

College of New Caledonia



NEWS RELEASE

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First international student from Saudi Arabia part of CNC's Class of 2011

When he walks across the stage to receive his diploma at CNC's 2011 Convocation, Ayman Aldhabaan is bound to receive plenty of hearty congratulatory handshakes and even a few hugs from the processional party on the stage.

Aldhabaan has plenty to cheer about. As the first international student from Saudi Arabia to graduate from CNC, and with a GPA of 4.09, he's graduating with honours with his management diploma.

But while his grades are important, Aldhabaan has become everything that the college strives to produce: a well-rounded student, a leader, a role model, a critical thinker and an athlete.

"Being at CNC is not about getting your degree, diploma or an education," Aldhabaan said. "It's about the experience, meeting friends, being positive, a better achiever and that's because of the right environment.

"It starts with the president's office and the deans, to the instructors and the support staff. Everyone is very hospitable, they're like a family and very friendly.

"The support at the International Centre has been phenomenal. It's provided job opportunities, social opportunities and we even have a soccer team. They don't have to do it, but they do."

Aldhabaan was recognized for his student leadership in October, 2010 with the Student Leadership in Internationalization Award from the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) at a ceremony in Calgary.

The CBIE is a national, bilingual, not-for-profit membership organization dedicated to the promotion of Canada's international relations through international education. It believes international education is one the best ways to create understanding among people and to develop enduring political, cultural and economic links among nations.

Aldhabaan was nominated for the award by Barb Old, CNC's Dean of Community and International Education, CNC president John Bowman and Eric Griffith, Aldhabaan's Management Studies instructor.

"Mr. Aldhabaan is an exemplary student exhibiting behaviours normally only found in graduate level seminar discussion," Griffith stated in his nomination letter. "He always demonstrates a positive and inclusive approach in his behaviours and comments. These natural leadership tendencies have resulted in others looking towards Ayman for advice and advocacy in ongoing situations. Ayman accepts this role willingly and naturally."

When Aldhabaan first stepped onto CNC's Prince George campus in May, 2007, he was worried and fearful of not doing well, especially being so far away from his hometown of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the country's capital city of 4 million. He hardly knew English and he was also challenged at first by the cultural differences – the food and our unique Canadian sense of humour.

"In that first week I was welcomed and met my ESL instructor. I felt the warmth and kindness at the college and I knew at that moment I will have my diploma," he said.

He had to get used to the change of weather, too. In his hometown of Riyadh, temperatures can soar to 58 C in August. In Prince George, he has experienced the mercury dipping below -30 C. Soon, he acclimatized to Prince George's weather, the food and the culture. It was exactly what he was looking for.

"I love Tim Hortons coffee," he said. "I was open to everything. Now when I go home in July, it's a challenge to adjust to Saudi food."

He was often the first person from Saudi Arabia whom Prince George citizens had met and was welcomed by everyone. By September, 2007 he was helping the International Education Centre recruit other students from his home country.

"I told students CNC was a small school, it was a great place to study and you could easily interact with Canadian culture," said Aldhabaan. "Because of the low numbers of Saudi students, they had opportunities to speak more English.

"I told them there is a good transportation system, rent is affordable, home stays were easier to arrange, they could easily make friends and people would say hello to you."

His sales pitch worked. By the end of December, 2007, seven students from Saudi Arabia enrolled at CNC. By the end of May, 2008, 25 Saudi students called CNC home. Currently there are 125 Saudi students in Prince George.

When Aldhabaan arrived, he stayed in residence for the first three months, then moved to a home stay and back to residence to serve as a Residence Advisor and finally into his own house. When new students arrived, if they didn't have a home stay, he hosted them at his house. He helped them get cell phones, new bank accounts and groceries. He showed them around CNC and the city.

“Four years later, it’s been an amazing experience. I’ve had wonderful instructors and the opportunity to work with international students is a bonus. There are no negative things at all about CNC. The only negative is that I won’t be at CNC anymore.”

Aldhabaan’s not going too far. In September, he’s travelling up University Way to UNBC to earn his commerce degree with a major in human resources and a minor in finance. He’ll keep the same work habits and hopes to one day establish a work experience program with Saudi Arabia.

Currently, he’s president of the Saudi Student Society of Prince George that provides educational, social and sport opportunities for visiting students. He represents Saudi students to not only the Canadian government, but the Saudi Arabian government too. There’s a society in every city around the world that has Saudi students.

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