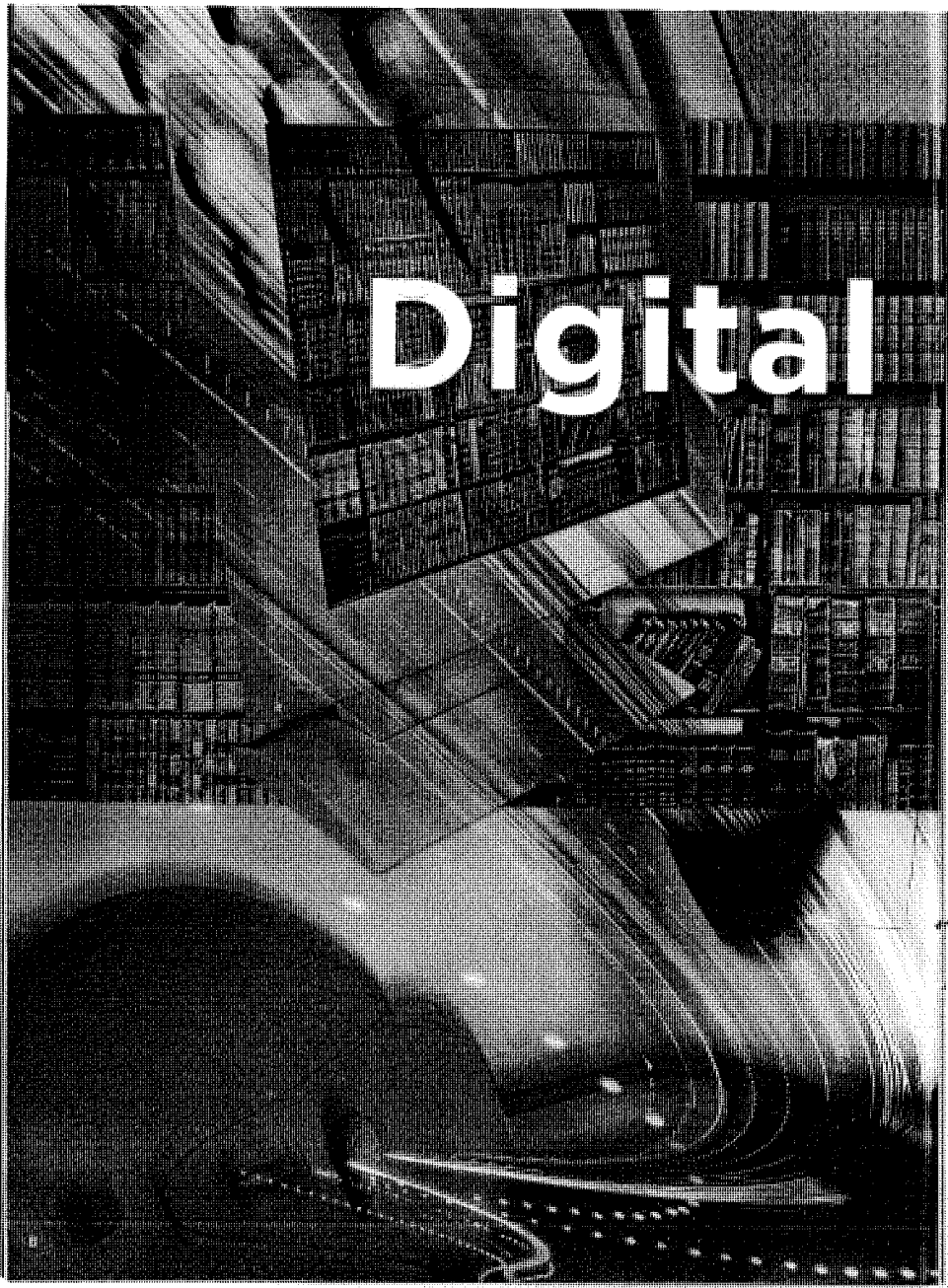


Appendix E: *Digital Library*. An article about mobile learning at AU



Digital

Distance learning and research are shifting to a new stage at Athabasca University. Called mobile learning or m-learning, it is a learning environment for people on the move.

Library

Each year, Athabasca University increases the use of the Internet for course delivery, for interaction between tutors and students, for library access and for administration. Athabasca University's web pages, though, were designed for display on desktop computers, for users with large, colour screens and enough bandwidth to download media-rich pages.

On the increasingly popular small-screen, hand-held mobile devices, highly interactive layout does not display well and may require a great deal of scrolling. In response to this problem, Athabasca University Library has implemented a comprehensive mobile library website system which automatically detects what kind of device a student is using (mobile or desktop) and converts the web pages to the appropriate display format.

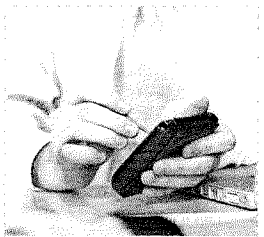
Steve Schafer, director of Library Services at Athabasca University says the introduction of the new technology is timely. "With the proliferation of pocket mobile learning devices, such as personal data assistants and smart phones," he said, **"many current students, and definitely future students, are expecting functionality with devices that they are familiar with."**

The development project for the new system received the 2006

Canadian Library Association Library Research and Development Grant in addition to mission-critical research funding from Athabasca University. Mohamed Ally, director and associate professor in Athabasca University's School of Computing and Information Systems was principal investigator. Co-investigators were instructional media analyst Billy Cheung, electronic resources librarian Tony Tin and course production co-ordinator Maureen Hutchinson.

"This new system provides opportunities to increase the boundaries of anytime and anywhere learning for students," Tin said. "Very little research has been done from the student's perspective to explore which mobile technologies are best to use, what constitutes an effective m-library and how to support m-learning and teaching."

The m-library website system provides a wide range of electronic resources and library services including course readings and reference materials, access to theses and projects, a help centre, a search engine and access to journal databases and the library catalogue. It responds to the needs of a new generation of learners who are demanding access to resources that support their educational goals, regardless of where they live.



This new system provides opportunities to increase the boundaries of anywhere, anytime learning for students.