



EXECUTIVE BRIEF

POSITION

DIRECTOR, TOTAL REWARDS

ORGANIZATION

ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

LOCATION

ALBERTA, ATHABASCA
PREFERRED



POSITION

Director, Total Rewards

STATUS

Full-Time

REPORTING RELATIONSHIP

Chief Human Resources Officer

LOCATION

Alberta, Athabasca Preferred

ABOUT ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

As Canada's leading open university, Athabasca University's (AU) approach to accessible yet transformative education and research is truly distinctive. Its academic mission is to remove barriers to post-secondary education for learners, regardless of their age, location, career, or educational background.

Based in the beautiful region of Athabasca, AU is one of four Comprehensive Academic and Research Universities (CARUs) in the province. AU is a public, board-governed, open, and online university serving more than 35,000 students across Alberta, Canada, and around the world. With faculties spanning health, science, humanities, and business - AU provides more than 70 undergraduate and graduate programs in ways that are uniquely accessible and responsive to today's demands of life and work.

AU seeks to be an agile and inclusive workplace in which all team members can grow, make their highest contribution, and each make a difference to our academic vision and mission.

Led by President Dr. Alex Clark, AU is embarking on its exciting next chapter with the launch of its new strategic plan. Drawing from five decades of growth in distance and online education, we aim to reinforce our position as Canada's foremost innovator in open and accessible learning. With the recent formation of an inclusive Senior Leadership Team dedicated to empowering every team member to contribute and thrive, AU stands poised for an exciting and ambitious next stage of development.

Almost 70% of undergraduate program students are the first in their families to get a degree.

AU's Strategic Plan - Like No Other

POSITION OVERVIEW

Reporting to the Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO), this leadership position is responsible for the creation and evaluation of the strategy, design, and delivery of the total rewards programs at Athabasca University (AU). This role ensures that all compensation, benefits, retirement, and related programs are competitive, equitable, and aligned with AU's Strategic Plan. The Director drives AU's compensation philosophy, manages total rewards, and aligns with AU institutional priorities, reinforcing employee engagement, and strengthening the organization's value proposition as an employer of choice.

Working closely with the CHRO, the Director, Total Rewards supports the efforts of the HR leadership team and its priorities, while advancing the goals of the University in achieving academic excellence.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

Compensation & Classification

- Lead the design and implementation of AU's compensation and classification systems for all employee groups. Maintain and enhance AU's job architecture. Accountable for the annual compensation processes, including collaborating with Financial Planning to optimize budgeting processes, and increases and executive compensation programs.
- Lead communications to enhance understanding and transparency of AU's total compensation programs.
- Strengthen leadership capability through awareness, education, resources and tools, on compensation principles and best practices.
- Regularly select and interpret relevant market data to ensure competitiveness and internal equity.

Benefits and Payroll

- Review, define and implement integrated benefits that supports employee engagement, well-being and recruitment and retention strategies.
- Oversee plan design, renewal, and governance related to employee health and wellness programs.
- Oversee payroll operations, ensuring accurate, compliant, and timely processing.
- Ensure compliance with federal and provincial legislation, collective agreements and labor regulations.
- Partner with HR and Finance teams to ensure accurate reporting, reconciliations, budgeting, and integration of payroll data with HR and Finance data sources.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES CONTINUED

Projects and Initiatives

- Develop and deliver policies, frameworks, and processes to enable equitable, effective and consistent compensation and classification practices across the organization.
- Develop and implement quality improvement and leading practice initiatives that deliver enhanced value to stakeholders.
- As directed by the CHRO, lead compensation, benefits, audits, and related projects and/or initiatives.
- Lead the design and development of education strategies and training, continuous quality improvement measures, including leading practice initiatives, to further develop the knowledge and skills of the University leadership team, the HR team, supervisors, and managers.

OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES

- Oversee the reporting and analytic activities, including internal and external reporting, survey completion, and auditing.
- Ensure Human Resources Systems are updated after appropriate testing has been completed.
- Oversee any implementation of new, and maintenance of the existing HRIS system to ensure efficiencies that support process improvement and alignment with legislation and collective agreement requirements.
- Oversee position control maintenance and fiscal year end processes.
- Provide leadership, coaching and direction to the professionals within the Payroll and Benefits and Compensation and Classification teams.
- Function as a strategic partner and subject matter expert for leaders within human resources and across the university while promoting an integrative work culture.
- Collaborate with key internal and external partners, review institutional Risk Management as relating to compensation practices, and proactively identify enhancements across employment policies and frameworks to mitigate risk and recommend efficiencies.
- Promote client relationship management to develop credibility and influence decisions and foster a positive culture with all relevant academic and unions partners.
- Manage the design of the total rewards organizational structures and resources to ensure that priorities and standards are reflected in the services delivered in alignment with HR's service delivery model and mandate.
- Establish role as a strategic partner providing expert advice and consultation to all faculties and business units.

OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES CONTINUED

- Ensure confidential information is properly protected and not disclosed to third parties, unless permitted or required under relevant law or regulation.
- Compliance with all statutory and internal disclosure requirements on a timely basis and ensures to the best of their ability, the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the information.
- Participate in preparing materials and recommendations for the Human Resources Compensation Committee (HRCC) of the Board of Directors.

QUALIFICATIONS

- Four-year undergraduate degree in human resources or business required. In addition, a related designation/qualification/certification such as Certified Compensation Professional (CCP), preferred. Master's degree in human resources and/or business preferred.
- 7 to 10 years progressive HR experiences within a complex unionized setting, preferably with at least five years' experience in a compensation and classification role leading the development and implementation of total rewards programs.
- 4+ years of people and strategic leadership experience, with a proven track record of leading, motivating and developing high-performing teams.
- Designation as a Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP) is required.
- Expert knowledge of compensation and benefits best practices, trends, and regulations.
- Strong leadership, communication, and negotiation skills with demonstrated written, verbal, facilitation, and presentation skills are essential.
- Strong systems and process leadership orientation, with a change agent mindset who can adapt with agility and lead others through transformation.
- Have excellent problem-solving, analytical skills, and strong business acumen.
- Highly client-centric mindset with a strong sense of urgency.
- Adapt with agility to a rapidly growing and evolving environment and effectively lead others through change and transformation.

PENDER & HOWE

Athabasca University has retained Pender & Howe to lead the recruitment initiative for their Director, Total Rewards position.

Pender & Howe is a North American talent advisory firm specializing in leadership recruitment and consulting. We partner with organizations to build high-performing leadership teams, optimize board effectiveness, and support executive career transitions.

Our team of accomplished consultants brings deep industry expertise and a global perspective, delivering tailored, retained search and advisory services that help organizations attract, assess, and retain top-tier talent. We work closely with human capital leaders, governing boards, and executives, offering a consultative approach that aligns leadership with strategic business goals.

With a presence in key North American cities – including Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Edmonton, Boston, and New York – we offer both local expertise and global reach. As a proud member of Kestria, the world's largest executive search alliance, we extend our impact across 40+ countries and 90+ cities, enabling seamless talent solutions for international organizations.

Pender & Howe is driven by the belief that diversity fuels innovation. We champion inclusive leadership and strategic growth, helping organizations navigate the evolving landscape of executive talent. Whether partnering with venture-backed innovators, private equity firms, or multinational enterprises, we are committed to shaping the future of leadership.

For more information, visit penderhowe.com

For consideration, please email a copy of your CV in confidence to:



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