

# the insider

A newsletter published for everyone in the Athabasca University community

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AU student Bryce Davison (seen here with former skating partner Jessica Dubé) has some decisions to make about his future. AU is an important part of his transition strategy. See the story on page 4.



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Athabasca University 

# Aspirations for AU: FLEXIBILITY, EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION

## Strategic University Plan Update



The first round of open forums in phase one of the community-based participatory planning process for the Strategic University Plan took place at Athabasca, Edmonton, CIM and Calgary in February.

Participants were asked to respond to four questions:

- What are your hopes and dreams for AU and how can they be realized?
- What are five key areas, in order of priority, that AU should focus on in the next five to 10 years?
- What are the biggest challenges AU will face in the next five to 10 years, and how should the university prepare for them?
- What specific actions or initiatives will make AU the most relevant university for the next generation?

Participant responses were varied, and many focused on addressing and overcoming perceived reputational challenges faced by AU, such as wanting AU to be seen as a real, legitimate university of choice, offering a positive student experience; or wanting AU to be seen more as a traditional university, with a strong reputation in Alberta (to match its international reputation).

Suggestions for overcoming such reputational challenges included market research, enhanced marketing, assuming a larger role in Campus Alberta, forming national and international partnerships and collaborations with educational institutions and the private sector, promoting recognition and accreditation, developing a stronger alumni voice and offering a more satisfying student experience.

Some participants wanted to see greater flexibility and efficiency in administration, course development and course delivery in order to be able to respond more creatively to market demands.

In terms of recruitment, some wanted to see AU recruit more visiting students, while others called for a focus on program students. Some wanted to see more international students, while others wanted recruitment to be focused first on Alberta, then Canada and then the world.

Regardless of preference for print-based or e-university model, participants called for a synergy of pedagogy and technology, while maintaining course quality, in order to benefit students.

Several participants suggested a greater emphasis on supporting student and staff success and satisfaction.

Enhancing communication was mentioned a number of times, including instructor-student communication, executive-staff communication, interdepartmental communication and university-wide communication.

Other recommendations included

- improving the student experience and enhancing student success and retention by supporting the whole academic cycle from prospective student to alumnus
- developing a university (infra)structure that is more agile, responsive, adaptable, streamlined and open to change with better internal communication
- having the best and most appropriate technology without burdening people
- achieving a balance between research and teaching, with research that informs teaching
- ensuring the success of all efforts through equity
- ensuring adequate succession planning
- recovering from the current hiring freeze
- finding ways to deal with increasing competition

# Retail Nation: Consumerism and Protest



Donica Belisle

Dr. Donica Belisle, an assistant professor of women's studies in the Centre for Work and Community Studies, has experienced shopping from both sides of the counter, as both a customer and a salesperson. Her many adventures in retailing left her with an interest in shopping history that eventually inspired the book *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada*, recently published by UBC Press.

"I grew up in rural Saskatchewan," Belisle said, "and my family and friends sometimes drove to nearby cities—Regina and Winnipeg—to stock up on furniture

and clothes. These experiences stuck with me and helped me see that shopping could be fun but also stressful. As well, when I was doing my undergraduate degree in Manitoba, I worked part-time in a clothing store. In that position, I experienced shopping from the other side of the counter. Both my positive and my negative experiences made me want to learn more about retail and consumer culture. How did retail and consumption evolve in Canada? How have they affected Canadians' lives? I began conducting research on these topics, and this book is the result of that work."

The experience of walking down a store aisle, replete with displays, advertisements, salespeople, consumer goods and infinite choice, is, Belisle said, so common that we often forget that mass retail barely existed a century ago. In *Retail Nation*, she traces the beginnings of Canada's transformation into a modern consumer nation back to an era in which Eaton's, Simpson's and the Hudson's Bay Company ruled the shopping scene.

Between 1890 and 1940, department stores revolutionized selling and shopping, the book argues, by parlaying cheap raw materials, business-friendly government policies and growing demand for low-priced goods into retail empires that promised to strengthen the nation. Some citizens found happiness and fulfillment in those department store aisles; others experienced a cold shoulder or a closed door.

During the first half of the twentieth century, Belisle said, operators of Canada's largest stores asserted that their activities strengthened the nation by bringing affordable goods to all consumers and providing jobs for many Canadians. "However, my book disagrees with this premise, and shows that department stores, together with consumer capitalism, helped to enforce social and economic inequality in this country. A central argument of the book, in fact, is that department stores, together with the consumer culture they promoted, helped to create a modern Canadian culture that was alienating and dependent on social disparity."

*Retail Nation* presents department stores as agents of nationalism and modernization but argues that the white, consumerist, middle-class nation that they helped to define was more limited and contested than the nostalgic portraits of the early department store suggest. "Department stores tended to privilege white, affluent and male workers and customers over other employees and shoppers," she said. "This treatment created disempowering and alienating working and shopping environments for people of African, Asian, and Indigenous heritage, as well as for women and low-income people."

The department stores' sexist, racist and classist ways did not go unchallenged, Belisle maintains. Across the country, journalists, activists, employees, unemployed people, shoppers, and many others were critical of mass retail. For example, over 500 Eaton's employees walked out during the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, and in 1934, a crowd of over 700 unemployed people held a sit-in at the Bay in Vancouver and demanded food and shelter. "My book documents these activities and more," she said "and shows that, despite the dominance of mass retail in contemporary Canada, Canadians have a rich history of resistance and protest against both giant retailers and the alienations caused by capitalist consumer culture."

Hardcover copies of *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada* are available through the [UBC Press](#). The book will be released in paperback in July.

To learn more about Donica Belisle's teaching and research, visit her [website](#).



Bryce Davison

## Bryce Davison Champions AU

Canadian skating champion Bryce Davison is ready for a change, and AU is an important component of his transition strategy.

He decided last summer to return to school to give himself more options for the future. "I did an Internet search of online schools in Canada, and AU had the best reputation," he said. "It also had the best variety of courses I wanted to take."

While still recovering from knee surgery performed last fall, Davison also recently had to deal with the end of his nine-year skating partnership with Jessica Dubé. Davison and Dubé were three-time Canadian pairs champions and 2008 world bronze medalists.

Taking control of his own life is a big element of the change that he is experiencing, he said. "Previously things were pretty well mapped out for me. There was little in the way of choice. But now I get to make decisions based on what I want to do."

Now working on his first six-credit biology course, Davison likes distance education because it lets people like him, who are otherwise engaged in a demanding life, work at their own pace.

At this point, career options include coaching, business, broadcasting and sports medicine. Whatever the next phase of his life becomes, Davison will likely take it on with the same full-out approach he took to skating and is now taking to his studies.

"There is a passion, drive and determination you find with any amateur athlete who is at a high level of international competition," he said. "Talent takes you only so far. The rest of it is how hard you train and how much you want it."

Bryce Davison is featured in the latest issue of [Open AU](#).

# Connecting Learning Ideas

The current issue of the *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning* (Volume 12, Number 3), published by the Centre for Distance Education, is a special issue on connectivism.

Connectivism is a new learning theory that exploits the power of networks and networking to support learning. The term was first coined in 2004 by George Siemens of AU's Technology Enhanced Knowledge Research Institute, who, along with Gráinne Conole of the Institute of Educational Technology at the Open University, U.K., is guest editor of the issue.

According to a blog entry by IRRODL editor Dr. Terry Anderson, "To our knowledge this is the first full peer-reviewed journal issue focused on connectivist ideas, ideals, practices and criticism."

The following excerpts are taken from an editorial by Siemens and Conole that opens the special issue:

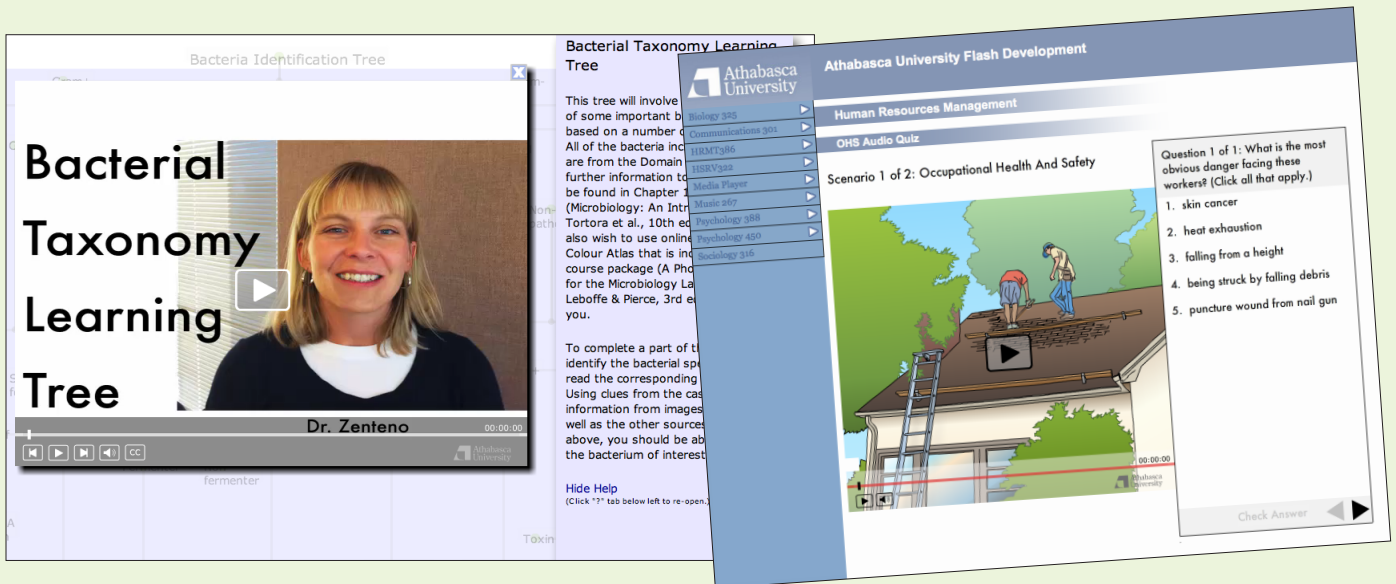
"New technologies that influence how information is created and shared and how people connect and socialize hold promise for adoption in education. Much like the idea of a book necessitated the development of the library or the idea of structured curriculum and domains of knowledge produced classrooms, the idea of the Internet – distributed, social, networked – influences the structure of education, teaching and learning."

"This special issue of IRRODL provides an opportunity to step back and reflect on how these dramatic social and technological changes impact education. In 2004, connectivism was presented as a new theory of learning that addresses learning in complex, social, networked environments. Since that time, numerous articles, open online courses and online conferences have explored connectivism's application in education. As articles in this issue reflect, sharp criticism and support have been offered. We hope this issue will help to advance the discussion, to clarify areas of needed research and to contribute to ongoing debate about the influence of the Internet on teaching and learning."

The issue is available at [IRRODL](#).

# Going Beyond the Text: Showcase Courses Project

by Erin Ottosen



AU is adding more than 20 new multimedia learning enhancements to high-enrolment online courses as a result of the CAF-funded Showcase Courses project.

According to AU learning designer and project co-ordinator Stephen Addison, the project created opportunities to present more information to students in formats that go beyond text on a screen. “The focus was on course content that students find more difficult to learn,” he said, “so we developed interactive learning objects and other enhancements as a way of helping students engage more successfully with such content.”

For example, a crossword puzzle with audio clues helps students learn to hear the difference between a major chord and a minor chord in Music 267.

In Human Resource Management 386, students test their knowledge of occupational health and safety by examining a picture of construction workers on a roof accompanied by audio narration and completing a multiple choice quiz about the scenario. Pop-up responses explain why the answers they choose are right or wrong.

In Biology 325, students practice identifying important species of bacteria by working through the branches of a taxonomy tree. “Information about identifying bacteria is in the textbook,” course co-ordinator Dr. Shauna Reckseidler-Zenteno said, “but this tree offers students a grand synthesis of the information. It’s a way of putting it

all together and seeing that these bacteria belong to this group, and that group is part of another group.”

The tree does more than illustrate the connections between classes of bacteria because students not only look at it but interact with it. Their understanding of bacteria classification is reinforced by selecting the classes to which they think an unidentified bacterium belongs. By selecting classes, they travel down the tree branches until they arrive at a species of bacterium. They practice what they have learned in a way that is not possible by reading a textbook.

“Creating something like the tree, which presents information in a way a textbook can’t, is really helpful,” Reckseidler-Zenteno said. “It’s an excellent way to cater to different learning styles and help students master the course learning objectives.”

Chris Manuel, the instructional media analyst who programmed the taxonomy tree and several other Showcase Courses learning enhancements, said that one goal of the project was to develop reusable resources. “We’ve built a number of things where the core is reusable,” he said. “The XML content can be replaced with new content.”

Read more about these new learning enhancements on the [KIP – CAF Projects website](#).

# Online Student Debating: Does It Work?

by Bob Heller

The Arts and Science Research Talks series was pleased to host the presentation "Formal Student Debating: Does it Work Online?" by Dr. Virginia Vandall-Walker of the Faculty of Health Disciplines at AU Edmonton on March 18. The speaker offered an enthusiastic positive response to the question posed by her title.

According to Vandall-Walker, formal debating is often used in the conventional classroom as a means of promoting critical thinking skills, but its use and value in online courses is relatively unknown.

To explore the possibility of using debating in online courses, Vandall-Walker and her FHD collaborators Dr. Carolyn Park and Dr. Kim Munich incorporated modified debating rules as part of an assignment in Advanced Trends and Issues in Nursing, a paced online graduate course in nursing. Unlike formal debates, these modified debates yielded no winners, the emphasis instead being on thoroughness of coverage and student engagement.

In Phase 1 of their analysis (Phase 2 is to be completed by June 2011), Vandall-Walker and her colleagues used a qualitative descriptive approach to categorize concepts identified in student reflections following the debate assignment. They identified five themes: risk taking, defense of a position, coverage of all aspects, skill and knowledge transfer, and critical thinking. Moreover, they also identified numerous factors influencing each theme, some of which overlapped across themes and across factors.

The modified debate had an enormous positive impact on the students' overall learning experience, Vandall-Walker said, as reflected in their comments, some of which she quoted.

Those in attendance at the presentation agreed that online debates could be extremely valuable in a distance education curriculum. Ideas based on the teaching practice of audience members were shared.

A link to the recorded session is available at the [Centre for Research home page](#).

Join us on April 15, when the next Arts and Science Research Talks speaker will be Dr. Rhiannon Bury, associate professor of women's studies in the Centre for Work and Community Studies, who will be speaking on television viewing and fan practices in the web 2.0 era.



A view of the new science lab

## Science Lab Open House Announced

An open house to celebrate AU's new and expanded science laboratory will be held from 2 to 4 p.m. on Tuesday, April 26.

Faculty of Science and Technology faculty and staff members will be on hand with demonstrations and to answer questions, and light refreshments and snacks will be provided.

**RSVP** by Wednesday, April 20.

# Shave and a Haircut, \$4034.95 and Counting

Facilities and Services director Greg Wiens is raising money for the Canadian Diabetes Association by shaving his face and head, and he has raised \$4034.95, so far, surpassing his original \$2500 goal.

The shave took place at AU Athabasca on March 21, performed by volunteer barber Albert Assaf. Wiens has worn a beard since 1977 and described the new feeling as “definitely breezy!”

“Apparently it makes me look younger (so I have been told),” he said, “and it has been fun watching the reaction when people actually recognize who I am. There’s a little bit of an identity crisis when I look in the mirror.”

Wiens expressed his appreciation for the efforts of Facilities and Services staff in organizing the fundraiser and said he was overwhelmed by the generous support from members of the AU community, from AU business partners and from friends and family.

Donations can still be made to the fundraiser, and they will be much appreciated, Wiens said. To donate, go to the [Canadian Diabetes Association website](#), click on Go to My Fundraiser, and then click Search for an Individual. Enter Greg Wiens in the Search by Name field and follow through to the donation page.



Before and after, Greg Wiens with barber Albert Assaf.

## Pivato's Eighth and Ninth

No, he didn't score goals for the Athabasca Insiders.

Dr. Joseph Pivato, professor of English and literary studies in the Centre for Language and Literature, has published his eighth book, *Pier Giorgio Di Cicco: Essays on His Works*. The work is published by Guernica Editions of Toronto.

Pivato's upcoming ninth book, on African-Canadian writer George Elliott Clarke, will be published by Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

In April, Pivato will speak at a Canadian Studies conference at the University of Udine in Italy.

Dr. Joseph Pivato at Convocation 2010

# AU Students, Alumni and Faculty Members Making News

## EMBA Alumni Networking

AU EMBA alumnus Michael Conway, along with business professor Dr. Deborah Hurst, recently appeared in a *Financial Post* article examining the usefulness of networking in today's fast-paced and complex business environment.

Reporter Mary Teresa Bitti wrote that EMBA alumni networks provide a means of connecting with a group of people who have come through a shared and, in the case of most EMBA programs, intense experience.

"Networking becomes more and more important with the rapid changes in the economy, technology and business practices that force great managers to change their strategies, thought processes and vision on the fly," Conway, who is regional superintendent of the North Slave Region Department of Transportation and leader of the Yellowknife chapter of AU's MBA alumni network, is quoted as saying.

Business schools across the country are using social media such as Linked In, Facebook and Twitter to help their EMBA alumni "stay connected," the article says, and quotes Hurst as saying, "When you look at what is happening with social media today, you can see this is a powerful means to developing a student alumni community. The benefit of that collective experience works so much easier online. You have an immediacy of response and robust, candid discussion with former classmates weighing in to help you with an issue."

See the full article in the [Financial Post](#).

## Bully for Byrne

The *Prince Albert Herald* featured an article about AU student Jesse Byrne's professional bullfighting career. In his first full season on tour, Byrne will travel across the United States between January and October.

Reporter Sheri Lamb wrote that Byrne started his rodeo career at 16, following in the footsteps of his bullfighter father Ryan Byrne and his mother Kelly Byrne, a competitive barrel racer.

Byrne is working toward an AU commerce degree with a major in finance and balances his studies with his professional activities. "I can take it with me on the road," he is quoted as saying of his school work, "because with my schedule it doesn't go real well with a student's schedule."

See the full article in the [Prince Albert Herald](#).

## Fundraising for Japan

AU student Céline Labelle raised over \$3000 for Japan relief by hosting a spaghetti supper in Cornwall, Ont.

The money raised was donated to the Red Cross.

News of Labelle's successful event was reported in the [Seaway News](#).



## DID YOU KNOW?

Athabasca University's Facebook page now has over 1,250 fans



# Corporate Challenge Games 2011

The AU Wellness Committee is excited to announce that, for the first time, AU will participate in the Edmonton and Area **Corporate Challenge Games**, scheduled this year for May 27 to June 11.

Now in their twentieth year, the CC Games involve over 175 organizations, more than 18,000 athletes and 1,900 volunteers in an Olympics-style competition that is one of the largest amateur sporting events in Canada. The games promote participation, sportsmanship, team building and fun while fostering interaction, teamwork, morale, pride, health and wellness. In the spirit of friendly competition, points are also awarded in each event.

The last few days of the CC Games do overlap with AU's Convocation on June 9, 10 and 11, but we are confident there will be plenty of AU participation and spirit in our athletes, volunteers and Convocation attendees. Please consider volunteering for both Convocation and the CC Games.



Enthusiastic participants from last year's games

AU will participate in the Purple Division which requires athletes and volunteers for the following events: five-pin bowling, bunnock, cribbage, foosball, mountain bike race, orienteering, race walk, five- and 10-kilometre road races, scavenger hunt, team trivia, unknown challenge, spirit challenge and blood donor challenge

A detailed description of each of these events can be found on the [CC Games Website](#). Click on the Sports and Events pull-down menu at the top of the page, scroll down to the particular event and then look under the Rules heading for that event.

The roster of events in which AU is entered with the date for each and the number of spots still open is posted on the [AU Wellness website](#). Please sign up as soon as possible by emailing [Nichole Collins](#) indicating the event or events in which you wish to participate. Current AU employees (from all locations), AU employees on leave and retired AU employees receiving benefits are eligible to participate.

Volunteers are also needed to help out at the games, and AU is required to provide a minimum of eight volunteers. To sign up as a volunteer, please email [Nichole Collins](#). Volunteer duties will be assigned by CC Games organizers but will most likely involve working at one or more of the three events with the most AU participation. Members of the following groups can volunteer: AU employees (all locations), AU employees on leave, retired AU employees, AU students, AU alumni, family members of AU Employees, students and alumni, and friends of AU employees, students and alumni. All volunteers must be 18 or older, and they may not bring pets or children under 18 to an event.

The Spirit Challenge Award is a highlight of the CC Games. Team spirit points can be collected at different challenges and events, and an overall spirit winner is named in each division, plus teams that collect the most spirit award points will gain points towards their overall standings. For information on eligibility and activities at which spirit points can be collected, see the [Spirit Award Challenge webpage](#).

The Blood Donor Challenge 2011 will honour the participating organization which earns the most points within its division for blood donations and for recruiting new donors. Information about who can take part and how to make a donation is available at the [Blood Donor Challenge webpage](#).

In addition to the sporting and challenge events, the CC Games features several social events, including the Party in the Park (Borden Park, Friday, May 27, 5 to 11 p.m.), which is open to all participants, and Family Day (Borden Park, Saturday, June 11, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.), which is open to participants and their friends, co-workers and families. More information on these events can be found on the CC Games webpage under General Information, Special Events.

Contact [Nichole Collins](#) (780-675-3775) with any questions. Check the [AU Wellness website](#) for regular updates on how teams are shaping up, how many points AU has earned and how we do on the challenges.



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- ▶ Successful Canadian business experiences in Africa
- ▶ The future of doctoral and post-doctoral business education in Africa in an era of globalization

For more information visit our website:  
<http://iaabd2011.athabascau.ca/index.php>

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# KIP/CAF *FOCUS* Ends Its Run



The last issue of **FOCUS**, the newsletter dedicated to reporting on Community Adjustment Fund and Knowledge Infrastructure Program funded projects at AU, was published on March 31. As a CAF funded endeavour, *FOCUS* concluded on March 31 along with all other CAF funded projects.

The *FOCUS* team would like to thank all the KIP and CAF funded project team members who made the newsletter possible by participating in interviews and contributing to the content.

Watch for more information about the completion of ongoing KIP funded projects in *The Insider* and on [AU's KIP and CAF Projects website](#).

*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 next issue of *The Insider* will be published on Monday, April 26, 2011. The deadline for submissions is April 15.



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