

the insider

A newsletter published for everyone in the Athabasca University community

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IN THIS ISSUE:

- 2 AU Research at CES
- 2 Giving to the World
- 3 Powerful Portals
- 4 Lab Work
- 4 Amundsen among the Inuit
- 5 Dream Update
- 6 Capacity Building
- 7 The AU Corral
- 7 The Science of Wolves
- 8 Research Talks
- 8-9 AU People in the News



Photo by Susan Bainbridge

Over 700 parents, students, community leaders and school committee representatives were on hand when AU donated the first of 48 laptops to Mansingh Dharma School in Kathmandu earlier this month, making it the first school in Nepal to have a computer lab. Internet access will enable the school and the community to connect to the world. See the story on page 5.



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

Athabasca University 

AU Semantic Technology Research Featured at CES

The Semantic Technology Laboratory in AU's School of Computing and Information Systems partnered with Warranty Life, a Bellingham, Washington, technology start-up company to develop a receipt parsing technology that will allow online shoppers to easily access a record of their purchases, manufacturers' warranty information and product manuals and to buy extended warranties for products, all in one central place.

A demonstration of the receipt parsing technology for Amazon.com users was launched at the International CES, the world's premier consumer electronics show, in Las Vegas, Nevada, earlier this month.

The technology will allow Amazon customers to email their receipts to Warranty Life and have their purchase information automatically entered into the Warranty Life system. If no user account exists, a new one is created while product information is extracted and manufacturer warranty details determined. For existing accounts, the product information is simply added to the

account holder's My Stuff page, giving the consumer an easy way to track purchases and allowing Warranty Life to make an extended warranty offer.

Currently users can search the systems database (1 million products) to manage and protect virtually any purchase. As the technology is further developed, it will give Warranty Life the ability to parse HTML or PDF receipts from any retailer.

According to Dr. Ebrahim Bagheri, an assistant professor in the School of Computing and Information Systems, this research and development project carried out in collaboration with Warranty Life exploited state-of-the-art natural language processing and semantic technologies to enable the seamless integration of consumer information with Warranty Life systems.

"We're happy to be a part of an innovation that helps consumers instantly manage their products," Bagheri said, "and look forward to expanding the technology to be able to support any retailer."

Changing the World through Giving

AU president Frits Pannekoek believes that anyone who wants to change the world. He also believes that AU can play a part in changing the world, and that belief is one of several motivations for his personal giving to the university.

In the past three years, Pannekoek has donated nearly to \$95,000 to the university. "If you don't believe in your own institution," he asked, "why would others? If you don't have passion, you can't demonstrate that passion to others. I believe in this university and what it stands for: breaking down barriers."

Pannekoek, who serves as a member of the advisory board for Red Crow Community College, has funded scholarships to allow RCC students to study at AU and has supported the development of AU courses in Kainai (Blackfoot) studies, jointly with RCC. He has also supported AU Press, specifically to promote scholarship in aboriginal issues. Interest in Blackfoot, Plains and aboriginal culture is significant in Germany and Eastern Europe, Pannekoek said, and he regards such courses and research as opportunities not only to develop pride of culture here in Alberta but also to attract students from abroad.

In the past year, Pannekoek made a donation to the AU Art Committee in memory of his late wife, Christine, and presented a painting by First Nations artist Jim Logan to the Centre for World Indigenous Knowledge and Research at the opening of the centre's new offices in the Academic and Research Centre.

We exist to give to others, to give to our community, to share and to leave the world a better place, Pannekoek said. "One of the reasons people come to AU is to make a better world. That's why we get involved abroad with other open universities, universities that remove barriers, universities that appeal to people who, for generations, have never had learning opportunities. For this university to have the chance to transform nations is hugely important, and we can all get involved in some way or other."



Frits Pannekoek presents *Becoming a Woman* by Jim Logan, to CWIKR elder in virtual residence, Maria Campbell.

Portals Can Be Powerful Marketing Tools

Dr. Mike Sosteric, an assistant professor of sociology in Centre for Global and Social Analysis, believes that it is time to bring sociology out from behind the academic wall, and he is doing so through a new media portal called *The Socjourn*.

A couple years ago, Sosteric became frustrated with traditional models of academic communication such as peer reviewed scholarly journals and academic conferences. "I felt it just created bulkheads between professors and the real world," he said. "This is a particular problem in sociology where there are no journals designed to raise awareness of sociological research and discussions."

Sosteric wanted to do something that would create a broader awareness of sociology and its contribution to society as a whole and to revitalize what he felt was a stagnating sociology program at AU. *The Socjourn*, founded in 2010, functions, he said, "by providing content interesting to students, in a language students can understand, in ways students can relate to, in forms easily accessible to them."

Although still new, *The Socjourn* is proving extremely popular, with 1,000,000 hits a month and a focused readership made up mostly of students but also including some professors.

Content includes articles contributed by Sosteric himself, faculty members from other institutions and students and book announcements submitted by publishers. Sosteric also posts student papers from his advanced sociology courses that he thinks might be interesting.

"I turn down a lot of material written by

academics," he said, "because it is in traditional forms (i.e., abstract, introduction, discussion, etc.). We are not a peer reviewed journal and trained academics have a hard time seeing past the publication blinders they wear."

Since *The Socjourn* first appeared, enrolment in Sociology 287 (Introduction to Sociology I) has increased by 30 per cent, Sosteric said, adding that part of the increase is likely due to a course rewrite which replaced previous, dated introductory material. "But I suspect a large part of the increase is the result of the modest efforts I've taken at *The Socjourn* to point potential students toward our sociology program."

The Socjourn's readership is not limited to those in humanities and social sciences but

also draws from natural sciences, formal sciences and professions (agriculture, law, business and the military). All of which suggests to Sosteric that portals like *The Socjourn* could be powerful marketing tools for the university. "If you draw student eyes to a single spot on the Internet, and offer them interesting content, then you guide them in channels as you see fit," he said.

"A lot of universities are advertising on *The Socjourn*," Sosteric said, "but because I have control over the form and content of the portal, I can give AU a prominent place. If these portals can translate to 20, 30, even 60 per cent increases in enrolment, as well as increased global visibility, then there is considerable value in constructing them."

The screenshot shows the homepage of 'The Socjourn', an online journal. The header is dark red with the site's name in white. Below the header is a navigation bar with various links. The main content area is divided into several sections: a featured article titled 'Get up, stand up' with a woman flexing her bicep, a 'Brain Training Games' section with a 'Play Games' button, and a 'Featured Articles' section with a photo of a group of people. There are also 'Improve Your Brain' and 'Book Reviews' sections. The page is designed to be user-friendly and engaging for students.

Lab Work

Grade 6 and 7 students from Landing Trails Intermediate School in Athabasca worked last week with Dr. Ken Munyikwa, assistant professor of earth science, in AU's new science lab. The students identified rocks and minerals by their characteristics such as hardness. The field trip was organized by Science Outreach – Athabasca.



Tombs' Documentary Shows Inuit Culture Critical to Amundsen

The *Blinding Sea*, a documentary film by George Tombs, an academic coordinator in the Centre for Integrated Studies, reveals the importance of explorer Roald Amundsen's exposure to Inuit culture.

From the Inuit, the film shows, Amundsen learned how to build snow houses, manufacture tools, dress in appropriate polar clothing (usually caribou and seal skin parkas), hunt effectively for food, ward off scurvy, drive dog teams and slaughter and feed frail dogs to strong ones on long sled trips.

In preparing the one-hour documentary, Tombs said, he filmed in many of the places Amundsen visited and lived in, including the Antarctic peninsula. "I didn't just want to rely on archival documents," he is quoted as saying in a *Globe and Mail* article, "but to show what it's like to live in these places. I spent one winter in the Beaufort Sea, with minus 56 C temperatures. It gave me the fear of God. We had access to satellite communications and, if we needed it, a helicopter. Imagine what it was like for him."

The documentary is scheduled for release in March.

Both the December 12, 2011, *Globe and Mail* article and an article by Tombs in *Canada's History* (October/November 2011) are available through the AU Library journal database.



DID YOU KNOW?

Athabasca University's Facebook page has over 1,700 fans.

Check it out at www.facebook.com/Athabasca.University

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

Building a Dream: Nepal Update



Dr. Mohamed Ally with Binod Pandit, principal of the Mansingh Dharma School, and one of the 48 laptops. (Photo by Susan Bainbridge)



The community turns out to welcome AU computers to Mansingh Dharma School earlier this month. (Photo by Susan Bainbridge)



Susan Bainbridge

This is the third in a series of occasional letters to The Insider by Susan Bainbridge, an AU doctoral student in distance education, who teaches at the Higher Colleges of Technology in the United Arab Emirates and has been working in support of the Mansingh Dharma School in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Over the past two years, due to the interest and generosity of readers like you, progress at the Mansingh Dharma School has been steady. During the past few months, the universe has

begun to unfold in miraculous ways, and I thought an update might interest those of you who have already helped and encourage others to join us.

As many of you will know, AU has been working with the Government of Nepal and other interested parties to found the Open University of Nepal. As the first open university in the country, it would help many Nepali citizens to further their education. This development was extremely fortuitous for me personally, as my doctoral research centres on Nepal and e-learning.

While working through EDDE 804 with my cohort and Dr. Marti Cleveland-Innes, Tony Tin, Sze-Kiu Leung and I presented a project on Nepal and its educational and leadership needs. As a result of this project, and thanks to Tony Tin, James McLeod, Kelcey Carlisle, Paige Jensen and the powers that be at AU who assisted, we managed to set aside 48 used laptops to donate to the Mansingh Dharma School.

During the first week of January, Dr. Mohamed Ally and I went to Nepal to work on a research project related to the Open University of Nepal initiative. Dr. Ally also brought over the first of the 48 used laptops to present to Mansingh Dharma School.

We visited the school with the prime minister's wife, the minister of state for education, ministry officials and other high ranking Nepali officials on January 5. We knew that these computers represented a significant donation to the school, but it was not until we arrived that we truly

understood the magnitude of AU's generosity in the eyes of the people there. Over 700 parents, students, community leaders and school committee representatives were waiting to greet us. Dr. Ally and I were smothered in garlands of flowers and greetings of 'Namaste.' Grandmothers, children and parents were hugging us and expressing their gratitude. It was extremely emotional and difficult to put into words. We were told that Mansingh Dharma School will be the first public school in Nepal to have a computer lab.

The doors that this facility will open for the school's students are innumerable. The Internet is truly the great equalizer. Suddenly, these children will have access to information that has, until now, been accessible only to the children of wealthier nations. The students, teachers and citizens of Nepal may become future students of AU or the OUN.

Dr. Ally pointed out to government officials that e-learning and m-learning could be the solution to education problems in Nepal. Despite the mountainous terrain, the limited transportation facilities and the lack of infrastructure in the country, the existing learning technology and additional innovative technology being developed daily, can allow Nepal to jump into the twenty-first century.

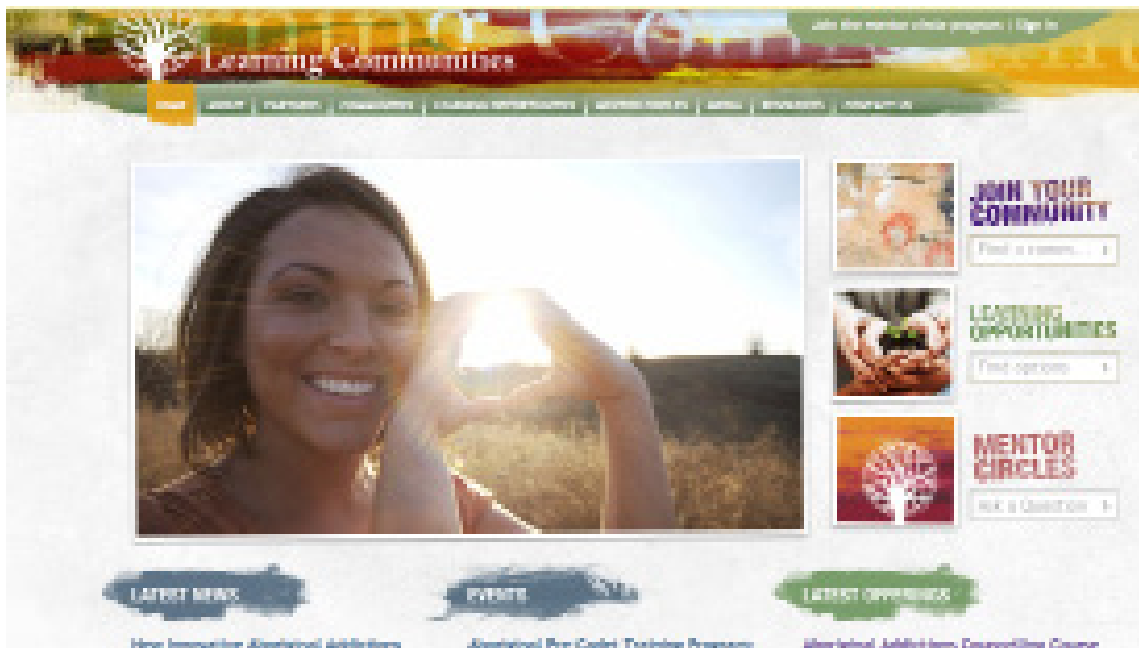
Our work in Nepal is just beginning, but this donation of 48 used laptops is a significant step forward. Thank you to everyone involved for this magnificent gift.

Although the students will be soon working with e-books and online material, from a pedagogical point of view, their primary-age students still require *real* books at this time. Hence, my book campaign continues. You can find details on my [Facebook page](#). I hope some of you decide to send a book or two to the school so we can begin the process of developing in their primary students the love of reading and learning.

You can follow the instructions on my Facebook page or simply send books directly to the school principal: Binod Pandit, GPO 12719, Kathmandu, Nepal. The cell phone number is 977-9741126650 (If you send by Amazon or courier they require a cell number).

Listen to an interview of Dr. Mohamed Ally about this donation on [The Eyeopener](#), the morning show on CBC Radio Calgary

Building Northern Capacity through Learning Communities



In the near future, an Elders' Council, led by Maria Campbell, will be added to impart counsel and guidance based on community culture and traditional knowledge.

Central to the project is development of a LCP website connecting community activities and providing a forum for sharing learning opportunities and information, showcasing best practices in communities and creating a supportive network that speaks to community members. Focused on the communities, the website has sections devoted

Since 2006, the Learning Communities Project has been assisting rural and remote communities in northern Alberta to create viable futures by developing the capacity to initiate, foster and support learning opportunities. The project focuses on building capacity, sharing expertise, creating knowledge and enhancing economic opportunities.

With the generous support of Allan Markin, chair of Canadian Natural Resources Limited, the project initially concentrated on building capacity for and awareness of post-secondary learning opportunities among itinerant workers in a northern Alberta single resource camp. Today, it is starting to enable residents of northern Alberta rural, remote and aboriginal communities to access educational opportunities through distance learning and by implementing community support mechanisms.

Following extensive community surveys and discussions of barriers to learning affecting the residents of the communities, the LCP has evolved to be a multi-stakeholder project concentrated on building capacity and providing support in 23 First Nations and Métis communities. This phase of the project is being funded by the Alberta Rural Development Fund, AU and private donors.

The core team of project workers is co-directed by Priscilla Campeau of the Centre

for World Indigenous Knowledge and Research and Dr. Lisa Carter, dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology and includes community project manager Lois Edge, senior liaison officer Lois Shaw and Maria Campbell, CWIKR elder in virtual residence. Other participants are involved in project development, including facilitation of mentor/learner relationships (Patricia Martin and Nancy Steel), website construction (Strategic Abstractions) and ongoing project evaluation (Peter Fortna and Dermott O'Connor).

Working with Alberta's northern post-secondary institutions and key partners, including Alberta-North (now merged with e-Campus Alberta), the Little Red River Cree Nation, the Big Stone Cree Nation, the Métis Settlements General Council – Strategic Training Initiatives, and the Athabasca Tribal Council, the LCP is engaged in a number of activities to support building of community capacity by way of a consultative and advisory process.

An Aboriginal Advisory Council has been established to provide input and wisdom for the various planned Learning Communities initiatives. Membership in the council includes key community partner representatives and institutional advisors including Northern Lakes College, Keyano College and Kayas Cultural College.

to each community, including news and events, community profiles and highlights of community members' achievements. The ability to share information with other communities through interactive media and to communicate knowledge using indigenous languages are especially significant.

Considerable time has been devoted to establishing the infrastructure needed to sustain the project. Co-ordinated and managed by First Nations and Métis community members, the LCP and its activities continue to evolve. Implementation of a Mentor Circle, using indigenous pedagogy and sharing indigenous knowledge, as defined by participants, including community co-ordinators, elders and other members of the community, has begun in several communities. Organized and led by community co-ordinators, these project components will use the Learning Communities website to access instructional materials, interactive exercises and forms.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the LCP is the direct involvement of First Nations and Métis community members in capacity building and development of a viable infrastructure that will contribute to community economic development and sustainability. The project's success in achieving these outcomes will be determined by a comprehensive project evaluation.

Science Outreach – Athabasca to Present Wolves of the Yukon

Bob Hayes, a biologist and author of *Wolves of the Yukon*, will present his work as part of the Science Outreach – Athabasca series on Thursday, January 26, at 7 p.m. in the Governing Council Chambers at AU Athabasca.

Hayes will explore how high wolf predation rates maintain Yukon moose at low density and why natural predation reduces the sustainable hunting opportunities for people.

His original research shows that wolves prefer to kill young and old animals, that kill rate differs by wolf pack size and that small packs kill proportionally more moose because of scavenging by ravens.

Hayes will also present a reading from *Wolves of the Yukon* at the Alice B. Donahue Library and Archives on Wednesday, January 25, at 7 p.m.



www.wolvesoftheyukon.ca YTG Alan Baer photo

Wolves in the Yukon

Ride and Park at the AU Corral

Beginning this spring, a corral will be available at AU Athabasca for anyone wishing to ride a horse to work. Availability of the new facility will contribute toward AU's application for LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Gold certification.

"In urban settings, people can use public transportation or car pool to reduce their carbon footprint," senior capital projects manager and interim facilities director Wayne Ferguson said. "In a rural setting, none of these options are available. This project fits into the the LEEDS program's innovative category." A number of AU employees have horses or may consider getting one now that there will be a place to house, feed and water it at work, he said.

The corral will cost \$800 to build, with the money coming from the ARC contingency budget. The structure will be installed this spring near the south-east corner of the community garden across from the ARC. It will accommodate two horses and can be expanded if needed.

The first bale of hay is on the university, but riders may be charged a feed fee in the future. Owners will be responsible for cleaning up after their horses, and the manure will be used for fertilizer in the community garden, a practice that will count for additional LEED points.

The final performance assessment for the ARC's LEED certification will be carried out in March 2013.



If it's ok with you, there will be no gunfights at the AU corral. Facilities and Services grounds technician Rob Koons can feel safe as he builds the structure.

Arts and Science Research Talks

Class Dismissed

In November, Dr. Alvin Finkel, a professor of history in AU's Centre for State and Legal Studies, described his recent work on the early history of Alberta's labour movement, including the founding of the One Big Union and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation.

Relying on oral histories and archival data, the project was led by Finkel and other labour scholars and activists in response to the upcoming centennial celebration of the Alberta Federation of Labour. A book based on this research, *Working People in Alberta: A History*, for which Finkel is principal author and overall editor, will be published by AU Press in February 2012.



Alvin Finkel

Learning from Abroad

In December, Dr. Josh Evans, an assistant professor of human geography in the Centre for Global and Social Analysis, provided an interesting presentation on place-based poverty-reduction strategies and their relation to a pan-Canadian policy learning network called The Vibrant Communities Initiative. Evans described the policy learning and transfer processes as a way to illustrate the increasingly mobile nature of urban policy.

Both presentations were recorded using Adobe Connect and can be accessed through the [Centre for Research website](#).



Josh Evans

AU People, Past and Present, in the News

Labour Martyr Remembered

In January, Dr. Ingo Schmidt, an academic co-ordinator in the Centre for Work and Community Studies, took part in the tenth annual memorial service for Joseph Mairs, a trade unionist and coal miner who died at the age of 21 during a miners' strike on Vancouver Island in 1914.

After the memorial, in Ladysmith, B.C., Schmidt led a discussion focusing on the debt crisis and the urgency of an accurate analysis and response to the agenda of the rich.

See the story in the *Ladysmith Chronicle*.

Daniel to Chair CIBT

CIBT Education Group Inc., an education management company focused on the global education market, recently announced that its advisory board, which consults with senior management on strategic initiatives, will be chaired by Sir John Daniel.

Daniel was vice-president of learning services at AU from 1978 to 1980 and received an honorary AU Doctor of Letters in 1998. He is currently president and CEO of the Commonwealth of Learning.

More information is available from *PR Newswire*.

Hockey Hero

AU student Taylor Peters, who plays for the Portland Winterhawks in the Western Hockey League, spent New Year's evening with a friend rescuing a drowning man from the rough currents of Portland's Willamette River. The man was one of a pair of kayakers who got caught in the current and did not have the strength to paddle out. When his boat capsized, he was unable to swim to shore.

See the full story, and Peters' own description of the event, in *Buzzing the Net*.

More AU People, Past and Present, in the News

Five Tips

Deb van de Water has just finished her first course in AU's MBA program. In "Grad Student Version 2.0" in the *Financial Post* online, she writes about the lessons she has learned so far.

The Real Alfred

An AU alumnus has unmasked Batman. Harrison Cheung (BGS, 1998) was actor Christian Bale's publicist and assistant for 10 years and has written a book about the experience.

In *Christian Bale: The Inside Story of the Darkest Batman* (to be published in May 2012 by BenBella Books) Cheung gives an inside look at the actor's life. "I felt a book would provide his fans with a more human face and insight behind the mask of this actor," Cheung said.

Written with veteran Hollywood and entertainment reporter Nicola Pittam, the book is the first biography of the actor. According to a media release, it "uncovers Bale's transformation from child actor to Internet sensation to Hollywood bad boy."

More information is available from *BenBella Books*.

New FO in Picture Butte

Melissa Rhodes, who received a Bachelor of Management from AU, is the new financial officer for the Town of Picture Butte, Alberta. In this position she will handle the town's banking, budgets and payroll along with working on grants.

Rhodes' experience in municipal administration started as a summer student with the Village of Champion. When the village CAO left, she moved into that job at the age of 23.

Read more in *The Sunny South News*.

Who's Who

Kimberly Brander, who earned an AU BA in management, is listed in *Stanford Who's Who*. Brander, a search consultant with Toombs Inc., a customized career transition services company, previously worked as a team leader in corporate employee communications for the City of Calgary and director of internal communications for the University of Calgary.

An article about Brander's acceptance to the *Who's Who* can be found in the *International Business Times*.

Bravo Bravura

Michael Petrina, a professional engineer who holds an AU MBA, has recently been appointed director of Bravura Ventures Corp. of Vancouver. Petrina has over 25 years of experience in operations, engineering, mine development, financial modelling and acquisition analysis and is a past technical advisor and engineering consultant for numerous mining companies.

CORRECTION

The two photographs taken at the Alberta Women's Memory Project fundraiser that appeared in the December 12 issue of *The Insider* were incorrectly credited. The photographs were taken by Lauren Wheeler. We apologize for the error.



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 first edition of *The Insider* will be published on February 13, 2012. The deadline for submissions is February 3, 2012.

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