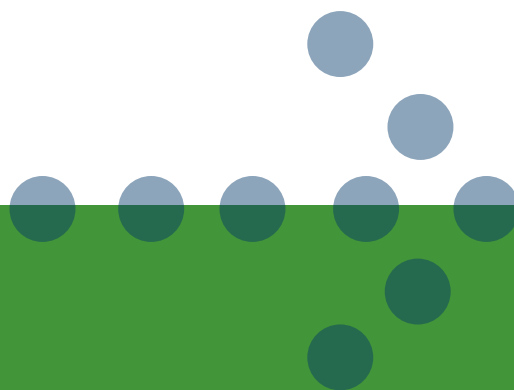
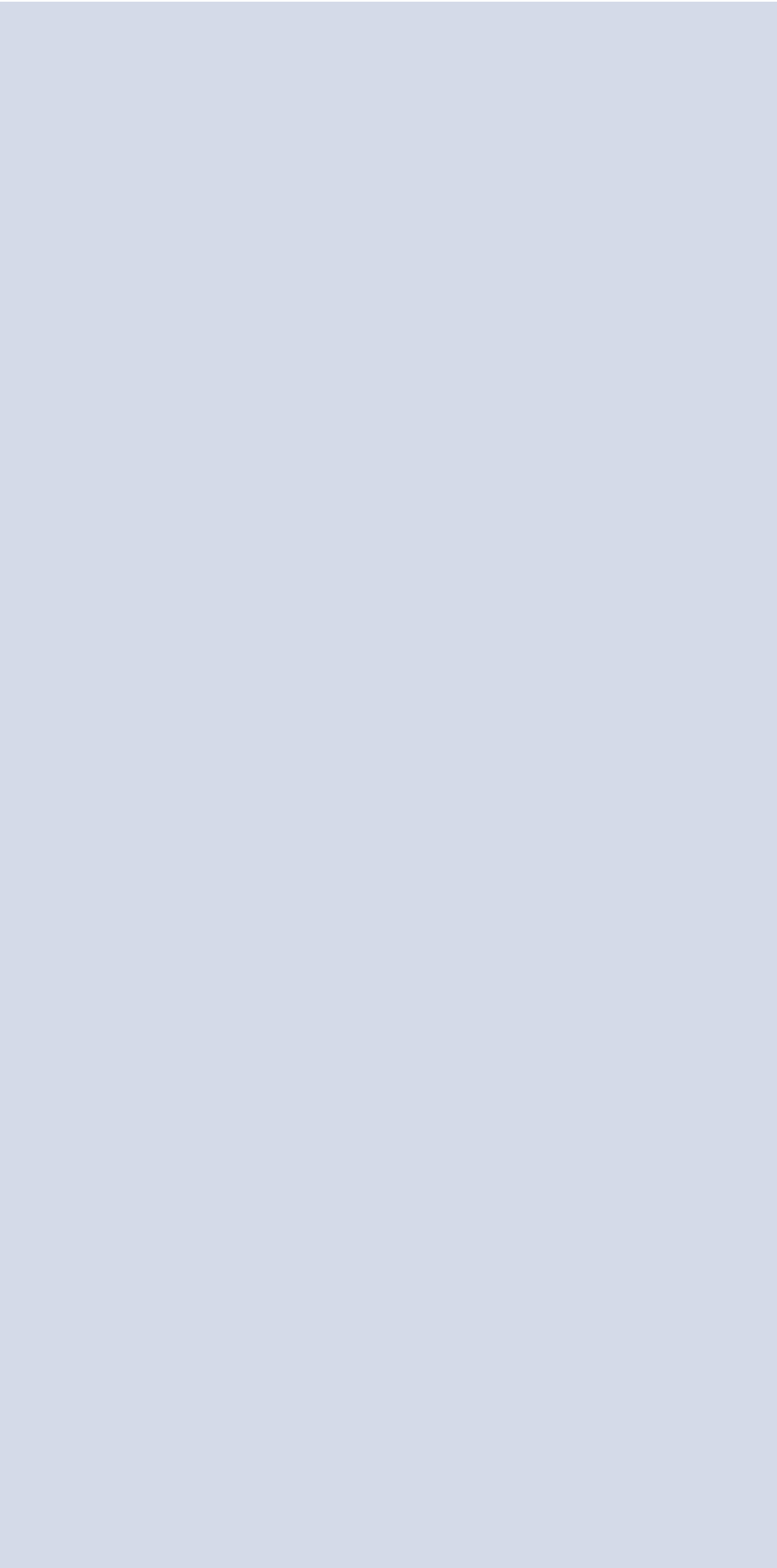
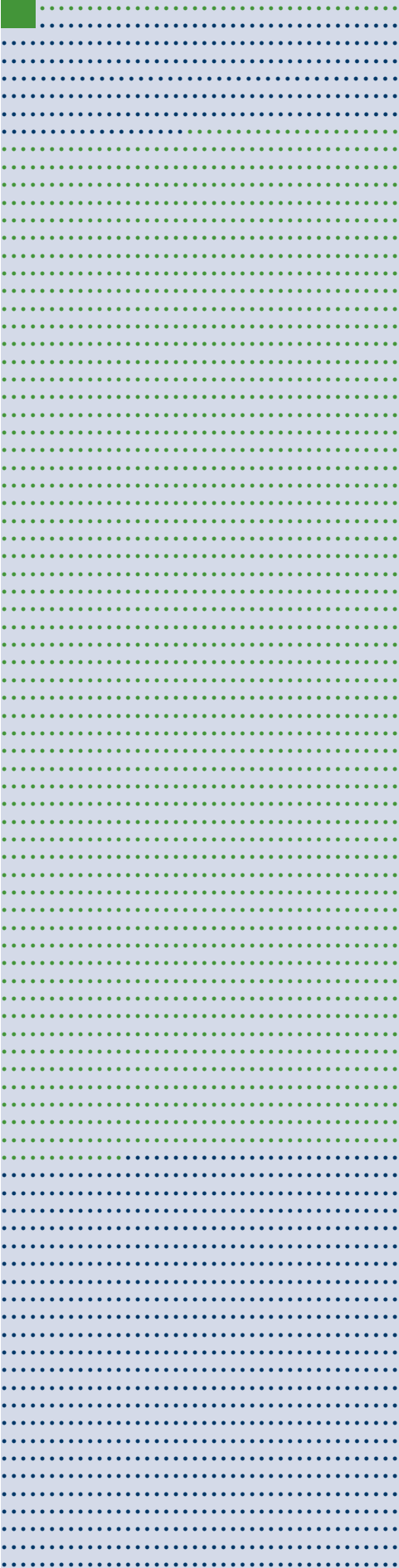


Athabasca University 

Strategic
University Plan
2011–16





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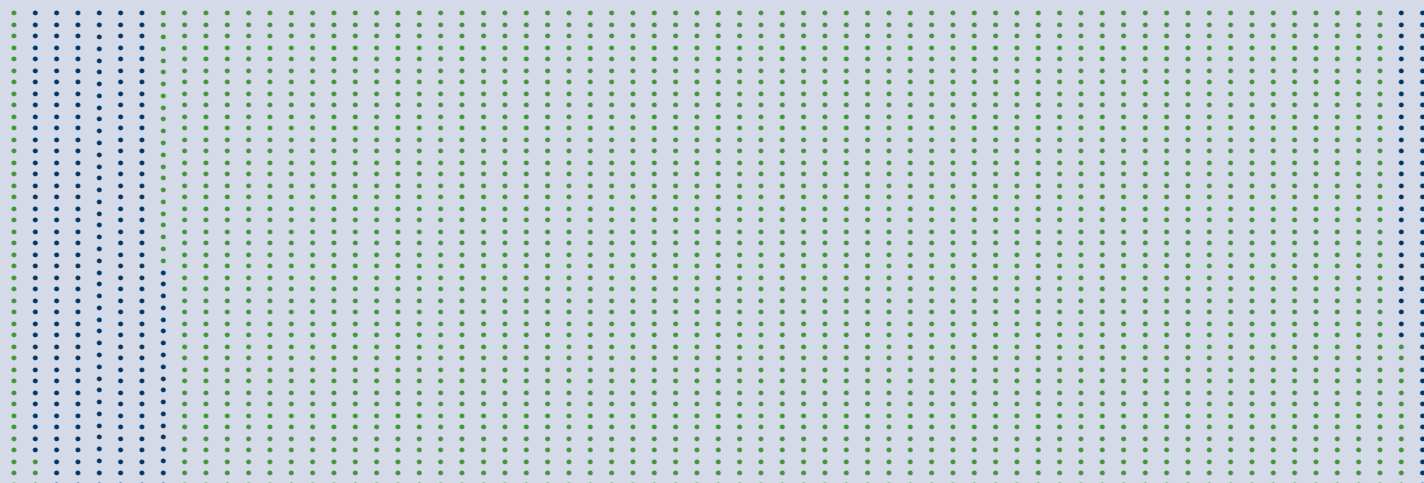
Goal 1: To be the Leader in Quality Open and Distance Education

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Goal 3: To Recruit and Retain Excellent People

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Academic and Research Centre, Athabasca, AB

1. Introduction

The *Strategic University Plan: 2011-16* sets the direction for Athabasca University for the next five years. It will serve as a guide to both the university community—faculty, staff, students and alumni—and the external agencies and communities the university serves.

The following statement summarizes the vision for the university as expressed by the AU community during the planning process: Athabasca University is recognized as a best practices university in research, teaching and service and as the leader in removing barriers to post-secondary learning.

This plan, which lays out the key strategies that AU will employ to realize this vision, is the product of a broadly based participatory planning process that included

- a series of open forums, focus groups and discussions involving the AU community and key external stakeholders
- a review of national and international environmental scans and federal and provincial government policy documents and an assessment of national and provincial demographic trends and economic forecasts
- a reassessment of the *Strategic University Plan: 2006-11* and associated outcome measures
- a review of the findings of a comprehensive institutional self-study carried out in 2009-10 in anticipation of major university planning initiatives, including renewal of the university's accreditation with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and development of this strategic plan
- a review of the conclusions of an Alberta Innovates facilitated joint Athabasca University Governing Council and Academic Council scenario creation workshop, which conceptualized possible futures for the university¹

This plan is rooted in AU's record of leadership in the field of university-level open and distance education. It builds on institutional successes and lessons learned while acknowledging the challenges and opportunities of the future. It details how the university will realize its mission and mandate in the years to come and how it will define and measure its success.

2. Planning Background

AU is recognized nationally and internationally as Canada's foremost open university. One of four public, comprehensive academic and research universities in Alberta, AU is a vibrant community of research, teaching and service, with a particular focus on removing barriers to post-secondary education.

The university is a full member of a number of Canadian and international post-secondary and distance education associations, including the Association of Universities and Colleges

¹ The Governing Council was renamed the Governors of Athabasca University (informally, the Board), and Academic Council was replaced by the Athabasca University General Faculties Council, effective October 1, 2011 (Order in Council 359/2011).

of Canada, the International Council for Open and Distance Education, the Canadian Association of Graduate Schools and the Organization of American States. AU's academic programs are recognized by the Campus Alberta Quality Council, a quality assurance agency whose standards are consistent with those of the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework. AU has also been accredited in the United States, by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, since 2005. The university's reputation for excellence in teaching is well established, and its standing in the international research community is growing.

AU's governing structure is bicameral, with authority shared by the Board and the General Faculties Council. Based in the town of Athabasca, AU also operates centres in Edmonton, Calgary and St. Albert.

All AU operations and activities are rooted in a commitment to achieving the highest standards in teaching, research and scholarship; a commitment to the university's core mission of providing access to post-secondary learning to all who have the ability and desire; a commitment to providing flexible learning models to meet learner needs; a commitment to serving indigenous learners; and a commitment to innovation in researching, developing and adopting learner-centred, technology-based learning models. AU's open access mandate actively facilitates diversity and inclusiveness for both students and staff members.

2.1 Mission, Mandate and Values

As a publicly funded post-secondary institution, AU operates under the *Alberta Post-secondary Learning Act* (2004), and its government-approved mandate determines the scope of its activities. This mandate, together with the university's mission statement and shared values and the commitments stated above, inform this five-year strategic plan.

*Mission Statement*²

Athabasca University, Canada's Open University, is dedicated to the removal of barriers that restrict access to and success in university-level study and to increasing equality of educational opportunity for adult learners worldwide. We are committed to excellence in teaching, research and scholarship and to being of service to the general public.

*Mandate*³

Founded in 1970 and operating as a comprehensive academic and research institution under the authority of the *Alberta Post-secondary Learning Act*, Athabasca University is a public, board-governed, open and distance education university which serves students throughout Alberta, across Canada and around the world. Working as a partner within Campus Alberta, Athabasca University is committed to collaborating with other key stakeholders to ensure a seamless and responsive advanced education system that provides high-quality learning opportunities in support of lifelong learning.

The university offers a range of courses and programs leading to graduate and undergraduate degrees, certificates and diplomas in the humanities, the social sciences, the sciences, technology, business and the health disciplines.

² May 1985; reconfirmed June 2006.

³ Approved by the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, November 17, 2009.

As an open university, Athabasca University seeks to remove barriers to undergraduate and graduate education. It offers flexible enrolment opportunities for learners, regardless of age, gender, culture, income, disability, career and family obligations, geographic location or educational background. As a distance education university, Athabasca University provides flexibility for lifelong learners who cannot or choose not to undertake residential post-secondary education. The university offers learners the opportunity to interact with students across Canada and around the world through programs in established and emerging areas as it seeks to meet the needs of career professionals, develop research expertise and create knowledge that fosters a global outlook among its graduates.

Athabasca University provides high-quality, interactive learning environments that include a variety of online and other media technologies for individualized and cohort learning. The university's library, tutorial services and extensive student support services that facilitate access and increase learner success are integral aspects of a quality open and distance education system. Similarly, its course designs and technology applications are based on current research in open and distance education, pedagogical advances in lifelong learning and contemporary developments in online learning technologies. The university actively pursues technological innovations that can enhance its teaching, research and administrative functions.

The university provides undergraduate degree completion opportunities for university transfer students and college diploma graduates through credit co-ordination, credit transfer, prior learning assessment and associated forms of learning accreditation. It supports collaborations such as its degree completion agreements with colleges, partnership with Alberta-North and various partnerships with indigenous post-secondary institutions and organizations.

These collaborations, together with its participation in initiatives such as the Canadian Virtual University, reflect Athabasca University's longstanding commitment to adult and lifelong learners, to aboriginal communities, to learners in remote, rural and northern areas, to under-served urban populations and to program students at other universities who seek courses to accelerate degree completion. The university also acquires and maintains accreditation in other Canadian provinces and in appropriate international jurisdictions.

Athabasca University pursues and demonstrates excellence in research and scholarship, viewing research as central to the creation and mobilization of knowledge, the enhancement of its programs, the education of its students, the betterment of its community and the development of its faculty and future scholars. Besides its international reputation for research in all aspects of open and distance education and learning technologies innovation, the university is developing notable strength in interdisciplinary research in several areas such as Canadian studies, globalization and cultural studies, indigenous education and indigenous studies, space and environmental sciences, project management, and nursing and health management. Aspects of technological change are integral to many of these theme areas. By supporting and conducting research activity in all program areas, Athabasca University makes significant contributions to cultural, scientific and professional development in Alberta and beyond.

Athabasca University's academic, professional and support staff engage in professional service within education and research bodies at local, provincial, national and international levels. The university expects its faculty members to serve a wide range of communities through activities such as volunteerism, community-based research, involvement in local, national and international community organizations and participation in virtual learning communities.

Values

The members of the AU community hold a set of complementary values that are fundamental to the university's identity and operations:

- **We value excellence.** The search for excellence is the hallmark of all of our endeavors.
- **We value learning.** Student learning and satisfaction are measures of our success.
- **We value scholarly research.** We engage in reflective practice through the scholarship of discovery and the scholarship of teaching.
- **We value the free exchange of ideas.** A respectful climate for open discourse promotes innovation, discovery and social responsibility.
- **We value openness and flexibility.** Reducing barriers to education enhances access and social equity.
- **We value diversity and inclusiveness.** Diversity and inclusiveness enhance the quality of learning and of the workplace.
- **We value our employees.** Their commitment, innovation, creativity and continuous learning contribute to our success.
- **We value accountability.** We are accountable to our students, to each other and to the public.

2.2 Internal Context

The *Strategic University Plan: 2006-11* and the current Academic Plan have guided AU in its commitment to excellence in open and distance education. The past five years have been particularly marked by the following strategic initiatives and achievements:

Research

Research has received renewed emphasis. Three new research institutes are being formed: the Technology Enhanced Knowledge Research Institute, the Project Management Research Institute and the Athabasca River Basin Research Institute. External support for research has grown significantly; for example, an NSERC Xerox Industry Chair, two new Canada Research Chairs and a UNESCO/COL Chair in Open Educational Resources were appointed during this period, and the university received its first Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research award. University researchers received major national and international research grants, and the Rural Alberta Development Fund provided funding for the Learning Communities Project, a large-scale research and development initiative designed to develop educational capacity in a number of northern Alberta communities.

Graduate Studies

Both graduate enrolment and the number and breadth of graduate-level programs have grown. AU launched North America's first online doctorate in distance education in 2008 and Canada's first online doctorate in business administration in 2009, and both programs are fully subscribed. Graduate programs—the Master of Arts (Integrated Studies), the Master of Science (Computing and Information Systems) and the Master of Education (Distance Education)—were reconfigured to

allow for additional specializations. Other new initiatives include graduate diploma or certificate programs in heritage resources management, legislative drafting, instructional design and architecture.

Undergraduate Programs

New undergraduate opportunities include additional majors and concentrations (philosophy, political science and education studies) in the Bachelor of Arts program, a finance major in the Bachelor of Commerce program, a Bachelor of Science in architecture and undergraduate certificate programs in e-commerce, marketing, financial services and heritage resources management.

Student Support

A great many recent enhancements to student services, particularly in the online environment, have improved access for AU students and prospective students, making it easier to apply for admission, process transfer credits, register for courses, interact with tutors and faculty members, write exams and receive course results. More electronic resources have been made available to students through the AU library, and efforts have been made to embed information literacy seamlessly into the curriculum.

AU has also taken significant strides toward making its academic programs entirely available online. Through the two-year, \$6.4 million Course Materials Digitization Project, completed in 2011, over 500 of the university's 903 courses were converted to a consistent online format that will help to streamline course development and delivery, course-related materials were digitized, interactive multimedia learning resources were developed, academic websites were revamped and relaunched, and the undergraduate and graduate calendars and over 700 course syllabuses were converted to new online templates.

Open Source and Open Access Initiatives

AU Press, North America's first open access scholarly press, was officially launched in 2008 and has been recognized for establishing new directions in scholarly publishing. Several of its publications, which are available in print and online, have received national and international publishing awards.

In 2009, AU became a founding member of the Open Education Resource Foundation, an international organization designed to assist educational institutions to reduce costs through the use of open educational resources. This independent, not-for-profit organization will promote the use of open educational resources worldwide.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Vancouver-based Commonwealth of Learning funded a new UNESCO Chair in Open Educational Resources, the first UNESCO chair to be granted in the Prairie provinces, at AU in 2011. The primary focus of the chair will be promoting the use of open educational resources at the institutional, national and international levels, particularly in the developing world.

Academic Restructuring

A decanal model has been adopted, and administration of the university's academic activities has been reorganized into five faculties: Business, Health Disciplines, Humanities and Social Sciences, Science and Technology, and Graduate Studies.

Institutional Reputation and Recognition

AU has placed increased emphasis on quality markers to address issues related to institutional recognition and reputation among external constituencies.

In 2011, the university was reaccredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and the British Columbia Degree Quality Assessment Board.

The British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfers, the body that facilitates admission, articulation and transfer agreements among B.C. post-secondary institutions, approved AU's membership in December 2009, making it the first Alberta post-secondary institution to be admitted to the B.C. transfer system.

AU was accredited in the European Union in 2009 as a result of a collaboration agreement with the Technological Educational Institute of Kavala, Greece, to promote its Master of Distance Education degree in that country. Relationships with other foreign institutions or governments including those in Mozambique, China and the Caribbean have also been enhanced.

Open AU, an online magazine, and *Open* magazine (print), featuring stories about AU students, faculty members, research projects, awards and events have been successfully launched to create a barrier-free global community for anyone interested in lifelong learning and AU. *Open AU* received a 2009 Platinum Award in design, and *Open* received a Gold Award in design from the Association of Marketing and Communication Professionals (MarCom) Awards, an international creative competition for marketing and communication professionals.

Fund development initiatives have increased the number and kinds of scholarships available to AU students, including graduate awards and first-in-family awards (for the first person in a family to attend university). Alumni relations have been strengthened and the number of available alumni awards has doubled.

National awareness campaigns have greatly increased the number of visits to AU's website, and a recently produced AU corporate video received a Platinum Award in the 2010 Hermes Creative Awards, an international competition administered and judged by the Association of Marketing and Communication Professionals.

Infrastructure

Significant enhancements to AU's physical and virtual campuses have been achieved in the past five years, including construction of the \$30 million Academic and Research Centre and expansion and refurbishment of the science laboratory on the main campus in Athabasca.

The two-year, \$7.65 million Open Knowledge Environment Project, scheduled for completion in 2011, responded to AU's highest priority infrastructure need: development and enhancement of the university's information and communication technology infrastructure. Completion of this project represents an important first step toward fulfillment of the university's \$90 million Information and Communication Technology Capital Plan.

2.3 External Context

Two elements of the external environment that have particularly affected AU are the growth in the number of online programs being offered by residential and for-profit, online universities and the recent global economic recession.

The major effects of the economic downturn have been decreased rates of enrolment growth and restrictions on government spending for post-secondary education. AU has not been alone among post-secondary institutions in experiencing these effects.

The marked increase in the number of universities offering online and distance education courses poses a threat but also creates opportunities. With a curriculum, infrastructure and staff, prepared by more than 40 years of experience and development to offer excellent online and distance education, AU is uniquely well positioned to compete in this growing market. It must reinforce and harness its strengths to maintain and extend its competitive advantage in the face of growing competition. The broader acceptance of online and distance delivery methods provides an opportunity for AU to leverage its strengths and ensure sustainability in years to come.

Although the global economy was widely considered to be moving out of the recession toward recovery by early 2011,⁴ some effects linger. In particular, the decline in institutional revenues resulting from decreased endowments and government cutbacks has produced significant financial challenges for public universities. Developments in the European Union and the United States have created uncertainty and market volatility in the second half of 2011, and AU will have to closely monitor and respond to any lingering effects of these developments.

National and International Environment

Despite global economic uncertainty, Canada's economic outlook is relatively positive. The economy started to rebound in many of the world's developed countries, including Canada, by mid-2009. Drawing on a number of sources, in particular from Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and International Monetary Fund assessments, the Conference Board of Canada⁵ provides projections of economic growth for the global economy, including the following key results:

- The world economy will grow faster in the second decade of the twenty-first century than it did in the first. Advanced economies as a group will account for less than one per cent of global growth between 2010 and 2020 while emerging economies will account for 3.4 per cent. China and India will generate half of global growth in this period.
- Unprecedented shifts are occurring in the distribution of global output. In 2000, emerging and developing economies had a 40 per cent share of global GDP. It is 50 per cent today and will reach about 60 per cent by 2020. China's share of global output doubled from eight per cent in 2000 to 16 per cent in 2010 and will rise to 24 per cent by 2020. India will double its contribution to global output (from four per cent in 2000 to eight per cent in 2020).

⁴ The Conference Board of Canada, *Provincial Outlook 2010: Long-Term Economic Forecast: Economic Performance and Trends* (2011), i. http://www.conferenceboard.ca/temp/1f3e4e29-0338-4dc0-a1b2-6829629680e1/10-153_ProvOtlk-LT_2010_WEB.pdf.

⁵ The Conference Board Inc., "Global Economic Outlook 2011: Key Results" (2011). http://www.conference-board.org/data/global_outlook_results.cfm.

Continued growth in GDP is projected for Canada for the next decade and beyond.⁶ Alberta, Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia are projected to show the strongest long-term economic growth, with Alberta and Ontario expected to lead.

Demographic developments in the western world are expected to include the transition of many baby boomers to retirement, an influx of immigrants into the labour market and growth of indigenous populations at rates higher than national averages.⁷ While population growth will vary from province to province in Canada, all provinces are expected to experience slower growth and aging populations, which will, in turn, impede labour force growth. Not surprisingly, net international migration will favour the larger provinces.⁸

Higher education is becoming an increasingly globalized and international endeavor as governments move toward knowledge-based economies.⁹ This transition poses challenges and provides opportunities for post-secondary institutions, particularly for open and distance learning universities. Information and communication technology enhanced higher education could become the main vehicle for international delivery of post-secondary programs. Internationalization of Canadian universities continues to be a major contextual factor, with an increasing focus on internationalized curricula and international exposure of Canadian students on the one hand and on increasing the enrolment of international students at Canadian universities on the other. Increasing pressure for international accreditation systems will pose unique challenges, and AU must remain at the forefront of these discussions. The respectful and sensitive forging of internationalized curricula will be a related challenge.

As economic motivations for the internationalization of higher education increase, AU and other open universities will continue to face the challenge of maintaining quality while providing mass access to higher education. The demand for access to higher education is likely to increase in proportion to the growth of populations in developing countries, and open and distance universities will be well positioned to respond to that demand. As learner demographics and needs change, however, course and program content and the flexibility of educational delivery mechanisms will need to evolve accordingly. The focus on accountability and quality is likely to grow and to change as more post-secondary providers deliver content online in a globalized context.

Alberta Environment

Alberta's economy contracted by about five per cent in 2009; however, it led all provinces in economic growth from 1990 to 2010, with a 3.1 per cent average annual growth in GDP.¹⁰ Although global economic factors remain volatile and therefore difficult to predict, Alberta's economy is now rebounding, and it is expected to advance over the long term with the province's energy sector a driving force.¹¹

⁶ The Conference Board of Canada, *Provincial Outlook 2010: Long-Term Economic Forecast: Economic Performance and Trends* (2011), ii. http://www.conferenceboard.ca/temp/1f3e4e29-0338-4dc0-a1b2-6829629680e1/10-153_ProvOtlk-LT_2010_WEB.pdf.

⁷ "Environmental Scan (Canada and Alberta) with Implications for Athabasca University" (Prepared for Executive Group and AUGC, June 2009).

⁸ The Conference Board of Canada, *Provincial Outlook 2010*, ii.

⁹ International Council for Open and Distance Education, *Global Trends in Higher Education, Adult and Distance Learning* (2009). <http://www.icde.org/filestore/Resources/Reports/FINALICDEENVIRNOMENTALSCAN05.02.pdf>.

¹⁰ *Highlights of the Alberta Economy 2010* (Government of Alberta, 2010). http://www.albertacanada.com/documents/SP-EH_highlightsABEconomy.pdf.

¹¹ The Conference Board of Canada, *Provincial Outlook 2010*, ii.

Alberta's 3.7 million residents, with a median age of 35.6, form, on average, the youngest population of any Canadian province. One of every six Albertans was born outside Canada, making Alberta one of the most multicultural provinces in the country. The majority of Albertans are of European ancestry, with a strong representation of aboriginal and Métis people, and an increasing number of immigrants from Asia and other regions. Net international immigration is expected to grow.¹²

Ongoing expansion of Alberta's energy sector is expected to continue to attract a steady flow of labour and capital from other Canadian provinces and territories. Alberta received an annual average of 24,300 net interprovincial migrants from 1999 to 2008, and while relocation to Alberta has slowed with the economic downturn, it has continued. This intake of Canadians from other parts of the country will help offset a slowing rate of population increase. On average, Alberta is expected to gain 16,300 more people than it loses through inter-provincial migration during each year until 2015.¹³

Alberta Advanced Education and Technology is targeting greater participation by members of aboriginal and other under-represented communities in post-secondary education to offset labour market shortages that could impede the province's economic growth. It also emphasizes the importance of international education: "International education is a key building block in advancing Alberta's position in the global marketplace and in achieving a knowledge driven future. . . . Alberta trades with an increasingly diverse international market, and we need to ensure that we are positioned to see the emerging opportunities and challenges both within and beyond our borders. More than ever, we rely on the international market for fuelling research and innovation capacity and developing a knowledge driven future, primarily through securing people with talent and skills."¹⁴

While Albertans are increasingly aware of the ongoing transition from a resource-based economy to a knowledge economy, the long-term ramifications of this societal change are only beginning to be understood: "Technological developments in the twentieth century have transformed the majority of wealth-creating work from physically based to 'knowledge based.' The only comparative advantage a company will enjoy will be its process of innovation—combining market and technology know-how with the creative talents of knowledge workers to solve a constant stream of competitive problems—and its ability to derive value from information."¹⁵

As Alberta's online university, AU is at the centre of the societal shift to a knowledge economy, and its research and academic activities represent opportunities to help the province advance. AU remains in a perpetual state of transition as the university constantly incorporates changes aimed at improving learning outcomes, evaluates how such changes and their outcomes fit with AU's mission and programs, and balances the need and desire for change against human and technical resource capacities.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ The Conference Board of Canada, *Provincial Outlook 2010*, 44.

¹⁴ "International Education Framework" (Government of Alberta, Advanced Education and Technology, November 2009), 2. <http://www.advancededucation.gov.ab.ca/media/254310/intleducationframework.pdf>

¹⁵ "Knowledge Economy" (EnterWeb). <http://www.enterweb.org/know.htm>.

Environmental Effects on AU Operations

Three significant aspects of the external environment will continue to shape AU's operational context:

Demand for University Services

University services include not only the delivery of higher education programs and research but also the provision of other activities of benefit to students, the economy and the community associated with the university. According to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, full-time university enrolment increased by more than 31 per cent between 2000 and 2006, and enrolment is expected to continue to grow nationally until 2016.¹⁶ AU must focus on fostering a culture of learning, increasing post-secondary achievement among the members of under-represented groups, increasing flexibility and accessibility to educational resources, achieving consistently high satisfaction levels and showing leadership in the field of digital learning. AU's research institutes, its growing information and communication technology business connections, its growing number of partnerships with professional associations and other initiatives align well with provincial research and development priorities, which focus on commercialization, technology transfer, finding ways to partner with business and supporting the career development of highly qualified personnel and high-tech industries. Significantly, AU commits to developing relationships, sharing knowledge and increasing access for and the achievement of learning objectives by members of indigenous communities. These initiatives will continue to grow and expand.

Government Policies

Government support for universities in the next five to 10 years will affect university programs and priorities. Government policies that have an impact may originate abroad or in Canadian jurisdictions other than Alberta. Policy trends that have recently gained momentum include an increasingly regulatory approach to ensuring a quality learning environment, progressively higher demands for accountability and changes in copyright policy. On the other hand, universities have an important role to play in shaping and delivering government policies, particularly with regard to innovation, employment and copyright.

University Funding:

Funding levels affect any university's capacity to deliver high-quality programs and services, and ongoing fiscal issues are forcing universities to make difficult decisions. To achieve excellence, universities will have to develop a deliberately entrepreneurial focus. This could include offering continuing professional education programs, developing and offering career development courses and short credentials in collaboration with professional associations, pursuing a land endowment or available government grants and engaging in fee-for-service opportunities. The new *Alberta Competitiveness Act* and the *Government of Alberta Strategic Business Plan: 2010-13*, with their focus on supporting and incubating Alberta business success, have informed AU's plan to become more entrepreneurial, to seek partnerships with business and to increase capacity and productivity through information and communication technology and e-learning solutions. AU must also partner with other Alberta institutions to reduce duplication and increase efficiencies while advancing learning opportunities.

¹⁶ *Trends in Higher Education, Volume 1: Enrolment* (Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2007).

In the future, AU's success will be contingent upon

- anticipating, understanding and preparing for disruptive changes in the nature of teaching and learning
- catering to a demand for increasingly personalized education
- proactively engaging provincial and federal government agencies
- building and maintaining strong connections with other public and private scholarly communities
- building and maintaining strong, creative relationships with professional and industry groups
- growing its leadership role as the world transitions to digital learning
- engaging in research activities that relate clearly to societal needs
- engaging with indigenous (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) populations

3. Strategic Goals

Based on the extensive community consultations described above and the existing and future contexts described through environmental scanning processes, five strategic goals have been formulated for achieving AU's mission and realizing its vision over the next five years. Each goal is described and contextualized below and followed by a list of associated strategic objectives (high-level objectives that will contribute to the achievement of the goal). To ensure accountability and progress toward goal achievement, strategic objectives are accompanied by a list of priority actions and measurable key outcomes and indicators. Monitoring of these projected outcomes over the term of this strategic plan will ensure that progress is clear to all stakeholders and that AU can adjust to new challenges and opportunities that may arise during the planning period.

GOAL 1: TO BE THE LEADER IN QUALITY OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION

The goal is to leverage AU's knowledge reserves, research capacity and technological resources to provide post-secondary distance education of the highest quality, to provide open access to students from all regions and backgrounds, to promote access to scholarly information through AU Press and to provide access to the tools and skills development that are critical to success in the digital environment.

AU's focus on enhancing access to quality education and lifelong learning aligns directly with Alberta Advanced Education and Technology's vision of a society in which all Albertans enjoy access to flexible lifelong learning opportunities.¹⁷ As Canada's only public open university, AU will continue to promote and facilitate open access to university education. Removing geographical, cultural, demographic, socio-economic, educational and physical barriers to quality post-secondary education will remain central to its mission. By recruiting a diverse body of students and giving them access to a world-class education, AU will continue to play a major role in providing Alberta with a mobile and knowledgeable workforce, one that is equipped to excel in the knowledge economy and the digital environment. AU will actively promote open access to educational resources through various open access initiatives including e-texts, journals and scholarly monographs, as well as electronic portfolios, interactive digital archives and other analytical and conceptual tools.

¹⁷ *Advanced Education and Technology 2010-13 Business Plan* (Government of Alberta, 2010), 2. <http://www.advancededucation.gov.ab.ca/media/257280/201013aetbusinessplan.pdf>.

Strategic Objective 1.1

Strengthen the quality and responsiveness of undergraduate and graduate courses and programs.

Priority Actions

- Encourage and monitor the implementation of evidence-based practice in the pedagogy, curricular development and accessibility of online courses to continuously improve teaching and learning.
- Ensure orientation to evidence-based practice for employees participating in online course delivery.
- Develop and implement further sustainable measures of the achievement of student learning goals.¹⁸
- Provide interactive learning environments for students and employees.
- Internationalize the curriculum to contribute to global citizenship.
- Develop processes to ensure the academic integrity of collaborative programs.
- Provide easily accessible sets of guided online resources for research, teaching and learning.
- Identify and pursue key accreditation opportunities for AU programs.
- Develop and incorporate indigenous ways of knowing in AU programs.
- Monitor and proactively manage student and course author access to scholarly materials needed for success.

Strategic Objective 1.2

Provide a superior, interactive and engaging student experience.

Priority Actions

- Extend curriculum renewal initiatives in response to assessment results.
- Develop enhanced, integrated, responsive and accessible student services.
- Provide opportunities for extracurricular student engagement with AU faculty and staff members and with fellow students.
- Develop online career guidance and support services for students and graduates.
- Develop additional appropriate services for indigenous learners.

Strategic Objective 1.3

Become the university of choice for those seeking post-secondary education through online or distance delivery.

Priority Actions

- Strengthen market awareness of the quality of AU programs and courses, provincially, nationally and internationally, particularly among key stakeholder groups.
- Build strong connections with other Campus Alberta institutions.
- Initiate and lead a project to determine quality standards for e-learning.

¹⁸ Middle States Commission on Higher Education recommendation.

- Build capacity in high demand programs to effectively meet current and projected needs.
- Monitor the demand for new professional and doctoral programs.
- Co-operate with professional associations and industry groups to explore online resource needs.
- Build strong partnerships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit groups.

Strategic Objective 1.4

Recruit a diverse student body.

Priority Actions

- Increase recruitment activities directed to international students.
- Increase opportunities for access to and success in university-level education for students from northern, rural and indigenous communities across Canada.
- Increase opportunities for access to and success in university-level education for students from minority, immigrant and other under-represented groups across Canada.
- Increase opportunities for access to and success in university-level education for students with diagnosed permanent or temporary disabilities.

Strategic Objective 1.5

Continue to build and maintain strong alliances with other Alberta post-secondary institutions as a major contributor to Campus Alberta and eCampusAlberta.

Priority Actions

- Further AU's contribution to Campus Alberta and eCampusAlberta by providing collaborative leadership in open and distance education opportunities, research, and administrative and student support services.
- Renew agreements enabling students to complete AU courses while enrolled at other institutions.
- Expand collaborative research activities within Campus Alberta and eCampusAlberta.
- Expand AU's leadership role in the application of prior learning assessment and recognition for undergraduate programs to enhance opportunities and flexibility for students enrolled at Campus Alberta, eCampusAlberta and other institutions.
- Encourage AU faculty members' involvement in graduate student thesis committees at other universities.

Strategic Objective 1.6

Assume a leadership role in the development and adoption of learning technologies that enhance open learning environments.

Priority Actions

- Lead the implementation of learning technologies that set the standard for technologically enhanced learning.
- Collaborate with industry and other post-secondary institutions to research the use of technology to create and manage knowledge.

- Enhance access to AU's learning and research resources.
- Collaborate with indigenous partners and institutions on the use of technology to strengthen indigenous learning pedagogies.

KEY OUTCOMES ¹⁹	INDICATORS
Student success rates are improved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased pass rate in undergraduate courses
Established evidence-based practice is consistently applied in pedagogy and curricular development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results from external review of selected courses
Students and researchers have easy access to excellent resources for research and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of digital and other library resources
AU is the university of choice for graduate students in key program areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of graduate students in Alberta enrolled at AU in key graduate program areas²⁰
Enrolment by members of targeted student groups is increased.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrolment by aboriginal learners, students from northern, rural and remote areas and members of other designated groups • International student enrolment
AU researchers are recognized as leaders in learning technologies that enhance open access.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of keynote addresses, invited presentations and research partnerships in open and distance learning

GOAL 2: TO ENSURE SUSTAINABILITY AND FOSTER ADAPTABILITY

The goal is to develop the financial and operating systems and the infrastructure needed for sustainable institutional growth and to encourage flexibility and versatility at all levels of the university.

AU will target sustainable growth through a new budget model that further aligns the institution with its decanal structure. Through engagement with government and continued stewardship of its resources, AU will also develop sustainable funding models that will allow it to pursue its mandate of excellence in open and distance education. Diversifying funding sources and monitoring affordability to students will be crucial aspects of these models. Information and communication technology infrastructure will be improved to serve the needs of an increasingly digital university community. Resources, systems and infrastructure will support an innovative and entrepreneurial university community. Delegating decision-making authority to the appropriate level, improving business practices generally and focusing on client services will become hallmarks of greater sustainability and adaptability at AU.

¹⁹ Key outcomes and indicators will enable the monitoring and evaluation of progress toward the achievement of general strategic targets. Specific performance measures will be included in all academic and operational plans flowing from the SUP.

²⁰ *Advanced Education and Technology 2010-13 Business Plan* indicator.

Strategic Objective 2.1

Support continued growth through the development of alternative funding models and a culture that is entrepreneurial, innovative and able to adapt efficiently to societal change. Priority Actions

- Fully implement the decanal model.
- Develop a new budget model.
- Identify and secure new funding sources to support research, teaching and service.
- Identify and implement entrepreneurial initiatives that will allow AU to fulfill its mandate.
- Implement policies and processes to enhance responsiveness, efficiency and adaptability.
- Develop and implement advanced environmental scanning activities.
- Implement a comprehensive risk management plan to inform strategic decision-making.

Strategic Objective 2.2

Enhance government relations through proactive engagement.

Priority Actions

- Develop and implement an enhanced government relations plan.
- Proactively engage with provincial and federal government agencies regarding policies and legislation affecting post-secondary education.
- Position AU as a major contributor to Alberta's innovation system.
- In co-ordination with the Centre for World Indigenous Knowledge and Research, implement AU's 2011 Indigenous Education Plan and Indigenous Community and Citizen Relations Plan to facilitate the development of relationships with indigenous communities and citizens.

Strategic Objective 2.3

Develop and expand AU's physical and virtual campus infrastructure to support continued growth and excellence.

Priority Actions

- Develop AU's capital infrastructure through the implementation of the Capital Plan and Campus Development Plan to support efficiency and sustainable growth.
- Revise and implement the Information and Communication Technology Capital and Strategic Plans to ensure the maintenance of a sustainable information and communication technology infrastructure.
- Develop opportunities for the innovative use of information and communication technologies to improve service and resource use at the academic and service unit level.
- Implement an integrated administrative services system.

KEY OUTCOMES	INDICATORS
Revenue increases are at or above the expected rate as indicated in annual budgets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total revenue • Revenue from donations • A balanced budget
Capital infrastructure is developed and maintained to allow sustainable growth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of capital developments referenced in the capital plan and maintenance projects completed
The Information and Communication Technology Capital Plan is implemented.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of budgeted ICT funding secured • Percentage of ICT Capital Plan objectives implemented

GOAL 3: TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN EXCELLENT PEOPLE

The goal is to recruit the very best employees and to provide exceptional opportunities for them to develop their professional skills and abilities.

The Government of Alberta's position that "human capital is the foundation for long-term prosperity and social well-being"¹⁸ is reflected in AU's conviction that its continued success depends upon its employees. The university will continue to recruit outstanding faculty and staff members and provide them with development opportunities to support a climate of excellence and diversity. AU will strive to provide a respectful, healthy work environment that values and supports personal development, and AU employees will continue to be united by their shared commitment to removing barriers to learning and providing students with an exceptional university experience.

Strategic Objective 3.1

Attract and retain excellent employees.

Priority Actions

- Develop and implement a comprehensive Human Resources Development Plan based on evidence-based practice.
- Provide enhanced employee development opportunities and encourage participation.
- Ensure appropriate, university-wide succession planning that stems from an analysis of the staff demography.
- Develop and implement an equity plan so that under-represented groups are represented across the university.

Strategic Objective 3.2

Foster and maintain an interactive and collaborative workforce within a healthy, effective and efficient work environment.

¹⁸ *Advanced Education and Technology 2010-13 Business Plan, 4.*

Priority Actions

- Actively promote the university's mission and vision among faculty and staff members.
- Improve communication and collaboration to share ideas and foster open dialogue.
- Provide an efficient and flexible work environment through the use of appropriate technology and development of an effective policy framework.
- Promote healthy workplace and wellness activities.

KEY OUTCOMES	INDICATORS
Staff engagement levels are high compared to university benchmark levels. ²²	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Percentage of staff members that are proud to tell others they work for AU• Percentage of staff members indicating favourable engagement levels
Staff development plans are implemented and integrated with performance management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Percentage of staff members with active development plans

GOAL 4: TO PROMOTE EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

The goal is to expand research and to encourage excellence in research and scholarship.

As one of four comprehensive academic and research institutions in Alberta, AU stands on its reputation for research leadership in technologically enhanced open and distance education and for excellence in research in other disciplines. In collaboration with other Campus Alberta and Alberta Innovates partners, AU will play a major role in securing the Alberta future envisioned by Advanced Education and Technology, one in which research and innovation are core strengths of a knowledge-driven provincial economy.²³

Research will remain fundamental to AU's identity and integrity. It will continue to be conducted and disseminated in a climate of academic freedom, and it will continue to inform teaching and learning. The university will increase opportunities for involvement in research as part of students' academic development, and all disciplinary and interdisciplinary research carried out will ultimately serve to benefit and improve society.

Strategic Objective 4.1

Provide appropriate support for faculty, staff and student research and scholarship.

Priority Actions

- Encourage and support AU researchers to secure the granting agency, industry or non-governmental organization support needed to expand current research.
- Increase opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to engage in research activities.

²² Based on Athabasca University Staff Engagement Survey results.

²³ *Advanced Education and Technology 2010-13 Business Plan, 2.*

- Support open access publishing through various AU venues and activities, including AU Press, self-archiving of research output on AU Space, the e-text initiative and digital repository resources.

Strategic Objective 4.2

Enhance AU’s international reputation in key research disciplines, including technologically enhanced online and distance education.

Priority Actions

- Pursue research chairs in key research areas.
- Enhance research institutes and foster centres of excellence.
- Expand AU’s international leadership role in research in open access and online and distance education.
- Develop a capacity for leadership in the data and learning analytics research community.
- Extend graduate courses and readings in key research areas.
- Engage with governments, research agencies and the private sector on research agendas and opportunities.

Strategic Objective 4.3

Promote and expand the transfer of research findings for the benefit of students, society and the economy.

Priority Actions

- Engage with key communities of scholars and the public and private sectors to solve problems and to contribute to Alberta’s capacity for research and innovation in key areas including health and technology.
- Work with non-governmental organizations and communities to build their research capacity and implement relevant research findings.
- Encourage the communication of research findings and provide the widest possible access to them.
- Assume a leadership role in supporting open educational resources.
- Advance AU Press as the university’s primary vehicle for open access publishing.

KEY OUTCOMES	INDICATORS
Research activity is increased at AU.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council grant success rate • Research revenue from council, industry and community sources

GOAL 5: TO BUILD COMMUNITIES

The goal is to promote collaboration, leadership and innovation in the communities served by the university.

AU seeks to exercise leadership and to promote collaboration and innovation in communities of various types across Alberta. AU embraces its role as an open university, one that allows leaders and innovators to remain active in their communities while pursuing their educational goals. Removing barriers to post-secondary education for indigenous and new Canadians will remain a key focus for AU as members of these groups are vitally important to the success of both the province and the country.

Collaboration with other post-secondary institutions in Alberta and beyond will remain a hallmark of AU's approach to learning and research and will provide enhanced opportunities for students. AU is also committed to building on existing strategic partnerships with industry, business and government and to actively seeking out further opportunities for such engagement.

Strategic Objective 5.1

Work with community groups and agencies and municipal governments to develop initiatives that foster healthy, prosperous communities.

Priority Actions

- Work with communities, including rural, remote and immigrant communities, to identify community needs, to find solutions to local problems and to enhance community development.
- Identify learning needs and enhance opportunities for flexible and culturally sensitive learning in remote, northern, rural, indigenous and immigrant communities and among other groups under-represented in post-secondary education.
- Support faculty and staff contributions to community service.
- Support collaborative agreements on projects of benefit to local communities.

Strategic Objective 5.2

Foster partnerships with business, industry and other strategic communities to advance mutual goals.

Priority Actions

- Continue to form public and private partnerships that meet university and community needs and contribute to economic and social vitality.
- Work with professional associations and employers to develop learning opportunities that allow people to continue their education while working.
- Work collaboratively with local, educational, government and other stakeholders to develop an interpretive centre for the Athabasca River Basin.

KEY OUTCOMES**INDICATORS**

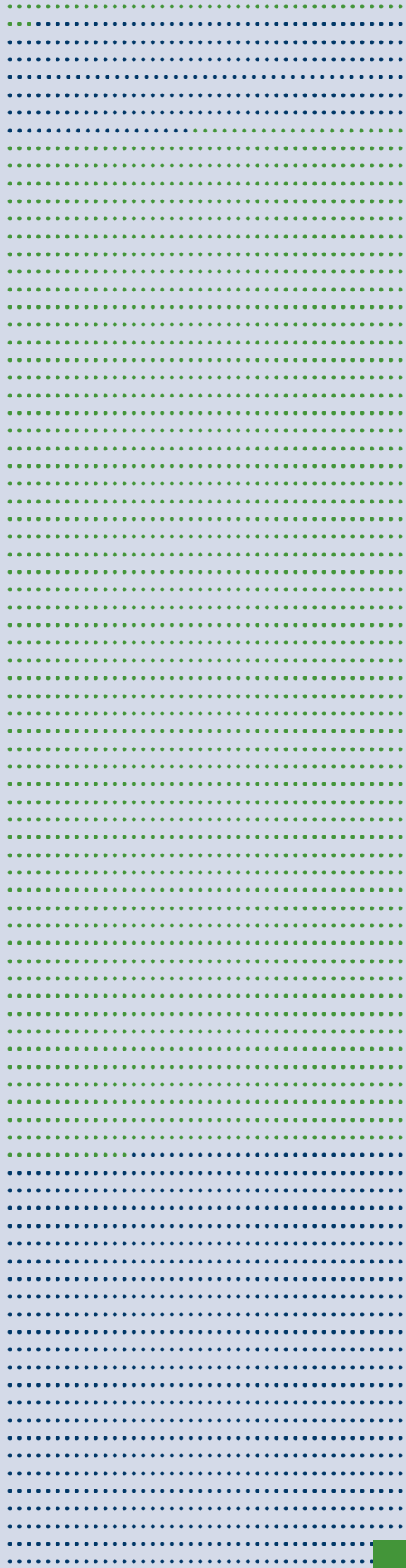
The number of partnerships and collaborations is increased.

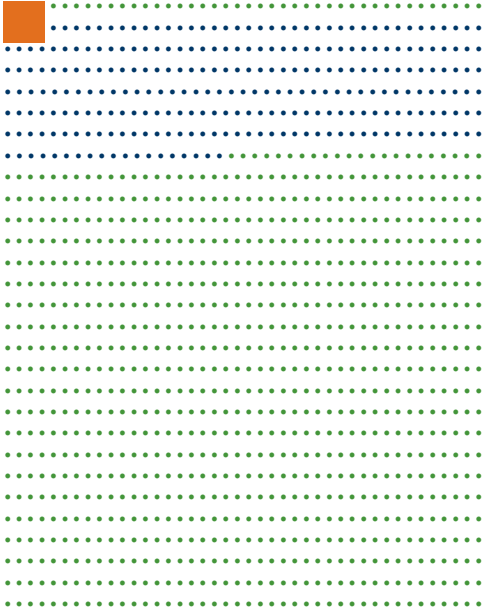
- The number of funded partnerships and collaborative projects

The number and scope of strategic partnerships with business, industry and other stakeholders are increased.

- Course registration resulting from specific partnerships
- The dollar value of Alberta business expenditures on research and development²⁴ in collaboration with AU

²⁴ *Advanced Education and Technology 2010-13 Business Plan* indicator.





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