

the insider

A newsletter published for everyone in the Athabasca University community

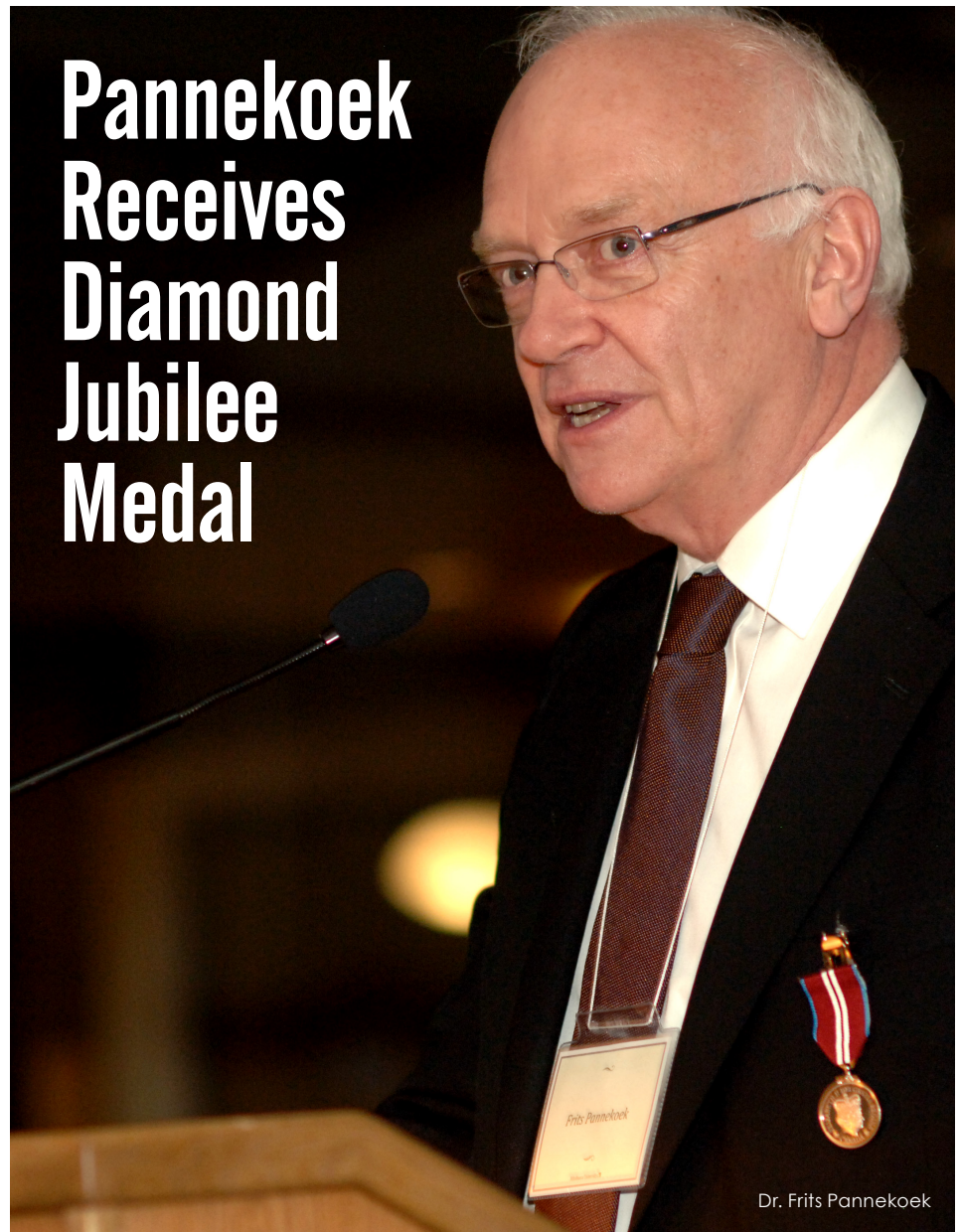
VOLUME 3: ISSUE #11
June 25, 2012

IN THIS ISSUE:

- 2 Convocation 2012
- 4 SSHRC Supports Social Economy Study
- 5 Personalizing Learning
- 6 Peak Oil and Climate Change
- 7 Transit of Venus Photographed
- 8 Branding Update
- 8 AU Grad Student Conference
- 9 Alberta Graduate Conference
- 10 People in the News

COVER IMAGE »

Fort McMurray-Athabasca MP Brian Jean was in Athabasca on June 8 to present AU president Dr. Frits Pannekoek with the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. The commemorative medal was created to mark the sixtieth anniversary, in 2012, of Queen Elizabeth's accession to the throne and to honour significant contributions and achievements by Canadians. Pannekoek was recognized for his contributions to northern Alberta and the local community.



Dr. Frits Pannekoek



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

Athabasca University 

Convocation 2012: Beginning a New Adventure

AMID CHEERS, TEARS, APPLAUSE AND THANKS, Convocation 2012 took place June 7 to 9 at the Athabasca Regional Multiplex. Of the 1,403 graduates from 80 countries receiving AU degrees this year, 345 attended Convocation.

Among the highlights of this year's events was the awarding of AU's first Doctor of Education in Distance Education degrees to Joyce Mary Helmer, Agnieszka Izabella Palalas and Debra Maria Walker.

Of the 1,403
graduates from
80 countries
receiving AU
degrees this year,
345 attended
Convocation.



Dr. Agnieszka
Izabella Palalas

"WE HAVE DISCOVERED THAT LEARNING is not a result but a persistent journey to the emergence of something new from within," Palalas said in her June 7 Graduate Address, promising on behalf of the graduating class to keep pursuing dreams through the power of knowledge and to support others in their efforts to reach their dreams as well.

Eight AU staff members received degrees or certificates this year:

Michele Boczkowski,
Human Resources (MBA)

Kathy Bury,
Financial Services (MBA)

Darryl Campbell,
Computing Services (MAIS)

Katherine Kuzyk,
Office of the Registrar (BPA)

Lori Lambert,
Institutional Studies (MAIS)

Chris McLeod,
Faculty of Business (MBA)

Evan Wagner,
Computing Services (M.Sc.)

Carla Yeaman,
Faculty of Business (University
Certificate in Public Administration)



Cheryl Sutherland,
accepting a
degree on behalf
of her partner,
Daniela Leca

DANIELA MONICA LECA WAS POSTHUMOUSLY awarded a Master of Health Studies degree at the Friday ceremony. After being diagnosed with terminal cancer last year, Leca decided to complete her degree using her experience with her illness as the basis for an independent study course. One week before her death, she received notice that she had graduated. To a standing ovation, Leca's partner, Cheryl Sutherland, accepted a hood and parchment on her behalf.



Honorary degree
recipient
Dr. Nyameko Barney
Pityana

AN HONORARY DOCTOR OF LAWS WAS presented to Dr. Nyameko Barney Pityana in recognition of his ongoing commitment to human rights in South Africa. "Human rights opened for me the possibility that the conditions of humanity could be changed for the better and that values of human dignity and equality were fundamental to human well-being," he said.



Honorary degree recipient
Jack Brink

JACK BRINK RECEIVED AN HONORARY Doctor of Laws in recognition of his contributions to the field of archaeology, specifically pre-contact archaeology of Alberta and the Northern Plains of North America.

Brink spoke about how archeology has the potential to end racism. A contemporary situation can never be fully-understood without knowing something about the ancient culture that came before it, he said, explaining that his knowledge of medicine wheels, vision quest sites, 10,000-year-old arrowheads and carved and painted images throughout southern Alberta, and the history of the rich and flourishing culture they represent, helps to dispel negative stereotypes, thereby combating racist beliefs. He encouraged graduates to find their potential for affecting social change and improving the human condition.



Louise Taylor Green, MBA

IN HER GRADUATE ADDRESS AT THE Saturday ceremony, MBA recipient Louise Taylor Green spoke about wisdom, knowledge, love, innovation and compassion. "In our darkest hours, the moments of doubt, the uncertain reality that each of us faced on our learning journey, we've had to dig deep within ourselves to find the truth of our character, the breadth of our intellect and the strength of our convictions," she said. "Let us dare to dream and let today not be about the ending of our education but more about the beginning of a new adventure, built on a solid foundation of education, experience and commitment."



Honorary degree recipient
Dr. John Willinsky

AN HONORARY DOCTOR OF ATHABASCA University was presented to Dr. John Willinsky in recognition of his advocacy of open access, particularly the free and widespread dissemination of knowledge through open educational resources.

Receiving an AU honorary degree was particularly poignant, Willinsky said, because of the connection between the openness of AU and the openness of his work during the past two decades. AU represents education as a public and an open good, he said, and upholds the idea that learning is not private property, that the value of learning is found in what it contributes to the lives of others.

Willinsky asked the graduates to set one more goal for themselves: to pay forward a further degree of openness by looking for opportunities to open education to others, to become advocates for open educational resources and for access to the research produced at Canadian universities.



Richard Dietrich gave the Friday Graduate Address

IN HIS GRADUATE ADDRESS AT THE FRIDAY ceremony, Master of Counselling degree recipient Richard Lyle Dietrich, who earned the Governor General's Gold Medal for the highest overall academic standing, recounted the several eye surgeries he underwent while earning his degree.

"I see the world differently through new lenses, both literally and figuratively," he said. "I invite my fellow graduates to embrace their own changes and the new vision their learning experience has no doubt created for them."



Members of the RAIC Centre for Architecture Development Group

DURING THE FRIDAY CEREMONY, the members of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada Centre for Architecture Development Group were inducted into the Order of Athabasca University in recognition of their advocacy and promotion of the AU Architecture Program and their contributions to its development.

Members of the group include David Craddock, president of Architecture Canada (formerly RAIC); Stuart Howard, past president of Architecture Canada/RAIC; Vivian Manasc, Manasc-Isaac Practice, and a past president of RAIC; Kiyoshi Matsuzaki, a past president of RAIC and a long-standing member of the RAIC Syllabus Renewal Task Force; Ian Macdonald, an emeritus professor of the University of Manitoba School of Architecture and chair of the RAIC Renewal Task Force; David Covo, a former director of the McGill University School of Architecture and a member of the RAIC Renewal Task Force; Carole Scheffer, a department head at Cégep du Vieux Montréal and a member of the Syllabus Renewal Advisory; Barry Johns, an architect with Group 2 Architecture and chancellor of the College of Fellows, RAIC; and Jon Hobbs, former executive director of the RAIC and an active participant in the course development process.

Social Economy and Sustainability Project Wins SSHRC Support



Dr. Mike Gismondi

DR. MIKE GISMONDI, A PROFESSOR OF sociology in the Centre for Social Sciences has been awarded a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Partnership Development Grant valued at \$200,000 over the next two years.

Gismondi, along with his research partners, Mike Lewis, director of the **Canadian Centre for Community Renewal** in Port Alberni, B.C.; Dr. Ana Maria Peredo, director of the Centre for Co-operative Based Economy at the University of Victoria; and Dr. Noel Keough, a professor of urban design in the Faculty of Environmental Design at the University of Calgary, are working with the **B.C.-Alberta Social Economy Network (BALTA)** on the project Social Economy, Community Resilience and the Transition to Sustainability.

This two-year partnership development initiative will enable both existing BALTA partners and new participants to explore a longer term research partnership on the importance of the social economy in advancing sustainability and prepare the group to apply for a major SSHRC Partnership Grant in 2014.

Various forms of democratic ownership (co-operatives, non-profit enterprises, trusts, local authorities) are generating socio-economic innovations that increase community ownership, capture cash flow for reinvestment, reduce carbon and increase equity. Each is struggling to imagine an economy outside of the growth framework, with the added challenge of moving forward in an ecologically just and socially fair way.

This Partnership Development Grant will support a research program capable of joining up local and regional transition efforts, including strategies and mechanisms for adaptation to uncertain futures. The funding will support an administrator and two senior graduate students, who will be recruited this fall.

AU Athabasca will be the new administrative home to the research partnership, and researchers hope to establish AU as the institutional hub for BALTA and the future social economy research partnership. Other AU faculty members involved in project include Dr. Josh Evans in the Centre for Social Sciences and Dr. Lorelei Hanson in the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies.

This Partnership Development Grant will support a research program capable of joining up local and regional transition efforts, including strategies and mechanisms for adaptation to uncertain futures.

Xerox Canada and AU Work Together to Personalize Learning

by Cathy Nickel

THE SAME MOBILE TECHNOLOGY THAT HAS made social media ubiquitous is spawning a revolution in distance education, and an AU research team is among those leading the charge.

With support from Xerox Canada and several other funders, Dr. Kinshuk, NSERC/iCORE/Xerox/Markin research chair and a professor in the School of Computing and Information Systems, is leading a team that is exploring the potential uses of smartphones and other mobile devices in higher education.

The team is developing technologies that will create an enriched, highly personalized learning experience, one that adapts to students' needs, puts course content in the context of day-to-day life, uses social networks and facilitates student collaboration for collective problem-solving, and is available through mobile delivery for students on the go.

Xerox has been an AU partner for 20 years, and the company made a major financial investment in the mobile technologies project in 2008. That investment, plus other ongoing partnerships, enabled AU to secure provincial and federal grants to support the research chair through 2015.

Pleased with these developments and its ongoing relationship with AU, Xerox recently committed an additional \$250,000 in support of the research, once again creating the possibility of leveraging still more grants. The partnership is a win-win-win relationship that can have a long-term and far-reaching impact on industry, the AU research team and learners.

"The funding and partnership with a company like Xerox is extremely helpful," Kinshuk said. "Collaborating with their state-of-the-art technology allows us to work on projects that are close to our heart. We can build on each other's research."

The partnership has benefited both organizations, according to Randy Brydges, director of sales agent operations for Xerox Canada's West Market Centre, as it has allowed AU and Xerox to share knowledge and maximize



(ABOVE) Dr. Kinshuk is exploring the untapped potential of smartphones.



(LEFT) Dr. Kinshuk is exploring the untapped potential of smartphones.

investments in research and development. "We're particularly interested in furthering our understanding of content management technologies and applications," he said. "This will allow us to align our technologies with the fast-changing digital environment."

With the overarching goal of increasing access to education, Kinshuk's team is now concentrating on adaptive technologies. "We're focusing on understanding students better and providing them with the kind of learning they need," he said: "personalized content, better interaction, that suits them and the environment they're in."

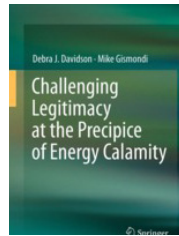
Xerox has invited the AU research team to use the company's newest technologies, particularly semantic technology and natural language processing, which facilitate the personalization of learning. Working with Xerox will also provide the team with opportunities to involve teachers and students in Canadian schools that use Xerox's document management and intelligent workflow systems.

"Having a partner like Xerox makes our research lab bigger," Kinshuk said. "It helps move research along more quickly, because we have the benefit of additional financial resources plus interaction with their researchers. It's also a wonderful opportunity for students to see what kind of industry research takes place in a high-profile company. Working with industry and having a real partnership like this is a very good model for taking research forward. We hope it continues for a very long time."

Donations in support of research represent just a few of many contributions to AU's ongoing \$30 million Open Our World Campaign. Initiated in 2008, the campaign, which is focused on the future of learning, has already achieved 75 per cent of its \$30-million fundraising goal, thanks to the support of over 300 donors. During its final, public phase, Open Our World will focus on four priority areas: student awards, research, community service and learning innovation.

Peak Oil and Climate Change

“What we need to navigate this future is forward-thinking, and here at home, continuing to rely on developing non-conventional fossil fuels is not looking forward: it is looking backward while exacerbating climate issues.”



Challenging Legitimacy at the Precipice of Energy Calamity, a new e-book by Dr. Mike Gismondi, a professor of sociology in the Centre for Social Sciences, and Dr. Debra Davidson, an associate professor in the Department of Resource

Economics and Environmental Sociology at the University of Alberta, examines the non-conventional fuel industry, specifically the Athabasca tar sands, from the context of peak oil and climate change.

Non-conventional fuels, Gismondi explained, require significantly larger amounts of inputs—in terms of raw materials, energy, labour, technology, processing, and so on—to transform them into a form that can be used. They are also associated with much higher levels of waste and environmental degradation.

Until recently, he said, non-conventional fuels have not been developed extensively because of the relatively high development costs; however, increasing oil prices, combined with technological developments and the precipitous decline in discovery rates of new conventional fuel sources, have drawn attention to the globe's several deposits of heavy oil, shale, bitumen and deepwater reserves.

The Athabasca tar sands, Gismondi said, is the first non-conventional fossil fuel source to become a significant producer of oil for the global marketplace. What happens there, he argues, could determine whether it is the first of many more such developments or the last.

In developing the book, published by Springer Science and Business Media, Gismondi and Davidson drew on transcripts of a series of Alberta public hearings to analyze the narratives used by industry and government to legitimize the oil sands and the contradictions within those frames, and the counter-arguments used by publics to oppose oil sands development and their potential to provoke Albertans to choose a different energy future.

This book is not about good guys and bad guys, the authors insist. They do not deny that companies and researchers are working hard to address the many resource and environmental problems posed by development. But it

takes a pretty spectacular leap of faith to assume they can solve them all, Gismondi said.

“Even with the best of intentions, technological innovation would have to keep up with two huge counter-trends,” he said: “oil that is increasingly harder to find and extract and a decline in energy produced in return for energy invested to extract it; that is, a decline from about 90 barrels of oil produced from by the energy investment of 1 barrel of oil in early years of the oil era, to about 18 to 1 today for conventional oil and as low as 3-1 in the tar sands. Ultimately, peak oil and the associated climate change impacts of tar sands expansion are simply not conducive to technological fixes, and the only answer to avoid serious economic contraction and social chaos is to move away from fossil fuel dependence.”

While the book takes an historical approach to the tar sands industry, the concluding sections explore the future of civilized society and the contribution that Alberta is making to that future. “Peak oil and climate change are some pretty drastic wake up calls for all of us, and Alberta is still slumbering,” Gismondi said. “What we need to navigate this future is forward-thinking, and here at home, continuing to rely on developing non-conventional fossil fuels is not looking forward: it is looking backward while exacerbating climate issues.

What is needed, Gismondi said, is massive and rapid social and financial investment in the next energy industry (a combination of solar, wind, hydro, biofuels and others) as society weans itself off fossil fuels.

“Years ago, when Albertans founded this up-start industry,” he said “few anticipated it was possible to separate oil from the Athabasca sands. Today, Albertans face a larger challenge, to transition away from the tar sands, while using our know-how to develop alternative sources of energy and innovative social forms of ownership and distribution of that energy that will slow climate change and sustain our communities and economies into the future. If we start today, we might still turn the corner.”

Videos of the authors, available on YouTube, provide teaching points and expand on the ideas presented in the book.

Transit of Venus Photographed at AU

DODGING CLOUDS, AU OBSERVATORY researcher Ian Schofield managed to photograph the **transit of Venus** at AU Athabasca on June 5.

The event, during which Venus appears as a small, dark disk moving across the face of the sun, is among the rarest of predictable celestial phenomena. The entire transit, as Venus travels from one edge of the sun to the other, lasts over six hours.

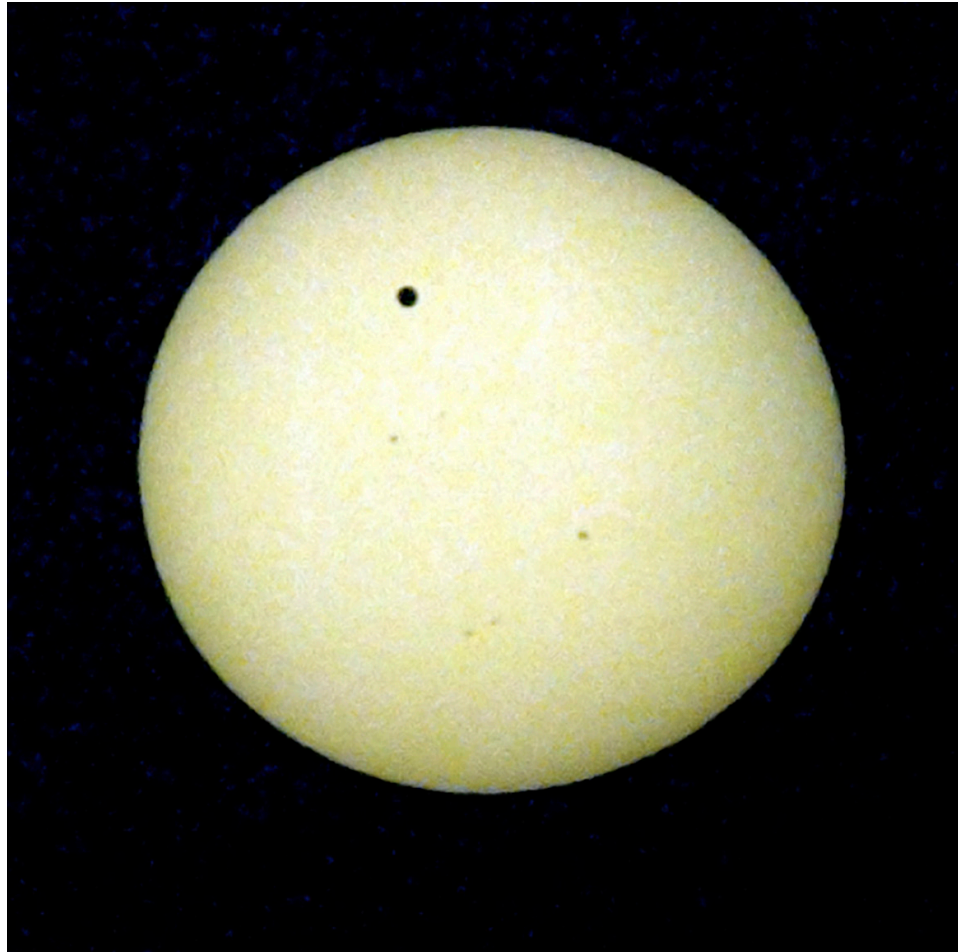
Transits of Venus occur in pairs, eight years apart, the pairs themselves being separated by more than a hundred years. The most recent transit of Venus, the first of the current pair, occurred on June 8, 2004. The previous pair appeared on December 9, 1874, and December 6, 1882. The next pair will in December 2117 and December 2125.

In the modern age, transits of Venus are significant mainly because of their link to the history of astronomy. Observing the event was essential in establishing the size of the solar system. British explorer Captain James Cook, British astronomer Charles Green and Swedish naturalist Daniel Solander observed and recorded the transit of Venus on the island of Tahiti during Cook's first voyage around the world in 1769.

AU professor and Canada Research Chair Dr. Martin Connors claims to be the last person on earth to have seen the 2004 transit, due to Athabasca's unique geographical position, allowing the event to be seen only for a few minutes at sunrise.

Photographing the transit of Venus was not easy. There are two ways to view the sun with a telescope: with a filter, considered the correct way to do astrophotography, Schofield said, or by projecting it on to a screen (demonstrated in the photograph above).

Schofield was not expecting to view the transit at all, since the sky was cloudy all day in Athabasca on June 5, but noticing a break in the clouds at about 6 p.m., he quickly returned to the university, grabbed a 30-year-old, three-inch Newtonian reflector telescope and set it up in the east lot, attempting to view the sun by projecting it on the back of a paper card. He had only minutes to spare before clouds closed in again, hiding an event that will not occur again for more than a century.



(ABOVE) The transit of Venus photographed at AU Athabasca on June 5.



(LEFT) Science Outreach - Athabasca co-ordinator Linda Lindballe projects an image of the sun on to a card in order to view it safely.

AU's Branding Project



by Nancy Biamonte, Director,
Marketing and Communication

The AU Branding Project continues to invite feedback and discussion as the university develops its new brand. The goal of the branding project is to reposition AU in the post-secondary market and to grow and strengthen relationships between the university and its students, alumni, faculty and staff and the larger community.

Brand is not simply a logo. It is about character, associations, values, thoughts, feelings and perceptions. However, testing logo concepts is an important component of the methodology for branding and positioning. Testing perception and preference is a significant strategic consideration in creating a clearly articulated, authentic, aspirational and enduring brand.

The detailed proposed brand concepts document, is available at the [AU Branding Project](#)

[intranet website](#). Click on AU Brand Concepts & Creatives in the downloads section. Please watch the [introductory video](#), and let us know what you think by filling out the [online survey](#) (available until June 30). You can also find us on [The Landing](#) by searching AU Branding Project.

Your opinion is important to the AU Branding Project. Thanks to everyone who has participated so far. We are very pleased with the high level of engagement with faculty, staff, students, alumni and key stakeholders. We look forward to receiving your feedback and insights on the two brand concepts that are being proposed.

If you have any questions, please contact me directly: phone 780-421-5049; toll-free phone 1-800-788-9041, extension 5049; cell 780-938-5049; fax 780-428-0342; Skype and Twitter nbiamonte.

Testing perception and preference is a significant strategic consideration in creating a clearly articulated, authentic, aspirational and enduring brand.

AU Graduate Conference

CONSIDERING SUBMITTING AN ABSTRACT for the conference? The abstract submission deadline is **July 1, 2012**, or when the maximum number of abstracts for the program has been received. The sooner you submit the more likely you will be to be accepted and receive funding to cover conference costs.

You can find more information at the [conference website](#).

Athabasca University 

Faculty of Graduate Studies

STUDENT CONFERENCE

September 14 - 16, 2012
Edmonton, Alberta

Research and the Knowledge
Frontier in an Online Environment



AU Helps Make Alberta Graduate Conference a Success

Focused on professional development rather than on academics, the AGC provides students with the knowledge and skills necessary to put their graduate training to use outside of the academy.

by Amanda Nielsen, AUGSA President

The Athabasca University Graduate Students' Association offers its sincere thanks to AU for helping to make the Second Annual Alberta Graduate Conference a success.

Special thanks go to AU's president, Dr. Frits Pannekoek, and the vice-president (advancement), Dr. Pamela Walsh, for providing both financial and in-kind support. Not only did AU provide the conference with a significant financial contribution, but Dr. Walsh and her team designed and hosted the conference website. We would also like to thank Dr. Pannekoek for attending the conference. He was the only university president who took the time to attend and meet with students.

Focused on professional development rather than on academics, the AGC provides students with the knowledge and skills necessary to put their graduate training to use outside of the academy. Given that 70 per cent of all graduate students end up working outside of academia (a number which may be even higher among AU students since most of us are already working), these skills are invaluable, and the AGC is one of the few places where graduate students can develop them.

In addition to professional development, the conference featured a variety of networking opportunities, allowing students to connect with students and professors from other disciplines, university administrators and representatives of industry and government. AU students particularly appreciated these opportunities as the distance learning nature of our institution can sometimes make it difficult to connect with peers and colleagues.

As most AU grad students are already working professionals, the opportunities for career development presented at the conference are unbeatable. At a cost of only \$40, attendees received a full three days of professional and academic development as well as opportunities to connect with industry representatives who might be interested in hiring them. Twenty-five AU graduate students attended, and we are hopeful that even more will attend next year as word starts to spread about the value of the experience.

Besides helping to ensure that AU graduate students gain valuable professional and academic development and have an opportunity to connect with peers at other institutions, AU's contribution to the AGC helps to solidify AU's reputation as a research intensive university. Unfortunately, some people at other institutions still do not believe that an AU degree meets the same standards as a degree from one of Alberta's other three research intensive universities. By attending this conference, networking with their peers and discussing their research, AU graduate students strengthen AU's reputation and the value of an AU degree.

The AUGSA feels that the value of AGC to AU graduate students cannot be overstated, so we are pleased that AU has chosen to support it and has committed to doing so again next year. Thank you, once again, to everyone at AU who helped to make this year's conference a success.

AU People In the News

Labour Relations and Diplomacy

Dr. Bob Barnetson, associate professor of labour relations in the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies was quoted in a June 6 Postmedia News [article](#) about careers in labour relations. Barnetson discusses the several pathways into labour relations and describes good practitioners as thoughtful people who pay attention to detail and adopt a long-range view. "Even when it's possible to win a particular issue, you might end up damaging the long-term labour relations climate. Having a strategic perspective is an important aspect."

Petrina New Advisor

AU MBA graduate Michael Petrina has been named an advisor to the Board of Directors of Silver Mountain Mines in Calgary. [Market Wire](#) provides more details about Petrina's background and experience.

Writing for Health

Writer in Residence Tololwa Mollel presented Writing for Health last month in Edmonton, sponsored by CARP. The event was an opportunity for the university and CARP to collaborate in the health and wellness development of CARP members and AU students. Mollel worked directly with students through virtual visits and online forums. Memoir, creative non-fiction and autobiography were some of the means of self-expression that were explored.

FOLLOW US ON



Athabasca University's Facebook page has over 2,000 fans. Check it out at facebook.com/Athabasca.University. If you would like something posted onto the AU Facebook page, please contact [Michael Shouldice](#).



The Insider is published for AU faculty and staff members and other members of the AU community by the Advancement Office.

Please send any information or photographs for inclusion to the [co-ordinator](#). If a photo opportunity presents itself, please contact [Blaise MacMullin](#). Due to FOIP regulations, a release form must accompany all photos. Please contact *The Insider* co-ordinator for a copy of the release form.

The Insider will be published monthly during July and August. The next issue will appear on July 16 (deadline for submissions July 6) and the August issue on August 20 (deadline for submissions August 10).

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

Athabasca University