

# the insider

A newsletter published for everyone in the Athabasca University community

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## How Does Your Garden Grow?

(left to right) Marilyn Bittorf, Mike Gismondi, Spencer Peterson, Rob Coons, Travis Benson and Ingrid Donahue prepare to measure a plot in AU's new community garden.

Get out of your office and get your hands dirty. A large plot of land across from the ARC at AU Athabasca is being developed into a community garden where you, your co-workers, your family and friends can garden up a storm.

Plots and rows are available at no cost. Get in on the ground floor. Information packages and application forms are available on the [AU Wellness](#) site.

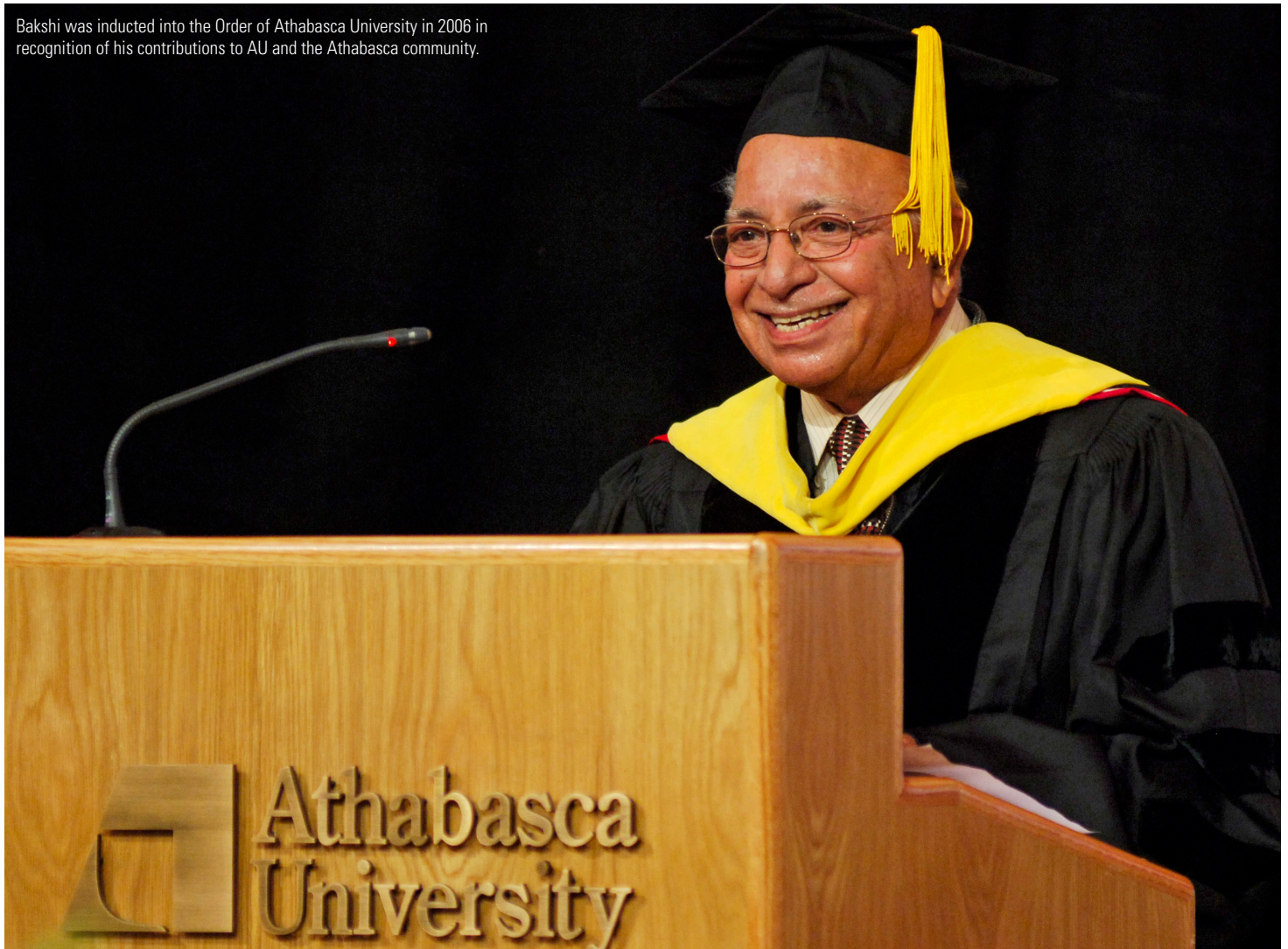


Posted on The Landing:  
<https://landing.athabascau.ca>

Athabasca University 

# An Educator to the End: Dr. Trilochan Bakshi, 1925-2012

Bakshi was inducted into the Order of Athabasca University in 2006 in recognition of his contributions to AU and the Athabasca community.



Respected biologist and community builder Dr. Trilochan S. Bakshi, AU's first full time faculty member and first Dean of Science, passed away on April 24 at the age of 86.

Bakshi co-authored AU's first course, Biology 201: World Ecology. He was a founding member of the Rotary Club of Athabasca and, in 1991, was named AU's first emeritus professor. For many years after his retirement, he continued to be involved in the popular summer course Biology 321: Wild Flowers and with the home-invigilation of exams for students with disabilities.

"Lochan was an old-fashioned professor who insisted on thoroughness from students and from himself," wrote a former student in a [letter](#) to the *Edmonton Journal*. "I have a fond memory of doing the final paper in BIOL 421, an effort that 'ran away' to 96 pages. It didn't faze Lochan; he went to work checking every single reference I had cited. My paper came back with an apology for the delay in marking and loaded with red-letter conversations. I earned my first 100-per-cent mark."

"Lochan Bakshi was a great scholar and teacher. He contributed much to the classification of local flora," read another former student's [tribute](#). "He left a wonderful legacy of education, and until his dying day, he gave us all something to think about."

Bakshi was in the media during the final few weeks of his life, bringing the issue of euthanasia for terminally ill patients into the public mind through thoughtful [commentary](#) and [interviews](#) about the right to die with dignity.

Friends, colleagues and former students who wish to donate to the T.S. Bakshi Herbarium in Bakshi's memory can forward their contribution directly to the Advancement Office (attention: Beverley Watters). Make cheques payable to Athabasca University, and indicate that the contribution is to the T.S. Bakshi Herbarium in the reference or note line on the cheque. The Advancement Office will issue a tax receipt to each donor and forward a list of donors' names to the Bakshi family.



Joyce Helmer, as the Hollow Bone Hunter.

# First Earned AU Doctorate to be Granted at Convocation 2012

Joyce Helmer, the first AU doctoral student to complete her studies, will receive a Doctor of Education degree in distance education at Convocation 2012 in June.

“It feels wonderful to have completed,” Helmer said. “It was a long-term, focused activity that required a lot of personal and professional sacrifice, endurance, tenacity, persistence ... I could go on.”

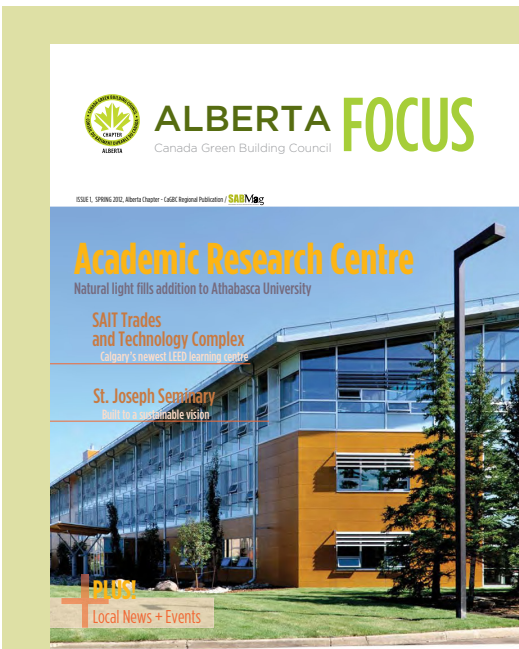
Helmer’s dissertation, *The Hollow Bone Hunter’s Search for Sacred Space in Cyberspace*, explores the applicability and translatability of the indigenous teaching circle in computer mediated environments and is written as a storied narrative. Her research persona for the dissertation, the Hollow Bone Hunter, lends itself to the metaphor of searching for knowledge and travelling to do so, which is what Helmer did in her studies.

“The oral exam was not what I expected,” Helmer said. “I was prepared for every question that I thought would be asked and was surprised from the first question onward. I enjoyed the opportunity to discuss my research and the implications of the findings. The time went by very quickly and everyone seemed quite interested in the presentation.”

Helmer says she knew what she wanted to accomplish with this degree and never changed her focus. “In our orientation, it was suggested that we would be changing our research focus many times over the course of the program. I never did. I had an end in mind, and I really stuck to my goal. Failure was not an option.”

Having the flexibility to work and learn from various locations was Helmer’s number one priority, and AU’s Doctor of Education Program afforded her that opportunity. “The specialty in distance education was a bonus because most of my work is in rural and remote communities, she said” Prior to beginning her doctoral studies, Helmer monitored the AU website for quite a while for news of the accreditation of the EdD program. She was accepted into the charter class in 2008.

Helmer would now like to work for AU, providing support to indigenous graduate students. She believes that in order to maintain cultural integrity and continuity, it is critical that every attempt be made to match indigenous learners with indigenous supervisors.



## ARC Featured in Alberta FOCUS

The recently completed Academic and Research Centre at AU-Athabasca is the **cover story** in the spring 2012 issue of *Alberta Focus*, published by *Sustainable Architecture and Building Magazine* (SABMag) and the Canada Green Building Council.

# Double Doctorate for Siemens

Dr. George Siemens of the Technology Enhanced Knowledge Research Institute has received two doctorates: he successfully completed a PhD program at the University of Aberdeen and received an honorary doctorate from Universidad de San Martin de Porres in Peru.

For his earned PhD, Siemens studied how people orient themselves, through sensemaking and wayfinding strategies, in complex online information environments. Though he is relieved to be finished, he said, his work with TEKRI is a continuation of his PhD research so it sometimes leaves him wondering if he is really done.

Siemens' honorary doctorate was granted for pedagogical insights and accomplishments. "I'm flattered by the recognition," he said. "It was a bit of a personal challenge to wrap up my PhD before the award from the Universidad de San Martin de Porres."

Since the late 1990s, Siemens has been involved in blogging and social media. He developed the concept of connectivism based on his experiences learning in online networks. Knowledge is complex and growing rapidly, Siemens said, and people are simply not able to manage knowledge outside of connections to others and to information networks. "I think most people are well aware of this and experience it in their daily lives: complexity requires specialization. In order for specialization to have an impact beyond a research lab, it needs to be connected with other specialized knowledge domains."

While many people are acquainted with the process of learning and living in knowledge networks, Siemens believes universities heavily emphasize individual learning. Networked knowledge is hardly new, he said, but today schools and businesses are just starting to respond by creating new learning models and approaches that leverage connectedness.

"In 2008, at the University of Manitoba," Siemens said, "I offered an open online course (Connectivism and Connective Knowledge) with Stephen Downes. This course was designed on a networked learning model, where we emphasized the process of forming and evaluating networks. We had about 2,400 students sign up, and the first massive open online course (MOOC) was the result. Since that time, numerous universities such as Stanford and MIT have started offering MOOCs."

# Science Outreach- Athabasca an Emerald Award Finalist

Science Outreach – Athabasca has been selected as a finalist for an [Emerald Award](#) in the non-profit association category. The Emerald Awards recognize and reward excellence in environmental initiatives undertaken each year by youth, educators, corporations, individuals, not-for-profit associations, community groups and governments.

Through the Science Outreach – Athabasca program, community members of all ages are encouraged to participate in a variety of initiatives including field trips and public presentations to promote public awareness of science related to the environment, the land, the water and air of the Athabasca River Basin. In the past eleven years, over 9,000 people have participated.

The awards will be presented in Calgary in June.

The objectives of the Emerald Foundation are to

- stimulate public and corporate environmental awareness in Alberta
- enhance youth participation by encouraging young people to become involved in environmental projects
- encourage behavioural change by recognizing environmental excellence
- expand and create new environmental excellence recognition initiatives
- create and strengthen strategic partnerships
- ensure the sustainability of the foundation



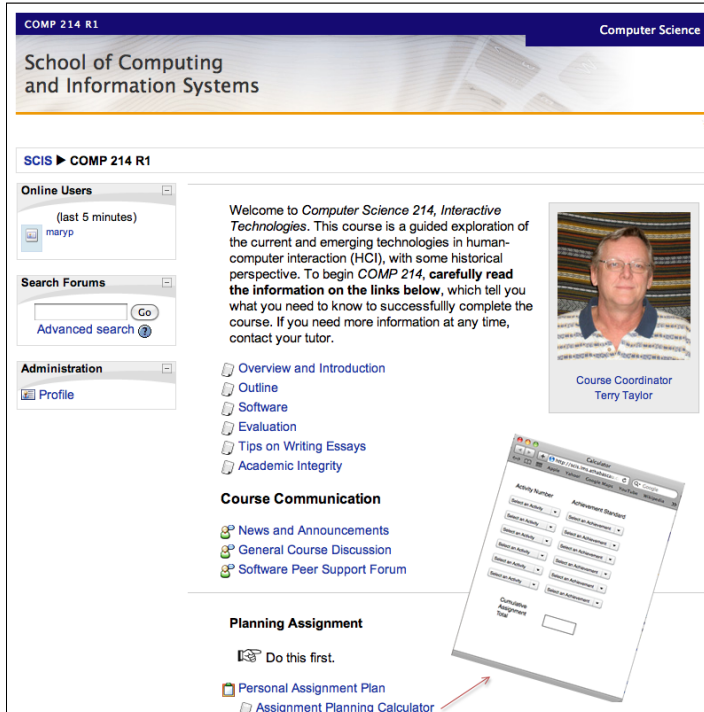
## DID YOU KNOW?

Athabasca University's Facebook page has over 2,000 fans.

Check it out at [www.facebook.com/Athabasca.University](http://www.facebook.com/Athabasca.University)

If you would like something posted onto the AU Facebook page, please contact [Michael Shouldice](#).

# Making Optimal Use of Online Technologies



Comp 214 lets students use a pop-up calculator to decide which activities they will undertake and which achievement level they want to aim for. Co-ordinator and course author Terry Taylor found that “if you give [students] a more open-ended and flexible set of requirements, especially with a very basic set of grading levels, as we have here, they tend to err on the side of caution, producing extensive content and adding extra refinements to the presentation.”



Comp 470 uses available Moodle tools, such as Random Glossary Entry, Random Tip from the FAQ and an RSS feed, to continuously refresh content, short surveys to engage student interest and student-created resource wikis. An audio podcast by co-ordinator and course author Jon Dron introduces each unit. More course activities take place in the COMP 470 group on the Landing, AU's online learning space.

A course redesign pilot that combines the academic expertise of the School of Computing and Information Systems with the learning design expertise of the Centre for Learning Design and Development is researching a number of online design principles that have the potential to increase student interaction, engagement and learning and student enrolment and satisfaction.

The courses involved in the pilot project include COMP 214: Interactive Technologies (Terry Taylor co-ordinator), COMP 268: Introduction to Computer Programming – Java (Vive Kumar co-ordinator), COMP 361: Systems Analysis and Design (Sabine Graf co-ordinator), COMP 470: Web Server Management (Jon Dron co-ordinator) and COMP 656: Cloud Computing (Qing Tan co-ordinator).

A number of principles have been formulated through designing the new courses:

- Give students choices (i.e., let them take some responsibility for their learning).
- Give students the tools they need to do what you ask them to do (or tell them where to find them).
- Make the learning environment attractive and engaging.
- Provide the right level of guidance.

- Build in opportunities for personal reflection about the learning process.
- Use freely available content and tutorials.
- Use a friendly, informal, personal tone.
- Use video and animation to engage, motivate and provide clarity.
- Make content relevant to the students' world.
- Integrate concepts being taught into a meaningful context.
- Encourage development of social interaction skills in the context of professional competence.
- Use available tools to motivate and engage.
- Keep rapidly changing material up-to-date.
- Give students opportunities to contribute to course content.
- Provide clear rubrics and formative assessment.
- Design graduate-level courses for maximum flexibility and student initiative.
- Bring in expert guests when possible.
- Give students a chance to join a community of practice.

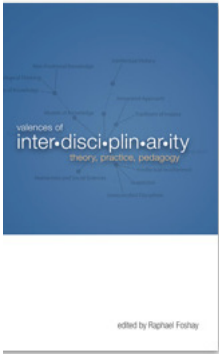
“These principles can be realized in various ways, allowing and encouraging creative design,” CLDD learning designer Mary Pringle said. “When course co-ordinators think in new ways, making course environments friendlier can make a big difference, which opens up conversations about deeper learning issues.”

In some SCIS courses, only visual material for engagement and an introductory picture to personalize the course for students were added. Others have added online workspaces in the form of personal wikis to increase students' digital literacy as they achieve the course objectives.

Suresh Joshee, a SCIS programmer analyst for web course support, has noticed a drop in student help requests since the development and design pilots have been implemented. SCIS faculty are working to improve feedback from tutors and exploring formal evaluation procedures to better inform the course redesign initiative.

Other course co-ordinators who would like to update their “course in a box” to include an effective online learning environment are invited to visit the CLDD website and to brainstorm with a CLDD learning designer for unique ways to apply sound learning design principles to their courses.

# Hot Off the Press at AU Press



## ***Valences of Interdisciplinarity: Theory, Practice, Pedagogy***

edited by Raphael Foshay

“For students and scholars in the humanities and social sciences, the critical and multifaceted essays in *Valences of Interdisciplinarity* bring together a good conspectus of issues in this field and a stimulating and provocative intervention into current debate. Highlighting the relation between various interdisciplinarity and projects of enlightenment, democracy and liberation, this volume brings epistemological-type issues into dialogue with ethical and political ones.” – Andrew Wernick, Trent University



## ***Imperfection***

by Patrick Grant

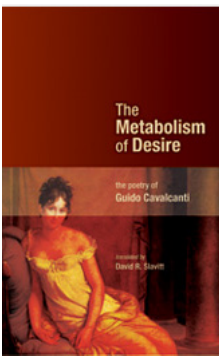
“*Imperfection* draws on philosophy, art, film, psychology, and mysticism among others. I can’t think of another book that combines such spread of reference, such succinctness and such depth of concern without losing weight or coherence, notwithstanding its – shall we call it? – wisdom.” – John Wilson Foster, author of *Colonial Consequences*



## ***Voices of the Land: The Seed Savers and Other Plays***

by Katherine Koller; introduction by Anne Nothof

“The plays of *Voices of the Land* are lyrical, subtle and gently humorous. They concentrate on the experience of ordinary people managing their environment, their resources and the forces of death, change and loss. In a mature, distinctive voice, Katherine Koller renews the tradition of prairie writing focused on the land, the farm and those who live intimately with both.” – Moira Day, University of Saskatchewan



## ***The Metabolism of Desire: The poetry of Guido Cavalcanti***

translated by David R. Slavitt

“Bringing his genuine poetic gifts to the project, Slavitt’s translations provide stronger evidence of the originals’ poetic qualities than has been available for at least a century.” – Henry Taylor, Pulitzer Prize winner

**Want more? Visit  
AU Press or:**





## Inspired by a Son's Memory and Donors' Support *by Cathy Nickel*

Dawne Price knows a thing or two about motivation. In 2013, the same year her son Connor would have graduated from high school were he still alive, she will graduate from AU with a Bachelor of Arts degree. She has attended university in memory of her son.

"I had always thought I'd take courses when my two boys were older," said Price, a 51-year-old mother who lives on a farm just outside Sangudo, Alta. "I started to think about it seriously in 2003, and then Connor broke his leg in 2004."

Life was never to be the same. Diagnosed with the same cancer that took the life of Terry Fox, eight-year-old Connor put up a remarkable fight but lost his battle in November 2005. Through all of the doctor's visits, hospital stays and treatments, he proved to be a magnet for positive people and a powerful inspiration to those around him.

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

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

She started slowly, "found her groove," and now has just a handful of courses left to complete. Price relishes AU's flexibility. "I didn't have to give up my life to do this," she said. "I was able to work around my husband's schedule and also be here for my son Colin."

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

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

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

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

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

Donations in support of student scholarships represent just a few of many contributions to AU's ongoing \$30 million Open Our World Campaign. The official campaign launch will take place in the ARC at AU Athabasca on May 23, at the Art Gallery of Alberta in Edmonton on May 24 and at Lougheed House in Calgary on June 20.

## Taking It All Off



Bonnie Nahornick and Aretha Smith have taken it all off ... their hair that is, for their Wigs For Kids Fundraising Event in Calgary on April 2. The event raises money for kids with cancer. Nahornick and Smith have been growing their hair to be used for making wigs for kids. Here are some of [Nahornick's other fundraising passions](#).

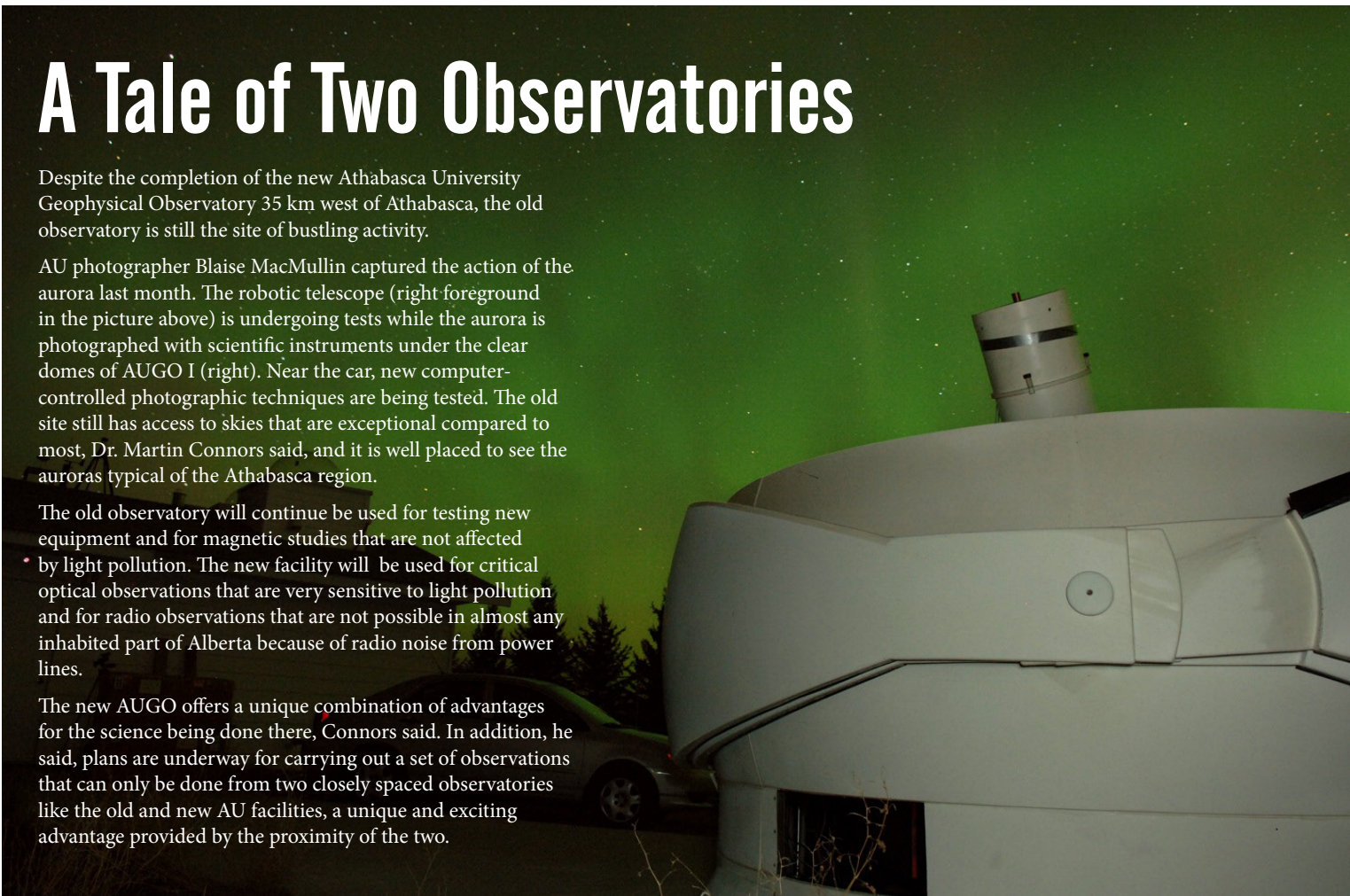
# A Tale of Two Observatories

Despite the completion of the new Athabasca University Geophysical Observatory 35 km west of Athabasca, the old observatory is still the site of bustling activity.

AU photographer Blaise MacMullin captured the action of the aurora last month. The robotic telescope (right foreground in the picture above) is undergoing tests while the aurora is photographed with scientific instruments under the clear domes of AUGO I (right). Near the car, new computer-controlled photographic techniques are being tested. The old site still has access to skies that are exceptional compared to most, Dr. Martin Connors said, and it is well placed to see the auroras typical of the Athabasca region.

The old observatory will continue to be used for testing new equipment and for magnetic studies that are not affected by light pollution. The new facility will be used for critical optical observations that are very sensitive to light pollution and for radio observations that are not possible in almost any inhabited part of Alberta because of radio noise from power lines.

The new AUGO offers a unique combination of advantages for the science being done there, Connors said. In addition, he said, plans are underway for carrying out a set of observations that can only be done from two closely spaced observatories like the old and new AU facilities, a unique and exciting advantage provided by the proximity of the two.



## AU People in the News

### MOOCs

Dr. George Siemens, a software analyst and web educational technologist in the Technology Enhanced Knowledge Research Institute was quoted in *Insider High Ed* on the use of massively open online courses, or MOOCs,

The *New York Times* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* also quoted Siemens in articles about a new non-profit partnership between Harvard and MIT, known as edX, which will offer free online university courses this fall. Students who complete courses on the edX platform will not get university credit although they could earn certificates. "Projects like this can impact lives around the world, for the next billion students from China and India," Siemens told the *New York Times*. "But if I were president of a mid-tier university, I would be looking over my shoulder very nervously right now, because if a leading university offers a free circuits course, it becomes a real question whether other universities need to develop a circuits course."

### New Appointment

[PRNewswire](#) reports that AU MBA graduate Donna Garbutt has been appointed to the Board of Directors of CE Franklin, a company that supplies products and services to the oil sands, refining, heavy oil, energy, petrochemical, forestry and mining industries in Canada. Garbutt's career has included a wide range of positions focused on different markets worldwide. She has also been recognized as a finalist for several awards, including the Woman of Achievement Award in Alaska in 2001, the 2003 U.S. Energy Woman of the Year in Washington, DC, and the Blackberry Women in Technology Award in the UK in 2006.

### Women and Alberta Politics

"Once women have the big, shiny jobs, nobody doubts any longer that they can do them. It's role modelling." So says Dr. Jane Arscott, an associate professor in the Centre for Social Sciences and spokesperson for Equal Voice, in a [Calgary Herald](#) article.

Equal Voice, a non-profit organization dedicated to getting more women elected to public office, is trumpeting the number of women, including the premier and the leader of the opposition, in the newly elected Alberta legislature. Overall, 23 of Alberta's 87 MLAs, 26 per cent, are women. Equal Voice notes that the outcome is comparable to that of the 1997 election, the high water mark, when 27 per cent were women.



# AU People in the News

## A Gift of Life

Natalie Gerstmar, who is working toward an AU Bachelor of Science degree, recently helped launch the [Ontario Be A Donor: The Gift of Eight Campaign](#) to encourage organ and tissue donation.

Gerstmar was just nine months old when she was diagnosed with Glycogen Storage Disease Type IV. A healthy human body converts glycogen to glucose, which is then used by cells as an energy source. Gerstmar's body was not doing this, and she faced a very short life, but at 21 months, she was fortunate enough to receive a life-saving liver transplant.

"It (organ donation) makes such an important difference in people's lives. I couldn't thank enough that family who made the decision to donate their son's liver. They gave me the gift of life and what better thing to give than that," Gerstmar told the *London Community News*.

## Teachers Not Needed?

The *New York Times* published an article about the open educational resources movement which quoted Dr. Rory McGreal, AU's UNESCO/COL Chair in Open Educational Resources. Delegates at the Open Educational Resources Conference in Cambridge, England, though united in their enthusiasm for the future of online learning, were sharply divided on issues like the future of teaching, copyright, private education providers and the importance of credentials and university credits in motivating and rewarding students. "You don't need a teacher for learning," McGreal said, arguing that most students "learn a lot on their own."

## Safety on the Farm

*Calgary Herald* columnist Naomi Lakritz quotes associate professor of labour relations Dr. Bob Barnetson and presents his research findings on the Government of Alberta's reluctance to protect farmers in a [column](#) about the need for legislation to protect Alberta farm workers. Barnetson, she writes, demolishes the government's rationale quite nicely; for example, the assumption that farmers cannot afford regulation.

"There is no evidence suggesting this is the case—it is just a bald statement," Barnetson writes on his blog [<http://albertalabour.blogspot.ca/>]. "Further, we expect all other businesses to bear the cost associated with workplace safety. MLAs never explain why farmers should be allowed to externalize those costs (in the form of injury) on workers."

Another objection MLAs have raised is that farmers employ friends and family members, which precludes regulation. "This ignores that friends and family members are employed in many businesses (e.g., restaurants, construction, retail), all of which the government successfully regulates. Again, we have a largely invalid narrative," Barnetson writes.



## Got the latest Open?

Keep up with the latest AU news all year round with *Open AU*, the online companion to *Open* magazine: [www.open-au.com](http://www.open-au.com)

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Download the *Open AU* app from iTunes.



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The next edition of *The Insider* will be published on May 28. The deadline for submissions is May 18.

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