

the insider

A newsletter published for everyone in the Athabasca University community

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COVER IMAGE »

The Faculty of Science recently finished three weeks of labs at AU Athabasca and will have another two weeks at the end of July. Here 20 students, from Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, attend the Field Ecology Workshop for BIOL345, learning about various pieces of aquatic sampling equipment in the beaver pond behind the AUGO I. So far this summer there have been 50 students on campus for Comparative Vertebrate Anatomy, Microbiology and Ecology labs.



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

Athabasca University 

Open Our World builds momentum

WITH ANOTHER CELEBRATION IN CALGARY and a major new donation, AU's Open Our World campaign continues to build momentum.

A \$50,000 gift from the Edmonton Oilers Community Foundation was announced in June. This gift is creating 40 new awards for nursing students in central and northern Alberta.

"The public phase of Open Our World is off to a great start," said Dr. Pamela Walsh, AU Vice-president of Advancement. "I'm thrilled about these donations. The donors have made some incredible contributions to key priority areas in this campaign."

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(TOP) The Open Our World celebration in Calgary on June 20 was attended by over 80 friends, partners, faculty, staff, alumni and students of AU.

(BOTTOM LEFT) Heather Kennedy, chair of the Open Our World campaign cabinet, led the proceedings at the Calgary event.

(BOTTOM RIGHT) Denise Blair, an MBA alumna who was featured on the cover of the spring issue of Open magazine and on one of the Open Our World campaign banners, attended the event in Calgary and delivered a speech.

Granting Daniela's last wish



(LEFT) Daniela Leca (right) and Cheryl Sutherland in the summer of 2011. The focus of Daniela's independent study coursework on cancer was what it was like to live with hope in the face of a terminal illness.

(BELOW) Cheryl Sutherland, accepting a Master of Health Studies degree on behalf of her partner, Daniela Leca at AU's convocation ceremonies 2012. The degree was conferred to a standing ovation.



AU turns a dream into reality for a health studies student with terminal cancer.

By Cheryl Sutherland

Daniela Leca received her Master of Health Studies degree posthumously on June 8th this year. One week before her death, Leca received notice that she had graduated. Her partner, Cheryl Sutherland, tells the story of that journey.

ON JUNE 8, 2012, I ATTENDED THE MOST moving and powerful public event of my life: Athabasca University's convocation. Convocation ceremonies are often deeply moving, but the reason this one had such special meaning for me was that I accepted a master's degree on behalf of my beautiful life partner, Daniela Leca. Daniela was pursuing her Master of Health Studies when she was diagnosed with terminal cancer in July 2011.

Daniela had immigrated to Canada in 1991, leaving behind her employment as a physician in Romania to find new opportunities in a new country. When she began her degree with AU, she was working in the mental health field as a vocational coordinator. Education was a priority for her, and she was an excellent role model on the benefits of hard work and determination.

When Daniela was diagnosed, she thought seriously about whether or not to continue her degree. After careful consideration, she decided

she wanted to continue. She was determined to not let her dream go without a fight.

After consulting her supervisor, Dr. Sharon Moore, Daniela settled into an independent study course to research and chronicle what it was like to live with hope in the face of a terminal illness. Yes, Daniela chose to place her focus on hope and her cancer journey. In the face of death, she wanted to make the most of her time left by trying to live each moment with hope and analyzing how living with hope affected her journey.

Daniela's cancer was much more aggressive than we anticipated, and by autumn 2011, she was hospitalized. Our initial understanding had been that her stay in hospital would last only for a few days. But a few days turned into 10 days, and suddenly we were faced with the realization that she was not going to rebound from her dramatic health decline.

In constant contact with Sharon during the hospitalization, at the end of September I inquired if there was any way that AU could award Daniela her degree before she died. Without hesitation, Sharon set the wheels in motion.

On October 11, 2011, we learned that the AU

Board of Governors had approved our request. Daniela was awarded her master's degree! When we told Daniela the news, it took a few moments for her to absorb the information, and then her face lit up. A smile slowly broke out, and that beautiful smile remained for the entire day. Finally, after so much sacrifice, she had achieved her goal. We quickly printed and framed the degree copy sent to us by AU, and Daniela was able to see it sitting on the windowsill of her hospital room for the remainder of her stay.

Daniela died just one week after learning of her accomplishment. Yet her achievement meant the world to her, and she relished the knowledge that she had completed her degree. This knowledge brought joy to her final week of life. Obtaining the degree was her last wish, and she was so proud.

I would like to extend a special thank you to all of those individuals at AU who assisted in making Daniela's final wish become a reality. I had the privilege of meeting some of you during convocation, and I am still in awe of the warm welcome I received. I felt completely embraced and cared for during my stay, and that means so very much. Thank you for showing, in all that you do, what a tremendous heart is at the centre of Athabasca University.

Life after hockey

CRAIG SCHIRA WAS ONE OF THE FIRST Western Hockey League players to study with AU, before the August 2009 agreement between AU and the WHL was even formally signed. He continues to study at AU through the 2004 agreement AU has with the Professional Hockey Players Association (just recently renewed) while playing defense for the Binghamton Senators, minor league affiliates of the Ottawa Senators and the AHL's 2011 Calder Cup champions.

Post-secondary education is important to Schira, from Spiritwood, Saskatchewan, because he understands that he won't be able to play hockey forever. When that day comes, it will be important to have something to fall back on, he says.

"I don't know exactly what I will want to do when I am done playing hockey. But I know that by getting my degree, it opens up more opportunity for me in the future," the 24-year-old says. "I have heard many people say that the difference between getting a job that you want and not getting it can be that piece of paper. Regardless of what I choose to do after hockey, the skills I have developed and everything that I have learned through this process will benefit me in the future."

"Ultimately, I want to have options. Whether or not my future job is directly related to what I am studying is yet to be seen, but I know it will create better opportunities."

Schira began his first AU course, an introduction to small business management, when he was playing junior hockey in Vancouver in



Craig Schira

"I know that by getting my degree, it opens up more opportunity for me in the future."

2009, after a meeting with the team's school advisor about post-secondary education. He didn't fully commit to AU until his second year of professional hockey.

Although it was difficult to balance playing hockey and being a student when he first began, he quickly realized that "if I was going to succeed in hockey and in my studies, I needed to have discipline and learn how to manage my time. There is a lot of free time away from the rink, on the bus and on the road. By developing a specific plan of action to reach my goals, it allowed me to know exactly what I would accomplish each day and helped me to make the most of my time away from the rink."

Schira has completed eight courses towards a commerce degree. He says having a plan prevented him from becoming overwhelmed with the day-to-day tasks because he never planned so much that he couldn't handle it. "It allows me to focus on hockey when I need to focus on hockey and it allows me to focus on school when I needed to focus on school. They never interfere with each other, which is extremely important when it comes to being the best I can be at both."

Online independent study courses can be difficult when there are no specific due dates and no face-to-face interaction with professors and other students. But the way AU courses are organized, and the online interaction that is available with students and tutors, simplifies the process, Schira says. "There is always available support to guide me as I work through a course, which makes things easier and less stressful."

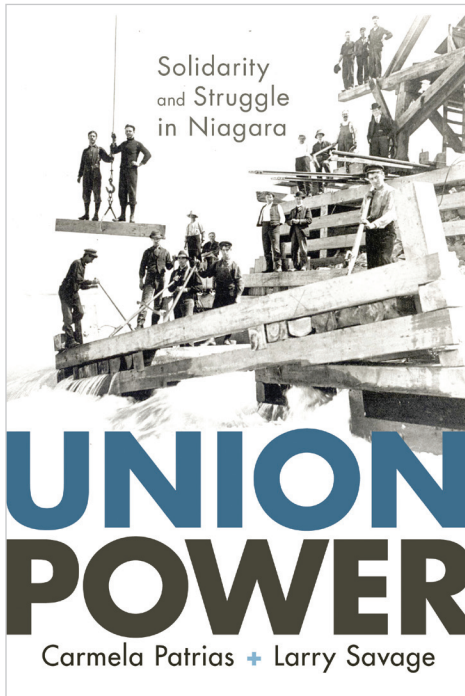


Christa Teeple

AU staff grads keep coming

ONE OF AU'S LIAISON OFFICERS, CHRISTA Teeple from Lethbridge, graduated with her Bachelor of Commerce degree this year. She completed the AU degree as a grouped-study collaboration student at Medicine Hat College, and went on to be the successful candidate for the new AU Liaison Officer at Lethbridge College last spring. We apologize for missing the name in the last issue.

New from AU Press

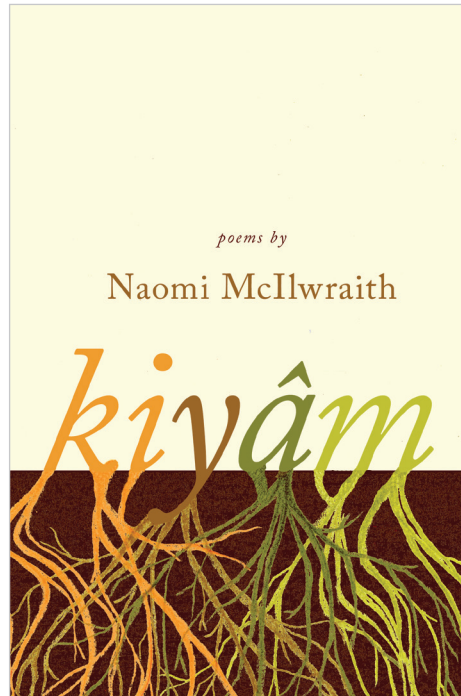


Union Power: Solidarity and Struggle in Niagara

FROM FACTORY WORKERS IN WELLAND to retail workers in St. Catharines, from hospitality workers in Niagara Falls to migrant farm workers in Niagara-on-the-Lake, *Union Power* showcases the role of working people in the Niagara region.

Early industrial development and the appalling working conditions of the often-vulnerable common labourer prompted a movement toward worker protection. Charting the development of the region's labour movement from the early nineteenth century to the present, authors Carmela Patrias and Larry Savage illustrate how workers from this highly diversified economy struggled to improve their lives both inside and outside the workplace.

Another book in a wonderful series called *Working Canadians*, a series co-published by the Canadian Committee on Labour History.



kiyâm

IN THIS LOVINGLY PREPARED VOLUME, poet Naomi McIlwraith explores the beauty of the intersection between *nêhiyawêwin*, the Plains Cree language, and English, *âkayâsimowin*. Written to honour her father's facility in *nêhiyawêwin* and her mother's beauty and generosity as an inheritor of Cree, Ojibwe, Scottish, and English, *kiyâm* articulates a powerful yearning for family, history, peace, and love.

kiyâm articulates a powerful yearning for family, history, peace, and love.

Excerpt from the book kiyâm:

What do you think of me, Dad,
writing this in Cree?
Could there have been more room
for a Cree conversation,
for a Cree understanding,
for a daughter's understanding
her father's honour
in the space between, *tawâyihk*,
your childhood and your passing.
Is it enough that I've
cleared a space on my desk
to light this candle for you?

Would that I could
have made more room.
nipakosêyimon kahkî-tawinamâtân.

Want more? Visit [AU Press](#) or:

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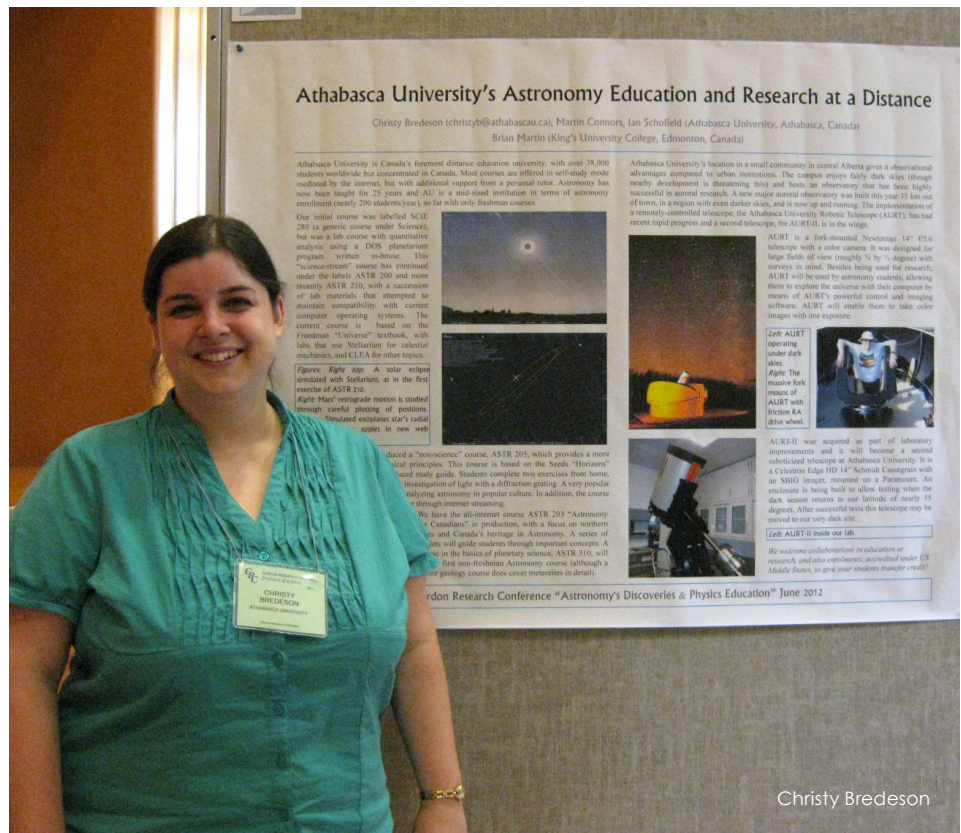
Development opportunities in the FST

In the stars

IN JUNE, ASTRONOMY TUTOR CHRISTY Bredeson attended the **Gordon Research Conference on Physics Education in Astronomy** in Maine, with support from the conference and from Martin Connors, with AU's Centre for Science. Bredeson presented a poster on AU's astronomy courses and on the use of small telescopes for research.

AU's small telescope research is based on Athabasca's dark skies and robotic control technologies. Telescopes are in many senses robots, Connors said, with precisely controlled motions and cameras for vision. "This combination and our northern latitude enable us to do unique research and we hope to use this advantage to link up with other projects for collaboration."

AU has hundreds of enrollments in astronomy a year, and is a major course provider in Canada. "Christy was offered the opportunity to attend the conference because of her involvement with astronomy education and I was happy to support this to showcase our research and teaching efforts," Connors said.



Christy Bredeson

Online MITX prototype

OBSERVATORY TECHNICIAN RAFAEL Hakobyan completed the inaugural **MITx course** in Circuits and Electronics, meeting training requirements for his tasks at the auroral observatory. The course had over 100,000 enrollments but less than a five per cent completion rate.

"The MIT course offered a way to cover the theoretical part of this training, and we are now getting Rafael to build electronic circuits which are needed for our measurement of earth's magnetic field and auroras" Connors said.

Circuits and Electronics is an on-line adaptation of MIT's first undergraduate analog design course. This prototype course ran, free of charge, for students worldwide from March till June this year. Students who demonstrated their mastery of the material earned an MITx certificate.

"The MIT course offered a way to cover the theoretical part of this training, and we are now getting Rafael to build electronic circuits which are needed for our measurement of earth's magnetic field and auroras."

Unleashing local capital

WORKING TOGETHER, ALBERTA COMMUNITIES can unleash the power of local investment to improve, enhance and expand their local economy. Unleashing Local Capital is a new project designed to empower communities to invest locally, direct their own economic development and reduce dependency on government supports.

The \$2.04 million dollar project is funded in large part by the **Rural Alberta Development Fund** and is co-ordinated by the **Alberta Community and Co-operative Association**. Strategic partners include Athabasca University, Alberta Business Family Institute, Community Futures Network of Alberta, Centre de Development Economique, and Alberta Rural Development Network.

This provides entrepreneurs with access to capital to finance business development locally, and provides local investors with an opportunity to invest their hard-earned savings in their own community.

Three pilot communities will be chosen to work through the Unleashing Local Capital Guide and establish their own local Community Investment Fund, a pool of capital raised from local investors and managed by a local committee, which is then invested in a local business.

Mike Gismondi, with the Centre for Social Sciences, is a member of the steering committee that is choosing the pilot communities and will be co-leading the development of a series of Raising Local Capital Guides that will help other communities establish community investment funds in the future.

AU will be providing help with course materials design, editing, and placement of the Raising Local Capital Guides on the Web in Moodle.

Selected communities contribute \$10,000 to the project for development costs, receive \$60,000 in financial support, and the resources to:

- form a local investment committee and create a Community Investment Fund (CIF);
- raise capital by offering shares for local investment (RRSP eligible);
- make sound and prudent investment decisions;
- provide financing through a CIF to a local business.

This provides entrepreneurs with access to capital to finance business development locally, and provides local investors with an opportunity to invest their hard-earned savings in their own community. The project has proven to be extremely successful across Canada in supporting the succession of an existing business, where owners are planning to retire. Moreover, investing in a CIF is RRSP eligible. Best of all, it ensures that important local businesses, jobs, and infrastructure remain and thrive in rural communities.

Recently the CIF has been applied in three rural Alberta communities, all of which were facing the loss of major economic infrastructure. Using the CIF model, these communities were able to purchase bedrock assets in their community, make them more profitable, and create more jobs than before.

At risk of losing its grain terminal, Westlock used a CIF strategy and raised enough capital to purchase the terminal. Today, Westlock Terminals NGC Ltd. is one of the busiest and most profitable terminals in all of Western Canada.

In the Battle River area, farmers were facing the decommissioning of the railway that connected them to the closest grain terminal. Again, the community pulled together and invested in Battle River Railway NGC and the railway. Since making the purchase, the investment has paid significant dividends to its community owners. It has also provided an important asset that can be used for tourism and other opportunities within the area.

A dedicated group of community members pulled together to set up the Sangudo Opportunity Development Co-operative, to raise capital to invest in a local business and revive the local economy. SODC raised a quarter of a million dollars to purchase Sangudo Custom Meat Packers from the retiring owner and leased the building to two local entrepreneurs. Since then, the meat-packing plant has created 14 additional jobs, and is expanding through support from SODC. The SODC has also invested in a local restaurant and is exploring several other business ventures.

Every year Albertans contribute over four billion dollars annually to RRSP's, the majority of which leaves the province. Imagine what could happen if a percentage remained, or was re-directed into the community to support the development of community owned and operated businesses. This project will commence in June of 2012 and run until December 2013. One long term goal of the Cooperative and Community Futures sector is to work with AU and Dr. Gismondi to develop a Moodle cloud server where Alberta community development groups can house educational materials and host Moodle learning spaces.

AU in the news

Changing knowledge

GEORGE SIEMENS, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR of TEKRI at AU, is featured in an interview about higher education in a networked age in [Campus Technology](#). Siemens says, "The changing way we create and share knowledge is at the core of what's driving education. It's not the fact that we have mobiles and the Web that requires education to change, but rather that we are using these technologies to begin circumventing existing knowledge processes.

Campus Technology also ran an [article](#) on AU's Open Knowledge Environment (OKE) project, reviewing the initiatives that were undertaken to "recharge technology infrastructure, redefine skill sets, and revamp processes across the entire organization."

Introverts come out

MBA STUDENT DEB VAN DE WATER HAS A column in the [Financial Post](#) about her experience as an introvert in an online graduate program as well as the leadership style of introverts. You can also find past columns by van de Water on the site.

Architectural education at AU

THE NEW CENTRE FOR ARCHITECTURE AT AU is mentioned in an [Edmonton Journal column](#) about architecture in the province. Architect Barry Johns writes about "a national School of Architecture to be headquartered here in our city. To be constructed around an association between the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada and a world renowned online and distance education institution – Athabasca University, this program is finally nearing completion. Quietly announced during its formative stages at a variety of public events over the past year, this program has the potential to significantly enhance architectural education in Canada and around the world."

Labour criticism

DR. BOB BARNETSON, LABOUR RELATIONS professor with AU's Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies is quoted in a [Calgary Herald article](#) about random drug testing for oil patch workers. Barnettson believes random tests are not necessarily the best method for determining impairment. "And if it is not an effective way to determine present impairment, then what purpose does it serve other than to invade the privacy of employees?"

Memorial award

AU STUDENT SARAH MANN IS THE 2011-2012 recipient of the Bryon Paeye Memorial Award from AU CUPE Local 3911. She was nominated by her AU instructor Mark McCutcheon.

Mann received the award for overcoming many personal challenges to be successful in her pursuit of academic studies at Athabasca University. She has demonstrated courage, perseverance and resourcefulness in coping with these challenges.

Mann also received the Barbara Roberts Memorial Prize for 2011/12 from Women's and Gender Studies for her paper on how sex workers are represented in new media.

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The next edition of *The Insider* will be published on August 20. Deadline for submissions is August 10.

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