

Athabasca University
Report for PCCAT
June 17, 2008

Athabasca University (AU) is an accredited Public Post-Secondary institution that operates under the regulations of the Alberta Post-secondary Act of Alberta. AU receives its accreditation status and its mandate from the Government of Alberta and is one of four accredited universities in Alberta. AU's mandate is to offer degree programs and university transfer courses in a variety of disciplines and professional fields. AU has an open admissions policy, specializes in distance education and serves a student population of approximately 37,000 per year.

AU operates within a bicameral governance system. Governing Council members are appointed by the Government of Alberta. The president of the University is an ex officio member of the Council. Governing Council membership consists of the following: one Chairperson, up to ten public members, two academic staff, two students, one tutor, one non-academic staff member, one graduate student, and one alumnus.

AU continues to support the post-secondary community through the offering of transfer credit opportunities for post-secondary students throughout Canada. We appreciate the support that Canada's post-secondary community provides in allowing their students to take Athabasca University courses for transfer on a Letter of Permission. Athabasca University had approximately 8900 visiting students in our 2007/08 fiscal year which resulted in approximately 11,600 course registrations.

We recognize the valuable contributions of our University and College partners in the post-secondary community with block transfer arrangements that allow for degree completion opportunities to students who might not otherwise be in a position to complete a degree. Distance Education has become a viable degree completion route for many individuals as a result of these formalized agreements. Athabasca University currently has 4,472 program articulation agreements with colleges and universities across Canada, a number that continues to grow by approximately 100 per year. Our transfer credit data base houses over 18,000 individual course transfer decisions and AU currently has 176 new requests for program articulation at various stages in the review process.

Our partnership with the Canadian Virtual University (CVU) is one that has much value. It has allowed us to forge relationships with and has fostered a community of collaboration between CVU partner institutions. This past April, the Royal Military College (RMC) and the Canadian Defence Academy (CDA) hosted a Transfer Credit Symposium for the CVU partners where we discussed the concept of a National Transfer Credit Database. The RMC and CDA have graciously offered to develop the database that is currently in the planning stages. It is hoped that this database will serve as a prototype that can be made available on a nation wide basis.

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As a result of an increased number of requests for formalized articulation agreements from the non-collegiate post-secondary community, Athabasca University is currently in the process reviewing our Non-Collegiate Organizational Review Policy. We have always applied rigid standards in this process to ensure that our non-collegiate partners apply the same rigorous academic standards as our accredited partners in the delivery and assessment of their academic content. The review has proven to be a valuable exercise in ensuring that those standards are upheld.

Athabasca University evolves and so to do our systems that support Admissions and Transfer processes. We are currently in the process of selecting a vendor which will move us into the world of Optical Character Recognition, Document Imaging and Workflow. We are looking forward to the internal efficiencies and improved student services these systems will provide to our admissions and document evaluation processes.

PLAR activity is in full swing at AU. Our Centre for Learning Accreditation is currently implementing new policy and process initiatives, has recruited and trained 100+ assessors, is in the process of developing a readiness as well as an exit instrument and is collecting and compiling a database of undergraduate learning outcomes. The Director has several publications in books and in journals

The Alberta Post Secondary Application System (APAS) is scheduled for full implementation in March and Athabasca University is looking forward to the benefits of the system. The largest value this will have in our admissions and transfer processes is that it will enable the sending and receiving of transcripts between Alberta's 21 public post-secondary institutions in an electronic format. This will be of great benefit to those institutions, like Athabasca University, who will be developing processes for this data to dump directly into their Student Information Systems.