

**ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY  
STRATEGIC UNIVERSITY PLAN  
2002–2006**

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# INTRODUCTION AND VISION

This Strategic University Plan, approved by the Athabasca University Governing Council on June 7, 2002, presents Athabasca University's strategic directions for the period July 1, 2002, to June 30, 2006. Tactics for achieving the goals and objectives presented in this plan, and for implementing the strategies, will be contained in annual, three-year departmental and divisional operating plans.

The following vision statement provides a longer-term view of Athabasca University.

## VISION FOR 2010

Athabasca University, Canada's Open University, is the premier open and online university in North America and is acknowledged to be one of the leading universities of its kind in the world. Annually, 50,000 learners register in 120,000 courses. About 15 per cent of course registrations are in graduate programs.

Athabasca University serves a diverse population of learners who live primarily in Alberta, the rest of Canada, and the United States. Athabasca University pays particular attention to under-represented learner populations. Students continue to express high levels of satisfaction with the quality of programs and services.

At Athabasca University, per-faculty-member research contributions are in line with relevant university norms. Curriculum and learning systems are informed by sound research. Courses, programs, and supporting services are delivered using appropriate digital technologies and are tailored to individual learner needs. Athabasca University's profile in research in open and distance learning and related areas is one of the best in the world.

With its main centre in the Town of Athabasca, and with nodes of operation in strategic locations in Alberta and elsewhere, Athabasca University has exemplary personnel who function effectively in a networked environment. Organizational structures, policies, and practices are in place to ensure that Athabasca University and its staff can capitalize on the benefits of this distributed working environment and overcome its disadvantages.

# ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

## Athabasca University Today

Since implementing the last Strategic University Plan in January 1996, there have been significant changes in student population, curriculum, and staffing.

### STUDENT POPULATION

Full-time-equivalent registrations have increased from 2,237 to 4,342,<sup>1</sup> an increase of 94.1%. The student population has grown from 12,003 to 23,479, an increase of 95.6%, and graduate registrations have increased from 6.6% to 13.5% of total registrations. In 1996, 209 degrees were awarded (none in graduate programs); in 2001, 298 undergraduate degrees and 278 graduate degrees were awarded, a total increase of 175%. Alberta students now account for 45.3% of total course registrations, a drop of 16.4%. The gender distribution of the student population has remained stable, with women comprising 65%.

### CURRICULUM

The curriculum has expanded by 41%, from 386 courses in 1996 to 546 in 2001, with the number of undergraduate degree programs increasing from 23 in 1996 to 29 in 2001 and the number of graduate degree programs increasing from 2 in 1996 to 5 in 2001. Although the balance in the curriculum has shifted with the introduction of additional professional arts programs, liberal arts and sciences courses still predominate. Applied courses now account for 13% of the total undergraduate offerings (6% in 1996), professional courses 17% (21% in 1996), and liberal arts and sciences courses 69% (73% in 1996).<sup>2</sup>

### STAFFING

By March 2002, the total staff complement had grown (March 1995 figures shown in parentheses) from 475 to 919, including: 104 full-time (48) and 117 (21) part-time academics (the latter primarily teaching staff in the graduate programs), 115 (48) professionals, 15 (15) management/executive, 251 (101) support and temporary, 68 (38) casual, and 249 (204) tutors.<sup>3</sup> Recruitment and retention of staff now represent significant challenges given the competitiveness of the marketplace and an aging institutional workforce.

## Alberta and the Rest of Canada: Looking Ahead

Throughout Canada, the period covered by this SUP will be characterized by increased demand, greater competition, and significant funding challenges.

### DEMAND

The next four years will be characterized by an increased demand for post-secondary education among full-time undergraduate and graduate students and by undergraduate enrolment caps in research-intensive universities. Colleges in some provinces (e.g., Alberta) will be under increased pressure to become degree-granting institutions. We also expect moderately increased demand for post-secondary education among part-time undergraduate students and increased demand for post-secondary education among part-time graduate students.

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<sup>1</sup> Official 1996 and 2001 Full-Load Equivalent counts for Alberta Learning—unless otherwise noted the numbers are reported on calendar year for comparative purposes.

<sup>2</sup> Following the categories in the 2001–02 Calendar—Applied Studies includes Communication Studies, Criminal Justice, Educational Psychology, Health Studies, and Nursing. Professional courses include all Administrative Studies courses.

<sup>3</sup> Figures based on the pertinent Athabasca University Annual Reports, with the 1995 data adjusted to include some Centre for Innovative Management staff omitted in error (and included in subsequent years).

Post-secondary institutions will increase offerings of grouped-study online learning, particularly in undergraduate and graduate professional programs. Increased demand for professional education will be generated by mandatory continuing education and the requirement of higher qualifications for entry into the professions. Expanded demand for post-secondary education will result from the double cohort of high-school completers in Ontario (Grade 13 and Grade 12).

## COMPETITION

There will be greater competition both at the undergraduate and graduate levels, primarily among public Canadian providers of distance education, but competition will also come increasingly from international providers. There will also be increased competition from for-profit providers of distance education, particularly in the areas of business, health, information technology, and other professional programs. Competition based on the cost and quality of learning opportunities and support services will increase, and there will be significant competition around staff retention and recruitment.

## FUNDING

Significant funding challenges include further declines in government funding per full-load equivalent, increased student debt, and a reduction in permissible annual tuition fee increases.

## **Opportunities in the USA**

During the term of this SUP, the University will position itself for meaningful expansion into the USA. Notwithstanding the major advances in distance education that have been witnessed in the USA during the last five years, the period will still be characterized by unmet demand for online and distance education. Athabasca University's learning flexibility and openness is unparalleled in the USA, its international tuition fees are highly competitive, and regional accreditation is a *sine qua non* for penetrating this market.

## **Technology**

The term of this SUP will be characterized by the use of technology to improve access and to remove barriers to learning; significant expansion of online infrastructures in support of e-learning throughout North America; expanded broadband infrastructure; increased presence and usability of e-books and related technology; and expanded involvement of the commercial publishing industry in interactive, multimedia learning resources.

## **OUR MISSION**

Athabasca University, Canada's Open University, is dedicated to the removal of barriers that restrict access to, and success in, university-level studies 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.

# OUR VALUES

*We value excellence*

*We value learning*

*We value scholarly research*

*We value the free exchange of ideas*

*We value openness and flexibility*

*We value diversity and inclusiveness*

*We value our employees*

*We value accountability*

The students, faculty, and staff of Athabasca University hold a set of complementary values that we believe are fundamental to our identity and functioning. It is from our varying perspectives that we come together as members of the university community to collectively affirm and enact the following set of values.

*We value excellence.*

The search for excellence is the hallmark of all our endeavours.

*We value learning.*

Student learning and satisfaction are the 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 both of learning and of the workplace.

*We value our employees.*

The commitment, innovation, creativity, and continuous learning of every employee contribute to our success.

*We value accountability.*

We are accountable to our students, to each other, and to the public.

# GOALS AND STRATEGIES TO 2006

## MEETING LEARNERS' NEEDS

*Currently in its fourth decade of operation as an open and distance university, AU understands, and has successfully met in many ways, the three essential needs of its students:*

*open access,  
flexible learning systems, and  
quality courses, programs, and student support services.*

*This section of the SUP specifies goals for 2002–2006 that AU will achieve in order to continue to address students' needs and to improve the ways in which we do this. By so doing, AU will implement its Mission and Mandate (see Appendix B) and move towards its Vision for 2010.*

## OPEN ACCESS

The period covered by this SUP will be characterized by unmet demand for affordable, open, and flexible university-level education.

### GOAL 1

#### **To provide increased access to our courses and programs**

**Objective 1: We will accommodate demand for our courses by growing our undergraduate course registrations by 10% per annum through:**

- i) developing and implementing an effective, rolling, three-year recruitment strategy;
- ii) regularly updating and revising articulation agreements;
- iii) increasing the number of courses that individual students take from AU; and
- iv) maintaining program and course quality, currency, and relevancy.

**Objective 2: We will increase the number of undergraduate degrees awarded by 10% per annum through:**

- i) achieving Objective 1; and
- ii) expanding collaboration and articulation agreements.

**Objective 3: We will increase the number of graduate registrations by 10% per annum through:**

- i) increasing registrations in current graduate programs; and

- ii) developing new graduate programs in selected areas.

**Objective 4: We will increase the number of graduate degrees awarded by 15% per annum by:**

- i) meeting Objective 3; and
- ii) encouraging students from new programs to proceed through program requirements.

## **GOAL 2**

**To increase the number and success of students identified with traditionally under-represented groups (women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and visible minorities)**

**Objective 1: We will increase the number of Indigenous students whom we serve by:**

- i) implementing the Indigenous Education Plan.

**Objective 2: We will increase the number of students with disabilities whom we serve by:**

- i) increasing the use of assistive technology and the application of universal design principles in the provision of courses and support services; and
- ii) linking dedicated support resources to increases in related registrations.

**Objective 3: We will increase the number of women students by:**

- i) maintaining overall growth.

**Objective 4: We will increase the number of visible minorities whom we serve by:**

- i) determining the number of learners from visible minorities currently served; and
- ii) developing and implementing a plan to increase their numbers.

**Objective 5: We will increase the dollar amount of scholarships and bursaries in support of financially disadvantaged students by:**

- i) developing and implementing a plan to fund this initiative; and
- ii) advocating for increased financial support for part-time learners.

### **GOAL 3**

**To ensure that residency requirements and Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) recognition do not represent unjustifiable barriers to openness**

**Objective 1: We will examine residency and prior learning assessment requirements for our credentials by:**

- i) reviewing residency requirements in the context of program outcomes for undergraduate credentials;
- ii) extending PLA to individual courses; and
- iii) extending AU's learning accreditation services through federal and international partnerships and projects.

### **FLEXIBLE LEARNING SYSTEMS**

*Flexible learning systems are as important to AU learners and to institutional positioning as are open admission, open registration, credit coordination, and learning accreditation.*

### **GOAL 1**

**At the undergraduate level, continue to consider individualized distance education as our core operation**

**Objective 1: We will continue to offer all undergraduate courses primarily in individualized study mode by:**

- i) increasing individualized study mode delivery as a percentage of total registrations;
- ii) considering grouped-study options as complementary, not primary, delivery modes;
- iii) using grouped study to address the needs of specific populations and where required by the specific learning outcomes of a course; and
- iv) using grouped-study options to pilot new offerings and incorporating the feedback into the preparation of individualized study materials and learning activities.

**Objective 2: Electronic student support services will focus on the needs of individual learners by:**

- i) implementing U-portal technology that enables the creation of individual “My AU” entry points to online student services; and
- ii) launching a true, online, Web-interfaced registration system.

## **GOAL 2**

**At the graduate level, where grouped study represents the primary mode of delivery, enable individualized study where feasible**

**Objective:** The appropriateness of opening selected courses to individualized study will be determined for graduate programs.

## **GOAL 3**

**Use appropriate e-learning pedagogy to increase flexibility for students to engage in learning and assessment activities**

**Objective 1: All undergraduate courses will include proven, online-learning and online-assessment activities and resources by:**

- i) developing and implementing an e-Learning Plan; and
- ii) using digital systems to increase the flexibility and access to learning resources, where proven successful.

**Objective 2: The Library will increasingly provide support to students using digital resources by:**

- i) acquiring and developing online resources and deploying resources (human and other) to facilitate learner access.

# **QUALITY COURSES, PROGRAMS, AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES**

## **GOAL 1**

**To improve the quality of courses, programs, and student support services**

**Objective 1: To ensure quality, the addition of new courses and programs will depend on adequate new resources being made available; otherwise, the breadth and depth of undergraduate programs will normally be based on the curriculum in place, or already approved for development, as of July 1, 2002. Quality assurance will be achieved by:**

- i) linking the approval of new courses and programs to the acquisition of new resources and/or the redeployment of resources resulting from the closure of existing courses or programs;
- ii) the linking of Step 2 (Business Plan) approval for new or revised programs that require new university-based funding or resources to the University's annual formal budgeting process;
- iii) developing, by each centre (for approval by Executive Group as part of the annual budgeting process), three-year, rolling operational plans that identify program and course development, technology, staffing, funding (costs and revenues), and other relevant factors; and
- iv) ongoing examination of processes to create additional capacity.

**Objective 2: Appropriate technologies will be successfully integrated into course development, delivery, student support, and administrative systems by:**

- i) developing and implementing annual, three-year operational e-Learning, Student Services, and Systems Development plans.

**Objective 3: AU will develop clear and comprehensive learning outcomes for each of its programs in order to inform its curriculum development and academic policies, improve marketing, and ensure the validity of its assessment processes by:**

- i) developing and implementing a Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan.

**Objective 4: The number, currency, and quality of examinations and assignments will be improved, particularly in undergraduate courses by:**

- i) increasing the use of item test banks and other online examination systems with item error analysis capacity;
- ii) adopting plagiarism detection technologies, and
- iii) reviewing the number of exam versions required by the relevant policy.

**Objective 5: We will ensure that the quality of learning, teaching, and support services are informed by current research both in the disciplines and in distance and open learning. This will be attained by:**

- i) developing, with the Academic Research Committee, an annual, three-year, rolling comprehensive research plan (for approval by Athabasca University Academic Council);
- ii) improving the opportunities for academic staff, and for professionals with research responsibilities, to contribute to research in their fields and in open and distance learning; and
- iii) providing training opportunities, including best-practices discussions, across the University.

**Objective 6: We will improve student success by:**

- i) improving the means by which prospective students can assess their readiness;
- ii) improving course pass rates through, for example, the early identification of, and remediation for, students experiencing difficulties; and
- iii) examining the effectiveness of introducing preparatory courses for students.

**Objective 7: Student feedback will be better utilized to inform curriculum development and service delivery by:**

- i) reviewing and refining the current process for receiving and using student feedback.

**Objective 8: Curriculum will be linked to access through ensuring that the curriculum is relevant to diverse student populations (including Indigenous students, and students throughout North America) by:**

- i) modifying and implementing the "phase 3" course development process.

**Objective 9: Administrative systems that support the University's core teaching and research functions will be improved by:**

- i) developing, approving (by Executive Group), and implementing an annual, three-year rolling Systems Development Plan.

**Objective 10: Improvements that are identified through the regular, periodic, independent evaluation of all programs and learning activities will be implemented. This will be achieved by:**

- i) implementing the Education Review Committee's rolling framework and schedule for the review and evaluation of AU's teaching, learning, and services; and
- ii) following up on recommendations that result from the reviews.

**Objective 11: Increased linkages in program development, delivery, administrative systems, and research agendas, both between undergraduate and graduate centres, and across graduate centres, will be fostered in order to maximize synergies and cross-fertilization of best practices. This will be achieved by:**

- i) facilitating teaching and tutoring assignments that promote this objective;
- ii) defining and formalizing a relationship between the Centre for Innovative Management and the undergraduate School of Business; and
- iii) an assessment (for Athabasca University Academic Council) and , if advisable, subsequent implementation of structures and processes needed to enable more co-operation among graduate centres, research, and student services areas.

## **GOAL 2**

**To increase the number of graduate programs offered**

**Objective 1: Where demand and new resources warrant, the University will develop new Masters programs by:**

- i) developing and implementing an annual three-year Educational Plan for graduate programs.

**Objective 2: With direction from the annual three-year Educational Plan, the University will have its first doctoral program approved by 2005.**

## **GOAL 3**

**To promote a balanced curriculum among applied, professional, and liberal arts and sciences programs**

**Objective 1: The University will, through its balanced curriculum, provide learners with the opportunity to take programs and courses in a variety of fields.**

**Objective 2: AU will continue to maintain its strong support for the liberal arts and sciences.**

## ORGANIZATION AND PEOPLE

*To enhance the effectiveness of AU's operations, a modified organizational model will be implemented. This will entail the development of networked work sites and associated staffing arrangements. Under the new model, the current facility in Athabasca will be the heart of the University and remain the hub of the institution's activities.*

*The University will encourage inclusion and diversity in its workforce, exemplify the belief that every employee contributes to the University's success, and provide a safe and respectful environment for free inquiry and critique.*

*While acknowledging the possible tension between fragmentation and cohesion, additional emphasis will be placed on:*

- 1. developing nodes or branch sites that are connected both to the central campus and to other nodes within AU's system,*
- 2. a function-based approach to staff location that takes into account the needs of the job when determining the geographical location of a position, and*
- 3. a flexible workforce that takes into account the staff member's needs in the timing and location of work.*

### GOAL 1

#### **To implement “the networked environment” at AU.**

**Objective 1: We will define, through consultation with staff, the characteristics of what a networked environment means at AU by:**

- i) defining and describing AU's networked environment;
- ii) defining and communicating “best practices” for a networked environment (tutoring, coordinating, support services);
- iii) identifying the skills required to function in a networked environment and promoting and encouraging the development of those skills in our staff;
- iv) identifying which jobs and functions must be located in Athabasca, which ones must be located elsewhere, and which ones require specified activities in Athabasca;
- v) where operationally feasible, testing and implementing flexible opportunities adapted to individual needs; and
- iv) identifying and providing the technological investment required to support the networked environment.

**Objective 2: We will align the changing staff roles with the networked work environment by:**

- i) defining the “new professoriate” and reviewing all relevant policies and practices;
- ii) defining the “new tutoriate” and reviewing all relevant policies and practices;
- iii) capitalizing on the expertise of long-term staff to improve the networked environment;
- iv) reviewing and revising the alternative work schedule policy;
- v) encouraging staff to use the networked environment to discuss and address issues such as staff wellness; and
- vi) fostering a common organizational culture and values.

**Objective 3: We will increase the skill levels of staff to prepare them to work in, and support, the networked environment by:**

- i) recruiting individuals with experience in networked working situations;
- ii) insuring all new staff are properly oriented to AU;
- ii) retaining employees with skills in working in networked environments;
- iii) identifying staff with the potential to enhance the University’s networked environment and training them to that potential;
- iv) using distributed training techniques to train all staff to the skill levels identified as required for the networked environment;
- v) developing a “community of practice” that focuses on training support staff in hardware and software use, communication tools, and so on;
- vi) drawing on the wider pool of employees that a more distributed workforce permits; and
- vii) *ceterus paribus*, recruiting tutors from Alberta.

**Objective 4: We will maximize the use of all AU facilities while ensuring a networked work environment by:**

- i) co-locating the Centre for Innovative Management and some units now located in Edmonton Learning Centre and Athabasca, and
- ii) tailoring the greater Edmonton site to improve support for staff working primarily out of their homes in this region.

## **GOAL 2**

### **To promote a productive workplace environment**

#### **Objective 1: We will improve employee wellness by:**

- i) developing and maintaining an effective occupational health and safety program;
- ii) improving measurement of employee satisfaction and developing and implementing a follow-up mechanism;
- iii) designing means of managing growth and monitoring the effects of growth on staff;
- iv) implementing coaching and mentoring programs;
- v) encouraging cross-training, especially in support positions;
- vi) enhancing employee recognition programs;
- vii) implementing and maintaining a respectful workplace policy and education program, and implementing policies to deal with harassment;
- viii) involving all staff in planning and implementing change; and
- ix) increasing tutor participation in university decision making.

#### **Objective 2: We will improve inclusiveness and diversity at AU by:**

- i) increasing the number and influence of employees from under-represented groups;
- ii) implementing an employment equity plan in keeping with the terms and conditions of criteria provided to federal contractors by Human Resources Development Canada; and
- iii) building on our practice of open forums to discuss important issues.

#### **Objective 3: We will prepare the University with respect to staffing continuity and effectiveness by:**

- i) developing a comprehensive workforce plan for the recruitment and retention of staff;
- ii) implementing an effective transfer-of-knowledge strategy; and
- ii) implementing succession planning for senior administrators.

### **Goal 3**

**To ensure that the structures of academic decision making and internal administration are representative**

**Objective: We will review existing structures of academic decision-making and internal administration by:**

- i) striking a committee on academic decision-making and internal administration; and
- ii) conducting a review of existing structures of academic decision-making and internal administration.

# PROVINCIAL, NATIONAL, AND INTERNATIONAL POSITIONING

*How the University seeks to position and brand itself is intricately linked to*

*mandate,  
mission,  
vision, and  
the environment in which it is developing.*

*AU is currently Canada's oldest and largest open university that provides high accessibility to higher education, primarily to Canadians, through flexible online and distance learning.*

*This Strategic University Plan seeks to reinforce this position at a time of significantly increased national and international competition, and in so doing, to expand AU's position within the contexts of both a quickly developing US distance and online market and the global educational environment. Failure to expand the University's positioning during the term of this SUP will have detrimental effects for its current positioning and will result in decreased national relevance.*

*The four goals outlined below build on each other. In combination, they delineate the space that AU will occupy by 2006.*

## GOAL 1

### **To improve AU's accomplishments, visibility, and recognition as a key provider of education in Alberta**

#### **Objective 1: We will increase the participation rate of Albertans through:**

- i) developing and implementing a recruitment strategy for individualized and grouped study that is specific to Alberta;
- ii) capitalizing on the recruitment potential of graduate and undergraduate collaborations through Campus Alberta initiatives with Alberta post-secondary institutions; and
- iii) maintaining competitive tuition and related fees.

#### **Objective 2: We will improve AU's profile among provincial educational institutions by:**

- i) increasing the number of graduates from the other provincial universities who use AU course credits in order to graduate from those institutions;
- ii) adding graduate program offerings, including at least one doctoral program;
- iii) increasing the number of graduate programs delivered in collaboration with other universities in Alberta;
- iv) developing and evaluating collaborative program delivery, either with single partners or with several (e.g., Alberta North);

- v) increasing our research profile with publications, contracts, grants, and awards that are in line with other provincial institutions;
- vi) providing provincial leadership in research and practice in open and distance learning; and
- vii) increasing participation in provincial committees related to our core activities.

**Objective 3: We will improve AU’s visibility among provincial politicians by:**

- i) developing and implementing an awareness program aimed at elected provincial officials;
- ii) better preparing Athabasca University Governing Council public members to interact with elected officials; and
- iii) reporting regularly on AU’s economic impact in the Province of Alberta.

**Objective 4: We will improve recognition and appreciation of AU in Alberta by:**

- i) developing and implementing a public-awareness program;
- ii) increasing provincial media coverage;
- iii) increasing the profile of AU’s facilities in the Province; and
- iv) valorizing AU’s national and international agendas.

**GOAL 2**

**To enhance AU’s reputation as “Canada’s Open University”**

**Objective 1: We will significantly increase our “rest of Canada” enrolments by:**

- i) developing and implementing an Ontario “double cohort” strategy;
- ii) developing and implementing plans for recruiting students from British Columbia; and
- iii) maintaining competitive tuition and related fees.

**Objective 2: We will strengthen our collaborative, national educational and research partnerships by:**

- i) providing leadership to the Canadian Virtual University;
- ii) enhancing the AU/Télé-université strategic partnership;
- iii) updating and expanding articulation and collaboration agreements with universities and colleges;

- iv) working with select professional associations in order to assist them in meeting their members' continuing educational objectives; and
- v) exploring opportunities to engage in national research agendas.

**Objective 3: We will improve AU's national visibility among federal politicians, national business leaders, and the general public by:**

- i) developing and implementing an awareness program for key national politicians, business leaders, and government officials;
- ii) increasing national media coverage; and
- iii) increasing co-operation with the Students' Union and the Alumni Association.

**Objective 4: We will increase our national reputation for research into open and distance education by:**

- i) improving the citation ratings of AU's staff;
- ii) increasing the profile and circulation of *IRRODL*;
- iii) increasing the value of grants received for research in open and distance education;
- iv) increasing the presentations in open and distance education made by staff at national conferences;
- v) hosting national conferences or events around distance and open education; and
- vi) conducting, in collaboration with key industry leaders, field research and practice in the application of emerging technologies for distance and open learning.

### **GOAL 3**

#### **To become recognized as the premier open and distance learning university in North America**

**Objective 1: We will significantly increase our enrolments in the US by:**

- i) attaining US accreditation;
- ii) setting competitive tuition and related fees; and
- iii) maintaining and enhancing our international service standards.

**Objective 2: AU will establish a US presence through:**

- i) gaining US accreditation;

- ii) participating in US forums where distance education is prominent; and
- iii) building and developing strategic partnerships with recognized US institutional leaders in distance and open education.

## **GOAL 4**

### **To further AU's international reputation as a leading, open, and distance university**

#### **Objective 1: AU will serve students internationally by:**

- i) expanding registrations (through our website) in individualized study by international students with the appropriate English-language skills and who deem the primarily North American curriculum to be appropriate; and
- ii) entering into limited and selective partnerships with reputable national/international universities and organizations for the purpose of delivering select, flagship, on-site supported programs.

#### **Objective 2: AU will develop its international institutional profile as a leader in distance and open education by:**

- i) engaging in select international development, consulting, and training projects;
- ii) facilitating and increasing international research in open and distance learning; and
- iii) entering into strategic partnerships with sister universities for the purpose of improving AU's brand both at home and abroad.

# **FISCAL HEALTH**

*A key measure of AU's ability to implement its vision and mission will be its financial stability and health as evidenced by its physical and financial net assets and its ability to generate free cash flow for further investment in human resources and the physical facilities and networks needed to support its activities. The University will need to renew and expand its infrastructure and retain, attract, and train highly skilled staff at all levels in a knowledge-based economy.*

## **GOAL 1**

### **To manage growth so that it strengthens the University's financial position**

#### **Objective 1: Ensure that the overall growth in individualized undergraduate studies will allow for re-investment in AU by:**

- i) managing curriculum to achieve economies of scale;
- ii) emphasizing innovation and productivity in all processes and activities; and
- iii) entering the US market through accreditation and competitive international tuition fees.

#### **Objective 2: To attract government funding for new programs and expansion of current programs by:**

- i) closely monitoring government and public priorities in education; and
- ii) collaborating with other stakeholders to lobby government for increased funding levels for post-secondary education.

#### **Objective 3: To fully fund programs in graduate studies that will later provide an overall contribution to cash flow by:**

- i) ensuring that each graduate program is fully funded before start-up;
- ii) reducing, over time, the University's investment in cases where internal, annual, base-funding commitments have been made;
- iii) establishing, using the positive annual variances in graduate programs, a strategic investment reserve for new graduate programs; and
- iv) seeking regular funding from Alberta Learning to provide for AU's graduate programs.

#### **Objective 4: AU will set, within the policy framework established by Alberta Learning, competitive tuition fee levels for its markets by:**

- i) not increasing differential tuition fees for out-of-province students during the plan period; and

- ii) maintaining the independence of AU's decisions around tuition fee levels while being informed by related decisions at other Canadian universities.

**Objective 5: The University will develop planning and measurement systems for all University processes in order to improve transparency and effectiveness by:**

- i) moving to a three-year planning cycle for all departments, projects, and processes;
- ii) ensuring that annual budgets at AU are balanced, with all expenditures matched to revenue or funding sources; and
- iii) developing management and budgetary systems that encourage excellence in operations and innovative decision-making in operating units.

**Objective 6: The University will reduce operational risks by:**

- i) enhancing financial controls, reporting, and accountability measures;
- ii) implementing and regularly updating the Disaster Recovery Plan; and
- iii) defining and meeting appropriate security standards for systems, data, and physical facilities.

## **GOAL 2**

### **To expand the sources of University funding**

**Objective 1: The University will diversify its sources of funding by:**

- i) working with Alberta Infrastructure and Alberta Learning to develop a new technology-based infrastructure funding formula for virtual-education organizations;
- ii) developing a comprehensive fundraising program focused on alumni, foundations, the corporate sector, and other possible donors;
- iii) developing an entrepreneurial program of contracting to, and consulting with, third parties such as corporations and public organizations for targeted e-learning and distance education projects and programs;
- iv) developing a strong research arm that will attract project funding, benefiting the organization as a whole; and
- v) developing a fundraising strategy for specific programs and projects such as technology and e-learning systems development.

## **APPENDIX A: Measures and Targets**

## SUP Goals, Measures, and Operational Plan Links

Area/Goal	Plans	Measures	Targets 2002/03	Targets June 2006
<b>MEETING LEARNERS' NEEDS –A) Openness</b>				
<b>1: Provide increased access to courses and programs</b>	Education Plan	⇒ Growth in undergraduate course registrations	10% increase	46% increase
	Enrolment Management Plan	⇒ Growth in undergraduate program enrolments	7% increase	40% increase
	Student Services Plan	⇒ Increase in number of undergraduate degrees earned	10% increase	46% increase
		⇒ Growth in graduate registration	10% increase	46% increase
		⇒ Increase in graduate degrees earned	15% increase	50% increase
<b>2: Increase number and success of traditionally under-represented groups (women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and visible minorities)</b>	Education Plan	⇒ Growth in registrations by students in identified groups	Establish benchmarks for improvement	To Be Determined
	Enrolment Management Plan	⇒ Course completions by students in identified groups		TBD
	Student Services Plan	⇒ Enhance systems for tracking	Demographic Study	TBD
	Business Plan	⇒ Amount awarded for scholarships and bursaries	\$150,000	Match or exceed % of tuition rate increase
<b>3: Ensure residency requirements and Prior Learning Assessment recognition do not represent unjustifiable barriers to openness</b>	Education Review Plan	⇒ Currency of policy and procedures	Determine what barriers are justified	Policy review & renewal process

MEETING LEARNERS' NEEDS –B) Flexibility				
<b>1: At the undergraduate level, AU will continue to consider individualized distance education as its core operation</b>	Education Plan Student Services Plan	⇒ Registrations by each mode of delivery	90% individualized study	90% individualized study
<b>2: At the graduate level, where grouped study represents the primary mode of delivery, enable individualized study where feasible.</b>	Education Plan	⇒ Make graduate courses available for individualized study where feasible	Feasibility study from each program area filed	TBD
<b>3: Use appropriate e-learning pedagogy to increase flexibility for students engaging in learning and assessment activities</b>	Student Service Plan	⇒ Proportion of primary and secondary materials made available digitally ⇒ Number of pilot projects reviewed	Benchmarks established 3	TBD 10

MEETING LEARNERS' NEEDS –C) Quality Courses, Programs and Student Support Services

<b>1: The quality of courses, programs, and student support services will be improved</b>	Education Plan	⇒ Student Satisfaction with educational experience		All program areas to be one s.d. above AB average for all measures.
	Education Review Plan			
	Research Plan			
	Learning Outcome Plan	⇒ Number of courses completed with original contract deadline.	Benchmarks established	TBD
	Student Service Plan	⇒ Number of returning students	Benchmarks established	TBD
		⇒ Student Satisfaction with courses	Course evaluation data to be made available centrally	TBD
		⇒ Core course availability	No 'required for degree' courses closed for more than 3 months	No 'required for degree' courses closed for more than 1 month
		⇒ Course currency	Policy implemented	TBD
		⇒ Courses transferable to other institutions	Review filed	TBD
		⇒ Learning Outcomes Assessed	Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan and Process in place	Learning Outcomes defined for all programs
	⇒ Best Practices defined and demonstrated	Defined	TBD	
	⇒ Number of peer-reviewed publications on scholarship of teaching by AU staff	Benchmarks established	TBD	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Number of peer reviewed publications in other disciplines</li> <li>⇒ Peer review of curriculum via program reviews</li> <li>⇒ Use and effectiveness of readiness instruments and preparatory courses</li> </ul>	<p>Benchmarks established</p> <p>3</p> <p>Benchmarks established</p>	<p>TBD</p> <p>8</p> <p>TBD</p>
<b>2: Increase the number of graduate programs offered</b>	Education Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ New Masters Program Approved</li> <li>⇒ Doctoral Programs Approved</li> </ul>		<p>TBD</p> <p>1</p>
<b>3: Promote balanced curriculum among applied, professional, and liberal arts and sciences programs.</b>	Education Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Distribution of undergraduate course offerings</li> <li>⇒ Distribution of graduate programs</li> </ul>		<p>Applied and Professional will comprise 30% of undergraduate curriculum.</p> <p>Arts &amp; Sciences will comprise 25% of graduate programs</p>

ORGANIZATION AND PEOPLE				
<b>1: Implement “the networked environment”</b>	Staff recruitment and retention plan	⇒ Best Practices defined and demonstrated	Networked environment defined	TBD
	Facilities Plan Systems Development Plan	⇒ Percentage of competitions in which first offer is accepted	Benchmark established	TBD
<b>2: Promote a productive workplace environment</b>	Education Plan	⇒ Proportion of service standards met (or exceeded) by each department	95% standards met	100% standards met
	Student Services Plan	⇒ Staff climate survey result	Benchmark established	TBD
	Staff recruitment and retention plan	⇒ Years of service lost due to permanent staff resignations	Benchmark established	TBD
<b>3: Ensure that the structures of academic decision making and internal administration are representative</b>	Education Review Plan	⇒ Review existing structures of academic decision making and internal administration	Strike a committee and establish mandate	TBD
	Strategic Development Plan			

Area/Goal	Plans	Measures	Targets 2002/03	Targets June 2006
<b>PROVINCIAL, NATIONAL, AND INTERNATIONAL POSITIONING</b>				
<b>1: Improve AU's accomplishments, visibility, and recognition as a key provider of education in Alberta</b>	Education Plan Research Plan Student Services Plan Marketing Action Plan Strategic Development Plan	⇒ Number of Alberta student course registrations  ⇒ Number of Alberta graduates  ⇒ Number of graduates from other institutions with AU credits  ⇒ Number of Media citations  ⇒ Per faculty publications, contracts, grants, and awards  ⇒ Awards from provincial agencies	Increase by 7%  Increase by 10%  Baseline study  Baseline study  Benchmark established  Benchmark established	Increase by 31%  Increase by 46%  TBD  TBD  TBD  TBD
<b>2: Enhance AU's reputation as Canada's Open University</b>	Education Plan Research Plan	⇒ Number of citations  ⇒ <i>IRRODL</i> circulation  ⇒ Value of grants and awards received  ⇒ Gross revenue from contracts from federal agencies  ⇒ Number of externally funded activities that reflect on AU's national reputation (presentations, seminars, consultations, reviews, etc.)  ⇒ Elected/appointed institutional representation on related national professional bodies	Benchmark established  Increase by 50%  Benchmarks established  Benchmarks established  Benchmarks established  Benchmarks established	TBD  TBD  TBD  TBD  TBD  TBD

<b>3: Become recognized as the premier open and distance learning university in North America</b>	Education Plan Enrolment Management Plan Strategic Development Plan Student Services Plan	⇒ US Accreditation ⇒ Number of US registrations ⇒ Number of externally funded activities that reflect on AU's North American reputation (presentations/ seminars/ consultations/ reviews etc.) ⇒ Elected/appointed institutional representation on related North American professional bodies	Candidacy Status Increase by 10% Benchmarks established Benchmarks established	Accredited Increase by 46% TBD TBD
<b>Goal 4: Further AU's international reputation as a leading, open, and distance university</b>	Education Plan Marketing Action Plan Strategic International Plan Student Services Plan	⇒ Registrations associated with international partnerships ⇒ Number of strategic partnerships ⇒ Number of externally funded activities that reflect on AU's international reputation (presentations/ seminars/ consultations/ reviews etc.) ⇒ Elected/appointed institutional representation on related international bodies	Establish benchmarks Establish benchmarks Establish benchmarks Establish benchmarks	TBD TBD TBD TBD

FISCAL HEALTH				
<b>Goal 1: Manage growth so that it strengthens the University's financial position</b>	Business Plan/ Fiscal Plan Education Plan System Development Plan	⇒ Total reserves generated by annual operating budget.	To be determined	University reserves represent 15% of 2005-06 annual operating budgeted revenue
<b>Goal 2: Expand the sources of University funding</b>	Business Plan/ Fiscal Plan/ Budget Research Plan Systems Development Plan	⇒ Amount of endowment fund ⇒ Net amount contributed by targeted fundraising ⇒ Proportion of provincial infrastructure grant money to post-secondary institutions awarded to AU	To be determined  Agreement from provincial government	Additional \$350,000 TBD 5% of funds to four Alberta Universities

## **APPENDIX B: Mandate**

## **Mandate**

Athabasca University is a board-governed open university committed, through distance education, to increasing accessibility in Alberta, throughout Canada, and internationally to university-level study, and to meeting the educational needs of the workplace.

At the undergraduate level, the university is mandated to offer degree programs and university transfer courses in the natural and pure sciences, humanities, social sciences, interdisciplinary studies, administrative studies, commerce, nursing and allied professional fields. Credit-based university certificates are offered within the structure of the university's undergraduate degree programs.

As a partner in Campus Alberta, Athabasca University offers its courses and educational services to students registered in Alberta post-secondary institutions. Working with these and out-of-province institutions, Athabasca University also provides degree completion opportunities for university transfer students and diploma graduates.

Non-credit continuing education courses are also offered.

At the graduate level, the University offers degree programs in distance education, health studies, and business administration. Credit-based university graduate diploma programs are offered within the structure of the University's graduate degree programs.

To the benefit of students, Athabasca University is committed to excellence in individualized distance education, coordination of credit and credit transfer, assessment of prior learning and associated forms of learning accreditation.

Dedicated to research and scholarship in various disciplines, with a particular focus on distance education and associated learning technologies, Athabasca University provides international leadership in individualized distance education methods and technologies.

*The above revised statement was approved by the Alberta Ministry of Advanced Education and Career Development in April 1999.*

**APPENDIX C: Letter of Understanding**

# Letter of Understanding

## 1. Primary Emphasis on Distance Education

In fulfilling its mandate, Athabasca University emphasizes the application of distance education methodologies and technologies for all its programs. While classroom instruction is not excluded, it is used as a delivery mode for the purpose of enhancing the delivery of its distance courses and programs and for compensating, where desirable and feasible, for intrinsic disadvantages of distance delivery.

## 2. Leadership in Distance Education

Given its emphasis on individualized distance education, Athabasca University provides leadership to Alberta institutions on applications and research in individualized distance education methodology and technology. This it does by:

- ensuring that all its courses and programs are available through individualized distance education
- offering a Master of Distance Education degree
- dedicating resources to its Department of Educational Technology
- ensuring that the University library maintains the optimal distance education collection
- emphasizing research in distance education pedagogy, methodology and technology
- facilitating the distance delivery of programs of other Alberta institutions particularly universities.

## 3. College Collaboration

Athabasca University plays the key provincial role in enabling college/technical graduates to complete a university education without having to enroll at a residential university. This it does in several ways by:

- developing baccalaureate programs to meet the needs of these college/technical graduates
- maximizing transfer credit arrangements
- minimizing residency requirements
- enabling working college/institute graduates to complete a university degree through individualized distance education
- offering group or individualized distance education courses on campus
- offering, where local conditions warrant, group instruction on campus.

## 4. Client Groups

Athabasca University is distinctive from other universities in that its predominantly part-time students register at the institution for one or more reasons:

- to undertake a University certificate or degree program
- to determine, by registering in one course, whether distance education and/or university education is a feasible personal goal
- to transfer a course or courses to other post-secondary institutions in which they are enrolled
- to complete one or more courses for professional/personal reasons.

## 5. Open University

As an open institution, Athabasca University is learner-driven in the determination of its academic regulations and curriculum articulation. This it does by:

- not requiring formal academic qualifications for admission as a student
- minimal course prerequisite restrictions
- maximum course selection flexibility within programs
- minimal residency (courses taken from Athabasca University) requirements
- generous provisions for transferring credits earned elsewhere
- credit co-ordination options
- course challenge-for-credit options
- year-round enrollment
- liberal course completion and extension deadlines
- policies and procedures that facilitate part-time enrollments
- delivery models which emphasize individually-paced distance learning

## 6. Program Approval

The Department of Advanced Education and Career Development has proposed to streamline program approval through the development of institutional accountability around performance indicators. Until this new system is in effect, Athabasca University will require Advanced Education and Career Development's approval when:

- a new program or credential is developed (including University Certificates or University Diplomas)
- there are significant changes to existing programs. Significant changes occur when programs are reduced, suspended, terminated, expanded, or extended. Significant changes also occur when a new major or its equivalent is developed within a degree program or a new stream is developed within the structure of the framework degrees (B.P.A., B.G.S., and B.Sc.P.D.).
- the university determines the need for allied professional programs that build on the expertise of existing University offerings.

The implications of this approach are that Athabasca University:

- may within the context of degree completion, reorganize and restructure its existing degree programs to improve the effectiveness of their delivery and to
- enhance their accessibility and their cost-effectiveness
- may develop courses within programs as they deem necessary
- may reactivate a suspended or terminated program.

The Department would require written notification of these instances.

*The above letter of understanding was agreed upon in November 1995. Its purpose is to clarify the mandate and role of Athabasca University in the post-secondary sector.*