I've been focused on my own work, isolated, head down," she says with a laugh. "So this also helps me reflect on the mechanics, the rudiments of writing. Every writer needs to stop and do this when they can."

And that attention to the detail and process of writing, to focusing on the nuts and bolts that hold a piece together, give it structure and flow, explore language and build strong characters is what enables stories to come to life.

"Anyone can tell a story. Writers are people who are able to put the stories together in ways that have cohesion, have meaning, are illuminating," she says. "The vast majority of people have great minds for storytelling, but they need to know how to shape it so someone will receive and understand and accept the story."

While it's probably safe to say most people believe they write well, few have

actually developed the skill. Yet being able to express yourself in a clean and straightforward way, so people know exactly what you mean, is something needed every day, for everything from sending an email to a colleague to delivering a speech. "It might even be more essential today because there are so many information channels," Edugyan notes. "It's so easy to put stuff out there. But how much is being misunderstood because it is written poorly? It's important to get it right."

Getting it right can result in the stories that become the new "truth" in people's understanding of the world around them, and how they fit in society. "The stories that are the cleanest and most compelling are the ones we believe," she says. "Today, there is a greater desire to write stories that have

never been heard, that in some ways have been forgotten or suppressed. Uncovering these and bringing them to the forefront changes the shape of the overall narrative, lets us see a bigger picture — and can change history.

"If I can help someone who is fresh out of the gate as a writer, who is excited, intense and interested in writing, and make their story stronger, that will be amazing." ■



Esi Edugyan was born and raised in Calgary, Alta., the daughter of Ghanaian immigrant parents. Following the release of her first novel, *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*, in 2004, she served as a writer-

in-residence in Stuttgart, Germany, where personal experiences provided inspiration for the critically acclaimed *Half-Blood Blues*, published in 2011. She, her husband and their son currently live in Victoria, B.C., where she is working on a new book to be released later in 2016. Read more about her perspectives on being AU's writer-in-residence at athabascau.ca/news/writer-in-residence.

Writing for herself

There has always been a "confessional" stream to writing, Esi Edugyan says, and the genre carries with it an element of risk for writers.

"Whether what you put out there is generating lots of criticism or lots of praise, it can be damaging. If you get it into your head that this is what everyone loves, for example, it can affect you in a way you don't necessarily want, and can't necessarily see."

For Edugyan, writing is soul-baring, and she has to close her eyes to the fact she's putting herself out there for all to read. "If I were very aware of my presence in the outside world, I'd feel too self-conscious to write. It could be paralyzing. So I don't think about other people. I write for myself."

Does she read reviews? As a general rule, no.

UNDOCUMENTED AND UNWANTED

THOUSANDS OF TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKERS IN CANADA FACE AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE by Jason Foster

As government initiatives go, Canada's Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP) has left quite a legacy: between 2000 and 2013, the number of temporary foreign workers (TFWs) in Canada quadrupled from 90,000 to almost 400,000; widespread reports of worker mistreatment by employers; complaints by employers that the program was too restrictive; accusations that TFWs were taking jobs away from Canadians. The list is long and varied.

'Has the temporary foreign worker issue finally been resolved? Not even close.'

Second, in 2014 the TFWP was split into two programs. The more-stringent rules only apply to low-skilled, low-wage occupations, whereas the new International Mobility Program (IMP) follows the previous rules for employers looking for higher-skilled workers. The IMP focuses on easing the path toward hiring TFWs, and none of the caps, restrictions or time limits apply.

Third, while the changes promised a range of new penalties for employers abusing the system or exploiting workers, there continues to be little to no enforcement of the TFWP's rules. In other words, none of the structural flaws in the program that led to TFWs being mistreated have changed,

so we can expect more stories of horrendous working conditions in the future.

Finally, there is the question of undocumented workers, which is likely the most significant and troubling consequence of the program in the long run. In April 2015, the first batch of work permits affected by the time limit expired, and thousands of TFWs were required to return home. Thousands more must leave Canada over the next five years.

Many of these workers will remain in the country illegally. They will work in the grey labour market without access to formal supports or services, making them even more vulnerable to exploitation. We know many have already chosen to stay, but cannot estimate how many. That number will only grow. Undocumented workers, long a contentious issue south of the border, may become a troubling one for Canada.

One last thing might put the TFWP back on the front page: The new Liberal federal government is expected to enact its own set of changes to the program to reflect its priorities. No one knows what those changes will look like, but if past efforts are an indication, they are sure to spark heated debate. ■



Dr. Jason Foster is an assistant professor, human resources and labour relations, in AU's Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies.

Photo courtesy: Jason Foster

Farfromhome

Top five home countries of temporary foreign workers in Canada in 2012:

1. United States
2. Mexico
3. France
4. U.K.
5. Australia

Source: Employment and Social Development Canada

In June 2014, the Government of Canada announced sweeping changes designed to reduce the use of the program. A cap was imposed on employers hiring lower-skilled workers, the length of time a TFW could remain in Canada was reduced and they were banned altogether in areas of high unemployment. Opponents of the program cheered while employers, especially in Alberta, howled in protest at the reductions, arguing they would lead to job shortages. Advocates for TFWs, on the other hand, lamented that thousands of men and women looking for a better life were caught in the middle.

The media have been largely silent on the issue for the past year. So what is going on? Has the TFWP issue finally been resolved? Not even close. It may have momentarily slipped from public view, but it continues to burn under the surface. Four areas of concern continue to plague the program and could bubble up at any time.

First, we don't yet know if the changes will lead to job shortages. The economic downturn has dampened labour demand, and it is hard to know what will happen when the economy rebounds. More importantly, we haven't yet seen the full impact of the 2014 changes. In particular, the hard cap on employers of low-skilled workers (retail, fast food, etc.) has not been fully implemented and will only reach its final stage in July 2016.



Photo: iStockphoto

Highlighting some of the many accomplishments of and contributions made by Athabasca University alumni, students and faculty

OUR PEOPLE



- 1 The *Globe and Mail* features** Natalie Allport (BMgmt student) and Dale Blythe (MBA '15), who benefited from AU's online flexibility as they pursued their passions, in a May 28, 2015 article. Allport tells how she followed her dream of becoming a competitive snowboarder while pursuing a university degree, while Blythe talks about his MBA experience, begun in Edmonton and finished after moving to Perth, Australia.
- 2 Dr. Paul Jerry**, Counselling program director, is **nominated by students** and receives the 2015 Psychologists' Association of Alberta Excellence in Teaching Psychology Award. He also receives an Academic Staff Outstanding Distinction Award from the AUGSA.
- 3 Larry Berglund** (MBA '03) **publishes a book**, *Good Planets are Hard to Buy: A Management Handbook for Creating Conscious Capitalism, Sustainability Principles and Supply Chain Excellence*, which speaks to conscious capitalism and how sustainable strategies can be put into practice in any corporation. AU Alumni receive a 20% discount. business.athabascau.ca/news/22497
- 4 Alumni and students in the Toronto area gather** on Oct. 20, 2015, to hear Dr. Gwynne Dyer, historian, author and columnist for a thought-provoking discussion on political and economic issues — and to network with members of the extended AU family.
- 5 Environmental Studies coordinator Dr. Lorelei Hanson joins a diverse group of 40 influential leaders in research** working across sectors to transition Alberta's energy system to one that is sustainable and resilient, when she is named a Fellow of the Energy Futures Lab.
- 6 Shastri Ramnath** (MBA '12) is **one of 18 finalists Canada-wide** for a 2015 RBC Canadian Women Entrepreneur Award. She's recognized from among 5,000 nominees for making impressive and substantial contributions to the local, Canadian or global economy and is one of the co-founders of Orix Geoscience Inc., as well as its president and principal geologist.
- 7 Twenty-nine MBA students take Washington, D.C., by storm** for an international elective, "International Business – Understanding and Managing the Legal Risks." Among the places students visit are the Canadian Embassy, U.S. State Department, International Centre for Settlement of Investment and the Embassy of Mexico.
- 8 A free new e-publication** is authored by Drs. Sherri Melrose, Caroline Park and Beth Perry from the Faculty of Health Disciplines. *Creative Clinical Teaching in the Health Professions* is a must-read for nurses and other health professionals who strive to teach with creativity and excellence in clinical settings. epub-fhd.athabascau.ca/clinical-teaching
- 9 Besting students from some of the world's top business schools**, two teams of AU business students — Far and Wide Traders and AU Traders — qualify and travel to Chicago to attend the Chicago Mercantile Exchange Group Day of Market Education.

Photos: 2 courtesy Paul Jerry 3 courtesy amazon.ca 5 courtesy Desy Sarmiento Flores 6 courtesy AU Faculty of Business 7 courtesy wikipedia.org 9 Joe Ravi, CC-BY-SA 3.0, courtesy wikipedia.org



Photos: Athabasca University

Mourning a great humanitarian and education champion
The Athabasca University community, and indeed all of Alberta and Canada, suffered a huge loss in November when Alberta MLA The Hon. Manmeet Bhullar (Bachelor of Arts – Sociology '06) was killed in a tragic highway accident. The 35-year-old Bhullar died as he lived, helping others. He was widely known as a great humanitarian and respected politician, elected to the Alberta Legislature just two years after graduation and the youngest MLA to serve at that time. Over the next seven years, he would serve as Minister of Infrastructure, Human Services and, most recently, Service Alberta. Bhullar was a champion for open learning, believing in empowerment through education. He advocated for it tirelessly, and in a 2011 interview in AU's *Open* magazine, lamented seeing young people with leadership potential not pursue higher education due to various barriers. "People want to better themselves, learn and grow," he said. "My hope and dream is that we promote post-secondary education and continuous learning in every corner of the world. Every student, including those who never thought they were capable of higher education, or never thought [they were] important [enough], should get an education.... I believe education is something that all students need to have access to in order to have a progressive Canada." Bhullar was a rising star who left an indelible mark on everyone he met. "Manmeet's bright light and honourable legacy in Canada, Alberta and at Athabasca University will live on through his spirit and commitment to education for all, for years to come," said AU interim president Peter MacKinnon.



Farewell to a long-time friend from AU's earliest days
It was with great sadness that Athabasca University said goodbye to a dear old friend last May, when The Hon. Frank Appleby passed away at the age of 101. Born on Dec. 23, 1913, in small-town Alberta, Frank Pierpoint Appleby was widely revered for his devotion to community service — and by none more than the AU family which owed him a debt of gratitude for his invaluable advocacy for and contributions during the university's earliest days. Throughout his life, Appleby was committed to learning, education, community advocacy and development in Alberta. He served as sergeant in the Royal Canadian Air Force during the Second World War, and had a deep passion for politics. From 1971 to 1986, Appleby was the MLA for the Athabasca constituency, and served as deputy speaker, responsible for various functions of the Alberta Legislature, for seven years. In 2005, he received Athabasca University's highest honour, the honorary degree of Doctor of Athabasca University, for his passionate support of AU.



Receiving Alberta's most prestigious honour
Two distinguished members of the AU community have received The Alberta Order of Excellence. Fil Fraser (right) is a distinguished journalist, broadcaster, and radio, TV and film producer. He wrote the best-selling memoir *Alberta's Camelot – Culture and the Arts in the Lougheed Years*. Fraser has served as a member of the Board of Directors of Telefilm Canada, and as chief commissioner of the Alberta Human Rights Commission. The Edmonton-based Fraser is also a member of the Order of Canada and was inducted into the Edmonton Cultural Hall of Fame in 2005. Dr. Frits Pannekoek was president of Athabasca University from 2005 to 2014 and is a scholar and tutor in Western Canadian history. He has also served as president of the International Council for Open and Distance Education and as a member of the Alberta SuperNet Research Alliance. Dr. Pannekoek helped launch the Lois Hole Digital Library and the University of Calgary digital library, nationally, through AU's move to online learning and its open-access press, as well as internationally, through the International Council of Distance Education (to ensure the developing world benefited from online learning).

AU’S SHINING STARS: 2016 ALUMNI AWARD RECIPIENTS

Four outstanding Athabasca University ambassadors are blazing new trails in science and education, bolstering communities and seizing every opportunity to better themselves and, in turn, the world



Volunteer Service Award
Sarah Stephens
Bachelor of Nursing, 2012 | Master of Nursing, 2015

Committed to caring for her community

Sarah Stephens pours her heart and soul into her many volunteer projects and causes. “I was brought up to believe that you need to give back. You’re only going to reap what you give,” she says. “‘Sharing is caring’ is one of my family’s mottos.”

Her entire family volunteers for the Belcourt Brousseau Métis Awards each year, and cancer research and cancer walks and runs are a big part of her life. Because of an accident — she shattered her tail bone in a race only a year before she was scheduled to graduate from AU — she’s now a race volunteer.

“I hand out medals at the end,” Stephens says with a laugh. “I’ll be the person at the corner telling you to turn right regardless of whether it’s snowing, raining or 30 degrees outside.”

Receiving the Volunteer Service Award, she says, took her by surprise, and she’s grateful that after her accident, Athabasca University’s flexibility enabled her to keep studying, volunteering and playing the game of life — on her terms.

“Without AU there would have been no way for me to finish my master’s degree. I am so grateful.”



Rising Star Award
Chris Horn
Bachelor of Science, 2012

A pioneer in an emerging science field

As a pathology scientist working at Alberta Children’s Hospital, Chris Horn’s role has the potential to save lives. His job is as important for science as it is demanding.

After graduating from AU, Horn went to the University of Calgary as a graduate student in the Pathologists’ Assistant (PA) M.Sc. program. How new and niche is his field of science? He was the first graduate of that program. “I’m actually the first of this breed, if you will. We’re cutting the pathways for this area of the lab in pathology — to figure out where this profession is going to take us,” he explains.

Horn has made impressive inroads in an emerging field of science in Alberta and has been published in numerous peer-reviewed publications. He’s positive he couldn’t have done it without his Athabasca University experience.

“My AU degree was a springboard to get to the next level,” he says, “both in my education and in my career. Finishing that degree gave me the platform to get a better, more in-depth knowledge of what I was doing in the lab, and from there it allowed me to shoot to the next step to becoming what I am today.”



Distinguished Alumni Award
Hanny Alshazly
Master of Distance Education, 2012

Visionary and advocate for online education

As regional director for Middle East and Africa for D2L (Desire2Learn), Hanny Alshazly’s job hits the bull’s eye of everything he ever wanted to do career-wise and everything he studied at Athabasca University. His work involves expanding educational technologies into new markets, while enhancing the quality of education and experiences for students.

“I am so honoured and proud to be recognized for my work,” Alshazly says. “But to be recognized not just by any entity — but by my alma mater, Athabasca University, the model for online post-secondary education — is truly humbling.”

Using his passion for e-learning as the teaching tool, Alshazly volunteers countless hours giving young people perspective on education and, using his own life story as an example, helps them create unique pathways.

It was while studying at Dalhousie University that Alshazly had an epiphany: He wanted to do something different. That led him to the e-learning field at a time when most people didn’t know what an e-learning consultant was. He was visionary — thinking ahead of the curve and finding a career trajectory that would be in demand down the road. As Alshazly says with pride: “I’m not just an advocate of online learning; I’ve done a full degree in it, and I’ve succeeded.”



Future Alumni Award
Kathleen Kelava
Master of Counselling, 2016

Seizing opportunities for success

For Kathleen Kelava, a mother of three boys ages 10 and under, Athabasca University stands for opportunity.

“AU provides the opportunity for those who are driven to better themselves, whether it’s education or personal development, without having to irreparably sacrifice the other areas of our lives,” she says. “You can still have a career, you can still have a family, and you can still volunteer or get involved in your community or personal commitments.”

Kelava competed in the 3MT (Three-Minute Thesis) Western Regional Competition last year (earning the right to take part by winning AU’s local competition) and was chosen from among 350 applicants to receive one of only five Sarah Gaulin Scholarships. She’s both proud and grateful.

“It is so encouraging and validating — not only for successes I’ve already had at AU, but in terms of the possibilities that are still out there,” she says.

Accepting the Future Alumni Award, Kelava offers students and alumni a few words straight from the heart: “Never forget how lucky you were. It comes back to gratitude. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve reflected on the fact I’ve been able to accomplish everything I did because of what AU is and stands for.”



photo: courtesy Sarah Stephens

AU helped me to help myself

by Sarah Stephens | Master of Nursing: Nurse Practitioner, 2015

We all have gifts — and I believe we have to share those gifts with others; it's a lifetime duty.

My mother is the reason I'm the woman I am today. I was brought up to believe that you need to give back; you're only going to reap what you give. When I was a little girl, it was my mom who first got me volunteering for Habitat for Humanity. She taught me that "sharing is caring," and the importance of "putting in sweat equity." Alongside my father, my sisters, my brother and other family members, we all worked together to help put families into homes they couldn't otherwise afford.

When I volunteer for the St. Vincent de Paul Society, it's all about giving food to people who are having a rough time. They're not asking for a handout; they're just asking for a hand up. And that's truly what I believe Athabasca University is about. It's about giving students a hand up. AU says: "We are an open university and we are going to allow you to study in a way that is functionally capable for you to achieve the goals that you have."

I had two goals in my life, and the first was to become a nurse practitioner. But in 2014, I shattered my tail bone running in a race. I had to have extensive surgery followed by months of recuperation. It was only months before I was supposed to graduate.

I learned, however, that sometimes life throws us those curve balls. And I knew that in the past I had somehow been able to find the energy when I needed it. I was determined to push through. AU led the way.

First, the university's flexibility factor and solution-focused programs allowed me to tailor my practicum. While being on stomach rest for six weeks might sound easy, there's really only so much Netflix one can watch. So I bought a massage table and, for the next six weeks, I could rest and simultaneously look at my homework through the table's head piece to stay in the game.

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The takeaway here is that Athabasca University was the place that allowed me to live my life the way that I wanted to; it allowed me to graduate on time.

My second goal was to become a professor. Last September, I had the privilege and honour of being offered a position as a clinical nursing instructor at AU. I was overjoyed. I'll be teaching again next year.

Without AU, my dreams would not have come true. Because I could study the "Athabasca way," I was still able to put in the hours necessary to volunteer and help others. ■

Sarah Stephens received one of Athabasca University's highest honours, the Volunteer Service Award, in October 2015. Read more of her inspiring story on page 26.



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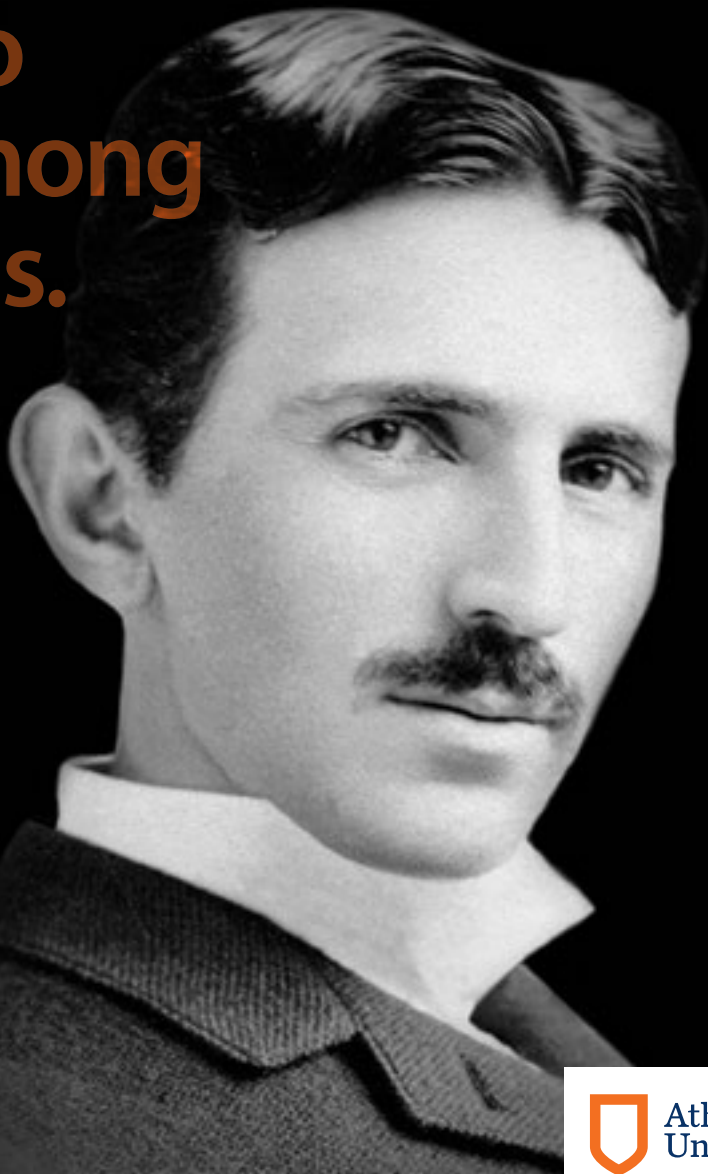
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