

## President's Message

By Ken Heather

Occasionally instructors ask me, "What do we get from our affiliation with the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT)? Why should we pay dues to a federal organization like CAUT?"

ACIFA members receive many direct benefits from CAUT, such as support for our members to get fair collective agreements in place. In November of last year at the CAUT council meeting, a motion was accepted in which CAUT publicly stated their support and solidarity with ACIFA members in our efforts to negotiate fair deals and also in the event of a strike or lockout (see page 2).

Our affiliation with CAUT gives us the big picture perspective. As instructors, we (rightfully) focus on our teaching and our students. We can, at times, lose sight of the big picture. We do not know what other academics are dealing with. Through our membership with CAUT, we are part of both a national and international movement of academic workers who face similar challenges as we do in Alberta, such as provincial governments issuing mandate letters and interfering with collective bargaining. Here is an example of what I mean. In her opening remarks at the 87<sup>th</sup> CAUT council meeting in November 2019, the President of CAUT, Brenda Austin Smith, shared how many universities and colleges across the country find themselves bargaining with "their provincial governments instead of their employers". Provincial governments issue mandate letters that restrict what management may and may not offer during collective bargaining sessions. It turns out this is not exclusive to Alberta. Instead of trusting the collective bargaining process to reach an agreement that best serves the needs of that particular school, provincial governments interfere. They issue mandate letters, which too often are not shared with faculty associations. That makes the collective bargaining process a farce.

At that same CAUT council meeting, there were two international speakers: Dr. Janne Gleerup from Denmark, and Lai Suat Yan, Deputy Chairperson of the Malaysian Academic Movement. It was astounding to learn that academic freedom is under pressure in both Denmark and Malaysia and that precarious working conditions are a growing issue among academic workers in both those countries.

In addition to the big picture perspective and being part of an international community of academic workers, we learn a great deal from CAUT members. For instance, a panel discussion at a recent CAUT meeting gave invaluable advice on the most effective ways to lobby a government. The panel members consisting of Karl Belanger, Rachel Curran and Greg MacEachern were tasked to discuss "what the new federal government means for post-secondary education" – a fascinating analysis in and of itself.



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## Meeting with ASEC



On October 29, 2020, I had an opportunity to meet with the Alberta Students Executive Council. This is a registered non-profit membership representation organization. ASEC represents over 110,000 students from 17 universities, polytechnics, and colleges in Alberta. The major pillars of ASEC are advocacy, professional development, and networking. The members of the Council I met with were, Jonathan Bilodeau (Executive Director), Emmanuel Barker (Director Public Relations), Jonas Bystrom (VP External & Board Member), Brittany Lausen (Board Member), Michael Frankiw (Board Member) and Ryan Morstad (Board Member).

We engaged in open and meaningful conversation, regarding the Alberta Colleges Economic Recovery Task Force document.

This document was created by a number of College Presidents, Business leaders and Government representatives.

Some of the topics we discussed were,  
Work-integrated learning (WIL) model of delivery.  
Micro Credentialing.  
Volunteer work recognized as part of education.  
Online learning materials (textbooks) and copyright laws.

ASEC believe that faculty are an integral, part to provide the best educational experience possible for students in the province of Alberta.

ASEC wants to continue to collaborate with ACIFA to raise concerns, regarding students learning needs and to bring forward solutions and ideas that would help these needs.

I look forward to continuing to work with Alberta Students Executive Council.

Ken Heather  
ACIFA Pres.

Learn more about their Advocacy Priorities for 2019/2020 by clicking [here](#).



Dr. Anna Beukes  
President, Alberta Colleges and Institutes Faculties Association  
317, 11010 - 142 Street NW  
Edmonton AB  
Canada T5N 2R1

Dec 9, 2019

Re: Thank You

Dear Dr. Beukes,

On behalf of the Alberta Students' Executive Council, I would like to offer my sincere thanks for taking the time to meet with Alberta's college, trade, university, and polytechnic post-secondary student leaders.

We are extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to learn about your organization's agenda and the actions you are taking. We are pleased with the robust conversation we had regarding the challenges post-secondary students face and our policy priorities including open educational resources, transfer credits, on-campus mental health, and transparent institutional funding.

Thank you for taking time to show the students some the projects and priorities of your member organizations- our student leaders strongly believe that there is room to work together in our advocacy efforts moving forward.

We are looking forward to continuing to work with you in our mission to improve Alberta's post-secondary education system.

Thank you again,

Emmanuel Barker  
Director of Government Relations and Advocacy  
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## Notes From The Meetings With The Minister Of Advanced Education



On **November 26, 2019**, at 10:45 am, fifteen ACIFA delegates (Presidents and Executive members) had their second meeting with the Minister of Advanced Education, the Hon. Demetrios Nicolaides.

ACIFA delegates: Anna Beukes, President ACIFA; Ken Heather, VP External ACIFA as well as FA President Red Deer College; Leslie Sayer, VP Executive ACIFA; Cheryl Meheden, VP Finance and Records ACIFA; Blair Howes, FA President SAIT; Garry Wilson, FA President NAIT; Kevin Wiber, FA President Lethbridge College; Alexandru Caldararu, FA President NorQuest College; Rick Robinson, FA President Medicine Hat College; Keith Smyth, VP Professional Affairs Committee ACIFA as well as FA President Olds College; Vanessa Sheane, FA President Grande Prairie Regional College; Al Brown, LRO SAFA; Neil Napora, FA President Lakeland College; Brian McCulloch, LRO ACIFA; and Victoria Kirchner, Executive Assistant ACIFA.



What follows are the notes from that meeting. On the agenda were the following topics for discussion:

1. Apprenticeship training concerns
2. Performance based funding
3. Consultation
4. Budget cuts being directed to address administrative densification

## **Apprenticeship Training Concerns**

Questions/concerns posed by ACIFA Delegates and Minister Nicolaides' responses:

1. The government's business plan refers to an expanded strength of apprenticeship opportunities, and funding has been provided for attracting people to the trades. Why, then, is the government taking money out of the institutions because when institutions get people into the trades programs, they don't have any place to train them? (Wiber)

Response:

With respect to budget 2019, the government is looking at a series of reductions to post-secondary education over the next four years, and they have had to make those difficult decisions because they are in a very challenging and difficult fiscal situation, and a very challenging and difficult economic time. They have to get their spending in the province under control. They want to see a situation in which there is economic prosperity that provides government the tools to continue to invest in post-secondary education. Minister Nicolaides thinks that balance can be achieved in a more diligent way, by being more thoughtful in how they fund the post-secondary institutions, and that can address some of those challenges. The intent is to be much more deliberate about where government tax dollars are going and to make sure each institution has the maximum possible funding to account for its priorities. He acknowledged this is a challenge and will continue to be a challenge, but he believes the new funding model will help to address some of these issues and ensure that funds are being directed to the areas that are most important for each institution.

2. In the fact we are going to bolster and help apprenticeship training, if there is no work for the trades people when they go through the programs, are we not just training people to send to other provinces because we cannot keep them employed? (Howes)

Response:

Government's number one priority is getting people back to work, and firing up the economy to create more job opportunities congruently. In respect to apprenticeship and trades employment, Alberta has a shortage of 3,000 skilled workers per year, with an estimated shortage of 50,000 by 2026. A lot of the initial investment that they have provided to the different apprenticeship opportunities will help to address the immediate shortage, and ensure that we are set up for success to meet the labour market needs when the economy starts to improve.

3. Institutional budgets were prepared based on the number of seats allocated in the various trades programs. To now have money clawed back, this will impact the classroom in terms of number of seats available and instructors in classrooms because now the institutions need to recover the money that has already been spent. Part of the problem in the past, and one that continues, is that although the institutions are awarded funding based on the number of seats available, the money is not necessarily allocated by the institutions to those specific trades. The institutions use that money across the institution, so there is an ongoing problem of the government awarding money to be spent on a specific area, but no accountability to ensure the institution is spending it where it should be. (Heather)



## Response:

There is a problem. This is the bigger problem as well as the current funding mechanism: there is very limited accountability. If funding dollars are being allocated to specific seats but not going where they should, this reinforces the importance for us to have a new funding mechanism with a new formula, in which government can be very clear about directing funding to particular initiatives and programs, and more importantly having accountability: having metrics and targets, and strengthened accountability and transparency about where dollars are actually going.

Minister Nicolaides acknowledged this trend is a concern that has been shared with him by both ACIFA and students, and noted this trend is one of the underlying assumptions he has been working with while developing the new funding model. He invited input on how to ensure money is not being redirected to areas where it was not intended.

## Performance-Based Funding

Questions/concerns posed by ACIFA Delegates and Minister Nicolaides' responses:

1. Can you please share some of the insights on the new funding model. (Meheden)

### Response:

It would be a non-competitive, performance-based system. A portion of funding would be guaranteed for operational purposes (perhaps 60%). This would be predictable and stable for operational needs. This would provide a lot more clarity in regards to expected funding rather than having to wait year over year. Another portion (30-40%) would be performance based. It would be tied to the institution's ability to reach or achieve certain outcomes. Those outcomes/metrics would have to be constructed very diligently. Those metrics would be finalized in consultation with colleges/universities and with ACIFA's feedback. Some of these metrics include research activity for quality of teaching and instruction. Instead of looking at metrics like enrollment targets that cause an institution simply to increase enrolment, there needs to be some way to tie the metric to quality of teaching/instruction. Some of the funding may be tied to meeting clear enrolment targets such as the number of domestic students, international students, and underrepresented learners. Other metrics would include completion and graduation rates, potentially graduate earnings, and employment in the field or a related field. As a non-competitive system, the institutions are not competing against each other; instead, government would sit down with each individual institution and work with their current baseline, and negotiate realistic targets that could be achieved at the end of two or three years. There would be a long window (2-3 years) to complete those. All of that would be housed under what he is tentatively calling an investment management agreement: "will provide "X" amount of funding over three years, and in order to receive full funding, we'd like to see the number of domestic learners go from here to here, the amount of research funding go from here to here...etc." The targets would be developed in consultation with the institutions as to where they should be. This should provide a lot of long-term clarity for the institutions to be able to plan and manage things in a longer-term fashion and provide more clarity on a multi-year basis as to what is guaranteed funding and what is contingent on meeting targets.

This sounds very good; we hope that the ratio of faculty to administrators and the cost of administration is one of the metrics. (Meheden)

Minister Nicolaides said he thinks they could integrate that as a metric of some kind.





2. There is a concern that the metrics in the business plan are significantly removed by time from the events that are happening now. How do you hope to get to the point where your long-term planning can overcome that? (Wiber)

Response:

It will be a challenging situation for government to address, but they do need to think of it in a longer-term fashion. A lot of the metrics that were in the business plan might be quite different than the metrics that will be used in the funding model. The metrics in the business plan are still important, as they are standard ones the ministry has evaluated and should continue to be mindful of, especially student satisfaction and employability. A new funding model with an element of metrics can help reinforce clear plans to improve on those targets. All of this needs to feed into a higher level of strategic direction for the post-secondary system, a new “master plan” for post-secondary through 2030. Questions and concerns need to be articulated within clear parameters in a master plan; then, the articulation agreements and funding formula can be used.

## Consultation

Questions/concerns posed by ACIFA Delegates and Minister Nicolaides’ responses:

1. We appreciate your comments on consultation, and hope that ACIFA and other groups like it will be included in the process of developing metrics within the funding model. (Wiber)

Response:

Minister Nicolaides replied, “Absolutely,” and added that he is very open and curious to the idea of admin to faculty as a potential ratio, and as something that could be integrated into a new funding mechanism. He extended an open door and open invitation. If there are specific metrics or things that we believe would be critical to have in a new funding formula, we should not hesitate in sharing them with him. There will be a more formal discussion document that will be sent around for consultation, but we don’t have to wait for that if we have ideas that would be beneficial. He would be happy to receive and discuss them.

2. We understand that the province is broke, but we have a hard time with the government meddling in the collegial collective bargaining process. We don’t like to hear that the government is going to hide behind mandates and bills and not share them with us. We would expect that because we are the stakeholders that government would share that information with us, not hide behind it. Administration was given information, but we were not, and administration would not share the information because they were told by government they could not. Government needs to be open with all stakeholders. The consultation process was not good over Bill 9; a 10-minute phone call was not consultation. (Howes)

Response:

Minister Nicolaides said he understands and that it is important for him moving forward with things such as a new funding formula or the other pieces that they do it in a consultative way. That’s why he has extended that invitation just now to help inform what some of those metrics would look like. A lot of what he is saying is very tentative and has not yet been endorsed by cabinet, but that is the preliminary thinking at this point. His intent is to be consultative.

The collective bargaining process is a rather collaborative process within the institution and for the most part a lot of them have really good relationships that would really be spoiled on both sides if the government is now going to interfere. (Howes)



One of the gifts Alberta post-secondaries have is that we value a good relationship between our faculty and our administrators, and this should be considered. (Smyth)

When government looks at that dynamic in the post-secondary world, it is quite unique, and there is always a desire to maintain that as a collegial environment. He understands that it is important, and it is in his mind moving forward.

3. We are feeling very blindsided about changes to public pensions and are disappointed that we had no hint that any of these changes were coming. It was not in the spirit of collaboration, and there needs to be an open door policy. A heads up that something this monumental is being discussed would go a long way to show that we are seen as valued partners. It has a lot of members scared/worried. It has not been very well communicated, explained, or justified. (Caldararu)

Response:

The justification is that government is trying to find efficiencies as much as possible. It's very challenging as they have to get to a balanced budget in 4 years. Minister Nicolaides recognizes these concerns, and he is trying to be more open with performance-based funding and changes to post-secondary. He said we can give him a call and ask questions at any time. His intent is to be open and forthright about changes coming forward.

Can we expect moving forward that if there are changes to things like pensions or bargaining, that we can expect to hear it from you first, or will it have to be through the media again? (Caldararu)

A lot of it comes through the Treasury Board and Finance, so he can not commit them to doing something without consulting with them first, but he will take this to them.

## **Administrative Bloat**

Questions/concerns posed by ACIFA Delegates and Minister Nicolaides' responses:

1. In addition to concerns over allocation of funding to alternate programs, there are concerns about administrative decisions about cutting programs or diverting money to administrative expenses. The government should exercise caution in regards to looking at allocation of funding over administrative bloat. (Caldararu)

Response:

More consultation needs to happen, but the preference would be to have some very clear targets, metrics, and goals around administrative spending and overheads. It is the intent to address that through the new funding mechanism and to also look at national comparatives of spending to determine goals for institutions; having this embedded as a goal would be a pre-condition to receiving a portion of the government funding. It is an important consideration for government to address this. It is the intent through the new funding mechanism to curb administrative growth and ensure those dollars are being redirected to programs and faculty supports and all of the things that are critical to delivering high-quality education.

2. There are some common problems in regards to administrative densification. Nobody knows who these people are, or what they are doing. This is further confused by administrative job titles that are not clear, whereas faculty positions are very clear. We know the UCP Government is very aware of the disproportionate number of administrative staff, both in comparison to other provinces and as a ratio to teaching faculty. (Meheden)



Response:

This is something that could be integrated in the metrics: what is the ratio of administrative staff to faculty, and is there an acceptable or comparable ratio that we could use, and work with the institutions to say, “We would like you to get closer to *this* ratio or *this* level.” Each institution is different, so there can’t be a metric from one source and have it apply to all. This is something that could be implemented, though, to identify what is the current ratio and what is the acceptable or desirable ratio.

Determining who/what is being counted as academic staff must be very clear. The core function of an institution is to be teaching. (Meheden)

Minister Nicolaides said he would argue it would have to be independently verifiable. It can’t just be a metric that the institution or government is reporting. It has to be something that both parties must be able to validate and agree upon. Government needs to be vigilant, particularly when there are more limited tax dollars, and be very thoughtful on where the dollars are going and how they are being used to ensure they are being used on serving the central purpose of higher learning.

Institutions have argued, and it is confirmed through other research as well, that the reason for this explosion of staff is to deal with increasing regulations and reporting requirements that the government has. When government is doing its comparison of *part-time this* and *part-time that* and basing it off full-time equivalencies, it could give a pure sense of information. This information could be further drilled down to how many of these positions are full-time faculty or full-time teaching positions versus part-time positions because a lot of the administrative cost in attracting, training, and developing these staff is amplified when there is a revolving door of part-time people. As a final suggestion towards efficiency, it’s very important that government identify the non-instructional functions that it expects institutions to provide. Over the past decade, there has been shifting of responsibilities and an expectation that institutions do more in regard to student career assistance, readily available health services, mental health support, providing learning accommodations, etc. Entire departments have exploded with staff in order to provide all of these services. The government needs to provide clearer guidelines or direction as to what institutions are expected to provide. (Meheden)

Minister Nicolaides agreed and said that it needs to be ensured that dollars are being used in the most effective way: supporting the main purpose of an institution, supporting teaching and research and academic inquiry and other academic pursuits, and providing more clarity about the expectations regarding non-instructional services. The new funding formula will help drive some of the behavioural change that needs to be seen in many of the post-secondary institutions.

## Final Concern

The government is planning to make changes to the association’s right to sole bargaining status. ACIFA has prepared a document outlining the background to our rights as sole bargaining agents and government’s proposed changes to this. Within the document are the changes that are required to the labour code to meet ACIFA’s request to retain sole bargaining status for faculty associations and six arguments as to why continuing our sole status will be in the best interest of our students, our members, and our schools. There is unanimous support around this table for this, and when we received the consultation request on the labour code, we felt this was the perfect opportunity to put this request on the table. Our request is as simple as removing the reference to the 2022 deadline regarding exclusive bargaining rights of faculty associations so that we can continue to operate the way we always have. That means the Board of Governors continues to have the right to designate who is faculty; we are happy to live with this though we would like more consultation with them





before they designate. However, we believe if you engage our employers in this conversation, they will agree the current method of negotiating is preferable. (Beukes)

Response:

If this change was to happen, would it cause constitutional problems in the sense of having a constitutional challenge?

No, as other groups in the province have sole bargaining status (the police and K-12 teachers). A constitutional challenge might only come if the government removes the right to strike. (Beukes)

Minister Nicolaides said his understanding was that no group was permitted to have a sole bargaining authority and that greater flexibility had to be available for representation by other groups and thus why the legislation was changed. He acknowledged labour law is not his forte and that he would have to do more research, but on the surface he is supportive.

### Close of Meeting

Minister Nicolaides agreed to another meeting in the new year. He said the new funding model will be coming out in the spring, and he would like it implemented for the following academic year. Not all of the new metrics will be in place; they will be phased in slowly to ensure they are reliable.



(The picture above was taken at a previous face-to-face meeting with the minister. The meeting we are reporting on below was a virtual meeting, but we include this picture because it was a virtual table that we met at.)

On **April 30, 2020**, at 9:00 am, eighteen ACIFA delegates had a WebEx meeting with the Minister of Advanced Education, the Hon. Demetrios Nicolaides. In virtual attendance were the following people:

Minister Nicolaides  
Jesse Robertson  
Colleen Marouelli  
Thanasi Pananos  
Laurie Chandler  
Elizabeth Day  
David Williams  
Anna Beukes  
Kevin Wiber

Ken Heather  
Alex Caldararu  
Blair Howes  
Keith Smyth  
Al Brown  
Brian McCulloch  
Gail Hiar  
Lisa Saxby  
Leslie Sayer

Jarret Serediak  
Garry Wilson  
Riley Buker  
Reddy Ganta  
Rick Robinson  
Natalie Rodrigues  
Neil Napora  
Janice Kirchner, minutes

1. Meeting Opening



The meeting opened at 9:02, with Minister Nicolaides providing an overview of the current COVID-19 situation and noted there will be new challenges as we come out of it: oversupply of oil in the market, investment in infrastructure and capital spending, the Keystone project, and post-secondary \$2 million increase for capital maintenance and renewal funding. The new capital spending announcements have been announced in the hope they will stimulate the economy and provide additional labour market opportunities. There will, unfortunately, be an estimated \$20 billion deficit rather than the previous \$6 billion forecast.

Anna thanked the Minister for his introduction and the opportunity for this meeting with him. The remainder of the time was spent in discussion over the questions as noted below (these had been forwarded to Minister Nicolaides in advance of the meeting). Note: all ACIFA speakers opened the conversation with thanks to Minister Nicolaides for his time and the opportunity for the consultation. This has not been included in each speaker note below.

## Discussion

2. How will the government weigh competing metrics, whereby achieving one metric prevents achieving another? (Kevin Wiber)

Kevin noted a concern as it seems some metrics compete with others, forcing us to sacrifice one in order to accomplish another. For example, one indicates the institutions reduce expenditures while at the same time increasing student numbers in 3 categories. We are concerned this will result in a number of people being laid off to reduce expenditures, yet institutions will report a surplus at the end of the term. Is there a plan for the surplus money or how to move forward with these competing metrics?

Minister Nicolaides noted there are a couple things to mention around that element. Obviously, there is no surprise that the top priority is to bring costs of the post-secondary system down, and it is an important priority now more than ever, given the fiscal trajectory and the economic state of the province. That metric will have considerable weight attached to it as we work with our institutions to bring the cost of delivery down and help deliver in more efficient ways. That is an essential priority and will remain an essential priority, and will be reflected as such in the investment management agreement. This example may seem contradictory, but he doesn't think it is. We need to challenge ourselves and use new modes of delivery as well. Many institutions are having opportunities to test the waters when it comes to online delivery, and we need to balance a reduced cost environment with a maintenance of existing enrolment. The high-level idea was to look at minor increases to enrolment; however, that's not necessarily the case. We may decide to keep the enrolment number flat or anticipate a decline. Just because a metric exists, doesn't mean it is necessarily tied to an increase; the targets that are identified will be reflective of what is happening currently. He believes we can and must bring costs down in a way so we can at least maintain or potentially increase enrolment. He thinks we can maximize online and distance delivery to help achieve that goal. The COVID situation has changed the landscape quite dramatically. It is not his intent to set metrics that are impossible to achieve. Because of the ongoing situation, specifically around the metric on enrollment, there is an incredible amount of uncertainty around that area. It is difficult to be able to develop informed assumptions around international and even domestic student enrolment, so they will be shelving that metric until year 2, once the landscape has had time to adjust to realities regarding COVID.

Regarding surpluses, the institutions traditionally generate surpluses on average as a system between \$200-\$400 million. It is largely to the discretion of BOGs as to how they want to manage those operational dollars.

Keith Smyth indicated to the minister that in his response, Minister Nicolaides indicated that online delivery can be implemented as a cost-saving model for post-secondary instruction. He asked the minister for his thoughts about



how applied post-secondary instruction fits into that, such as with apprenticeship programs – and those with a strong applied piece. Will those be unfairly biased against because of increased costs of those programs?

Minister Nicolaides responded, “No.” There are many circumstances where that model will not fit so well. The vast majority of students in the post-secondary sector tend to be in Humanities and Social Science oriented programs. In these courses, there are larger lecture halls and perhaps a natural ability to grow the audience through online delivery, and this will not cause a significant impact on the environment. For a lot of the applied programming, that is obviously different. The government’s priority is to strengthen applied learning. They believe that through applied programs and hands-on learning, it helps to set up our graduates for success in the job market in an incredible way. That is why many of the metrics in the performance-based model are associated with those elements. One of the metrics, for example, is measuring the proportion of students who participate in work-integrated learning as part of their program, the earnings of graduates, and the employability of graduates in their field or in a related field. The Premier and Minister have been very clear in their messaging they want to see increased numbers of students involved in apprenticeship learning. They are learning skills they need and concepts of work at the same time; the intent is to incentivise more of this type of programming. They recognise that some of the institutions with these types of programs have costs that are higher; they will work together to find solutions to bring costs down. Online may be one example; are there other ways to look at the costs of delivery and reducing them? We will have to look at a variety of options; we will need to look at it creatively and at some other solutions. He is confident there will be things that can be done.

Lisa Saxby indicated many institutions are relying on increasing enrolment tied to international students. Currently, there are restrictions on how many courses international students can take online. Going forward, there is very restricted access to online courses. This is one of the competing priorities that we see: we can increase international student numbers, but we can’t necessarily increase the online options unless the federal government changes their policies around the student visas.

Minister Nicolaides noted the issue of international students is much broader, and there are individuals who are clamoring at the opportunity to come to Canada. Most see it as a pathway for permanent residency and for citizenship, and while Canada is a destination for many students, they are not choosing Alberta; they are choosing BC or Ontario, or other parts of the country. The market is well established; as a province, we need to improve our standing and improve the Alberta brand. Minister Nicolaides’ department has worked on putting together, in consultation with stakeholders and feedback surveys, a recruitment plan and strategy to help bring Alberta to the forefront so we are capturing a greater proportion of the students already coming to Canada as a destination. As a nation, we can look to further developing strategies to increase the number of those desiring to come to Canada; this needs to be a federal strategy.

Minister Nicolaides clarified that they will be moving forward with the new performance based model, but will be moving some of the metrics around. Their original intent was to start year 1 of the IMA with 3-4 metrics. One of these, for example, was enrolment. However, because of COVID, there is a lot of uncertainty with international and domestic student numbers, so this metric will not be used this year; it will be moved to year 2, as well as a couple of the others. What will likely happen is they will start IMAs with 1 or 2 metrics so they can eliminate some of the uncertainty that exists.



3. We understand that each institution's metrics have been put in place. When will they be shared with us? (Ken Heather)

Ken noted we know from some of the information that has been shared, some institutions have been given specific metrics, while others have heard nothing. Is the ministry willing to share those with us (the associations)?

Minister Nicolaides said, "Absolutely." He indicated they haven't said anything specific publicly as to which metrics have been finalized. He believes in the next week or so this will be completed, and they will be willing to share those. He will have someone from his office send the finalized list of metrics they are examining to us. At this stage, they are 95% of the way there; he does not anticipate too many changes at this point to the schedule of implementation and the metrics that will be used. They are looking at a maximum of 10 metrics, with 1 or 2 to start this year and another 3-4 coming online in year 2 and then again in year 3 of the IMA.

Ken clarified he was asking more specifically about the metrics for each individual institution. Is the Ministry willing to share those individual targets?

Minister Nicolaides indicated he will have to see where they are in the process. They are sitting with each institution regarding the metrics and are looking at historical data and information associated with the metrics, and anticipating hard hits that are appropriate and realistic. He indicated the best avenue would be for each association to request that information from their administration or BOG representative, but he will have a look at where they are with specific targets and the best avenue to share this with us.

Anna clarified with Minister Nicolaides that we have requested some information as suggested, but to no avail, and that is why we are requesting this from his ministry.

4. What is the long range plan for government spending to PSE? (Alex Caldararu)

Alex presented the question as three separate parts:

He noted the Minister mentioned the financial difficulty of the province and noted our sector had taken a significant hit before the bottom fell out for oil prices. Are we in line for more cuts? If so, when?

In light of the cost saving measures mentioned and the previously released Mckinnon Report, is the government looking at the amalgamation of institutions as a viable option? If so, is there conversation happening among the institutions as a cost-saving measure, and how will this be balanced with the need for institutional autonomy and the ability for institutions in smaller, more rural areas to meet the needs of their local academic and labour markets?

What is some of the rationale and evidence used to guide policy decisions, specifically around things like performance-based funding, and what is the evidence that suggests it actually meets its targets and objectives it sets out to do? It is not something that is widely regarded within academic circles that it works in the way it is supposed to. In regards to online learning and cost certainty, how do you respond to the studies that online learning may actually be more expensive in terms of the cost to initiate and maintain it? It also appears to end up costing students more than traditional delivery.

Minister Nicolaides noted they need to continue to do more in relation to the last point and continue to look at whether it is indeed cost-effective in the long term. There is no question there might be upfront costs. He noted he refers to it more as an example of the types of things we will need to explore in the cost constraint environment we are working in. It cannot continue to be business as usual. We need to look at things in more detail to explore how



we can continue to ensure high-quality education and ensure access to Albertans in a more cost-effective way, and in a way that will have minimal impact on students. We can save by shutting down an institution, but this is not viable because of the impact to the community. Cutting programs will have an impact by limiting access and eliminating opportunities that Albertans need. That becomes more challenging. We need to continue to explore where we can save dollars and have as little impact on students as possible. Can online delivery help alleviate some of the pressure? It might be an area to explore. His comments are more general: we need to begin exploring these avenues and explore the trade-offs of reduced costs and continued access to Albertans.

Regarding amalgamating institutions, the minister does not have any preconceived outcomes or desired outcomes on the table that he is working towards (Alex: Is there a baseline number as to when a PS institution become unviable or untenable?) Short answer, no. Institutions with 3000 FLEs or lower have costs begin to inflate; there tend to be good economies of scale begin to develop around 3000 FLEs. They are not using this number as a baseline, but recognize that it is a baseline in the system. He does strongly believe, though, that our institutions must find ways to collaborate more effectively. For example, NAIT and SAIT are two similar institutions. He is sure there are ways to bring costs down and have the two working more collaboratively together. This is the same with other institutions. Do we need 2 presidents, CFOs, admissions offices...these are some areas where we need to explore. We need to think there are natural areas that will result in reduced savings but will not reduce access and programming. Every institution has its own systems, such as IT. Where can there be greater efficiency? This is part of the reason why they want to conduct a review of the system and help articulate a vision for the future. There is a deadline of May 5 to bring on a consultant to look at natural cost savings; thus, the coining of Vision 2030...the future of work, the labour market, the economy, and the role of post-secondary. They will be creating this with extensive consultation; it is needed to develop a strong vision for the future. The consultant has not yet been selected, but the minister believes the person should have a background in post-secondary education.

The Minister of Finance will be providing a fiscal update later this summer once the impact of COVID and the collapse of oil prices is better known. They still need to look at long-term consequences and the possibility of recovery, the amount of oil supply, and how long economic recovery will take. Alberta needs to be focused on fiscal responsibility to bring costs down, but addressing a \$20 billion deficit by bringing costs down alone is not feasible. The strategy needs to be a multi-faceted approach.

Natalie Rodrigues noted that historically, events like the GI bill after WW2, when a strongly funded post-secondary system was in place, had a significant impact on the economic growth and recovery. Is this something being discussed as well?

Minister Nicolaides noted this is something at front of mind. They are still in the midst of developing the economic recovery plan. They convened an economic recovery council to provide recommendations to government to help facilitate that economic recovery. There is an important role for the post-secondary community to play, particularly as there are tens of thousands of Albertans out of work. It is important to help unemployed individuals to develop new skill sets and find new opportunities for themselves. From the research side of the equation and the commercial activity that is often generated, research is an area the government is keenly interested in. They are incredibly interested in working with the post-secondary community to develop plans to support and strengthen the commercialization of research and other research-related activity that occurs on campuses, and helping graduate students start businesses and see more of the commercial application of that work. There may be more to say about this in the coming weeks. They are looking to strike a working committee on this topic particularly to explore how they can maximize the commercial application of some of that important research work. That committee will also address another underlying problem: AB receives a disproportionate amount of research funding from the federal government than the other provinces. The minister does not know why this occurs, so there needs to be more work





in pressing the federal government for its fair share of research funding dollars. Alberta is the only province not receiving a proportionate amount of funding dollars compared to its population. There is a strong interest from the minister and government to understand this, and to press the federal government for more research dollars to help support the commercial application of the incredible research activity that is happening here.

Natalie questioned the minister on the role arts and humanities can play. It is not necessarily a monetizable element, but it does impact society today as people turn to humanities or arts to deal with situations today – as a way to get through or explain the environment we are in. How do these areas fit into the picture? It is important to have a viable and vibrant arts community. These areas are a partner in the economy, as students impact the economy as small business owners, as artists, and as people who travel the world and share their work and their talents.

Minister Nicolaides indicated he is not sure, but that the economic recovery council is looking at some of the immediate economic concerns and challenges. He acknowledged Natalie's point there are important contributions that are made by the arts and humanities as well that are essential to that recovery and the broader well-being. He will circle back with the council and will impress upon them that point as well. He noted the post-secondary community can be working together to come up with innovative and creative ideas to help leverage the strengths of the arts and humanities communities to improve the well-being of all Albertans. He questioned whether there might be a need to strike a working group on that topic...he will be happy to be a part of that and help to facilitate it. (Natalie indicated she would be happy to participate in this in any way the minister felt would be useful.)

5. What are the true amounts of surplus these institutions have, and what can they actually use them for? (We understand some of surpluses are in endowments and can not be spent.) (Ken Heather)

Ken Heather noted information is readily available on the government's website, and we recognize lots of factors go into the reporting. These surpluses seem to be growing, and we are told, "We can't use it for this or that...it's a rainy day fund." However, there are millions of dollars sitting in these surpluses, and we think right now it is pouring outside. Is there a plan on how these institutions can start to be using the ministry's money to help offset some of the costs at this time?

Minister Nicolaides noted these surpluses are under discussion. Part of the challenge is that as we are working to bring the costs of post-secondary down, we need to be mindful as to how to use reserves. We need to look at how reserves are used – if not used to address problems, but to maintain current spending levels, this is a challenge. We need to find innovative and creative ways to bring costs down. We are working with the institutions to find strategies; those with surpluses should be well-positioned in the recovery and reinvestment in the institution once these costs are addressed.

Ken further noted that in the past, institutions have had funding rollbacks that resulted in elimination of programs and staff layoffs. However, at the end of these years, the institutions have still reported significant surpluses. We feel it is unfair that surplus are being built or accumulating on the backs of programs, faculty and staff. We are fearful the same will continue when money is earmarked to be spent on operating under post-secondary mandates.

Minister Nicolaides noted that each Board of Directors or Governors is in control of finances. The system as a whole returns a surplus every year historically, on average \$200-\$400 million. It is a common trend of institutions to anticipate higher costs and undervalue their revenue during the budgeting process.



David Williams indicated every institution has a different story as to why they have surpluses. Sometimes they note they have cut expenditures; other times, they have had unexpected donations, higher than expected revenue, or higher investment income. There are a lot of complicated reasons as to why they have surpluses.

Ken also noted that it seems the sides are playing against the middle. We are told, “The government won’t let us use this money,” but you are saying it is up to the BOG to determine how the surpluses are spent. We are looking for clarity.

Minister Nicolaides indicated he has directed institutions that they cannot use surpluses unless there is prior coordination with his office. The reason behind that is they need to bring costs down, so if they are just using reserves to maintain current spending levels and not addressing reduction of operating costs, this is problematic and not working toward addressing the issue that can be addressed. He has indicated to institutions they cannot use reserves in specific ways unless there is some extenuating circumstance they express to his office and it is approved.

Anna noted that our concern is that these surpluses designated from funding for post-secondary education must be returned to the core value of providing education. Some of these surpluses seem to be used for what may be called vanity projects. The institutions cannot at this time justify centres of excellence or centres of leadership.

Minister Nicolaides indicated he shares her concern and thus the request that institutions must coordinate with his office to have surpluses approved. Now is not the time to accept funding for these types of projects.

## 6. Administrative Bloat (Gail Hiar)

Gail Hiar noted there is a relationship between the cost per student and the cost of administration (not only with the smaller institutions, but across the sector). There is a need with some guidance from the Ministry to the administration saying this is an area the Ministry would like them to target a decrease. The concern is institutions have been seeing a decrease in the amount of spending put toward direct cost of instruction, and the cost of administering education is increasing. This means the cost of educating students is decreasing, but the cost of administration is increasing. What steps are you putting into place to deal with the higher and rising costs of administration?

Minister Nicolaides noted they are exploring a number of strategies to address this issue. They are still developing these strategies, but there needs to be an examination of both price and size: some of the costs of administrative positions and wages and benefits attributed to that, as well as volume of growth of number of positions at administrative levels, and the layering of administrative positions. They are looking at both of those and hope to be able to give us more clarity in respect to specific strategies in the future. It is on the radar and an area they are wanting to develop strategies around. It is an area the consultant being hired in May will be tasked to explore in greater detail as well.

Lisa Saxby asked whether it could perhaps be a metric that might be used: classroom education dollars versus administrative expenses; this could help to determine whether the ideas or solutions implemented to reduce costs are effective and having spending directed where intended.

Minister Nicolaides noted this particular area is a manifestation of this group (ACIFA) in particular; as part of the metric related to costs and expenditure of an institution will also be a sub-metric related to the admin to faculty ratio. There will be some element to make it clear that an element of funding will be tied to their ability to bring administrative costs down.



David Williams mentioned there are two pieces they looked at: the admin-faculty ratio, and administrative costs, and whether the institutions have met the mandated targets they were given to reduce the percentage of funding they are spending on administration.

Anna Beukes requested clarification on the consultant hiring and whether there would be any time for the person/organization to consult with this group, and the time frame involved. Minister Nicolaides noted there would be time for consultation, and that the RFP closes May 5. He is not sure when the person would begin.

David Williams noted it will likely take one month to get the contract signed and in place, so the end of May is a reasonable start time. Then, engagements will be developed and discussion as to the broad spectrum of the consultation group established - likely in summer or the fall. The government recommendations likely will be presented in the fall, with implementation in the spring.

Anna Beukes concluded by thanking the minister and noted she felt this was a real consultation. She wished him well and looked forward to continuing in conversation with him. Minister Nicolaides noted he was appreciative of the group and the open and honest discussion he has been able to have. He also noted his commitment to continue these conversations and consultations.

9. Discussion concluded at 10:24.

## Did You Know?

In May 2004, ACIFA became a founding member of **Public Interest Alberta (PIA)**, a broadly-based network of non-governmental associations, unions, professional associations, student and seniors groups, and concerned individuals, working together to explore ways of protecting and advancing the role of public institutions, public services and public spaces in Alberta.

ACIFA has an arrangement with the **Alberta Retired Teachers' Association (ARTA)**, which enables retired ACIFA members to purchase group benefits them. Benefit features include extended health, dental, life, travel, and hospitalization insurance.



## Northern Living Allowance Continuation Appeal



**ACIFA**

Alberta Colleges & Institutes  
Faculties Association

serving college and technical institute faculty

#317 11010 - 142 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta  
T5N 2R1

6 May 2020

**Re: Northern living allowance for Keyano College Faculty Association Members**

Dear Premier Kenney,

On behalf of Alberta Colleges and Institutes Faculties Association (ACIFA), I am writing to encourage you to continue the Northern Living Allowance for Fort McMurray residents. On April 22, 2020, Keyano College provided notice to their faculty that if confirmation of a grant agreement for fiscal 2020/21 is not received from your government, the Northern Living Allowance will not be payable after June 20, 2020.

ACIFA's concern is with quality post-secondary education. If the Northern Living Allowance is not available, many well-qualified, dedicated instructors at Keyano College likely will not be able to afford the high cost of living and will be forced to leave Fort McMurray for positions at other institutions.

Keyano College has been under significant pressure for some time. The recent catastrophic events such as the flood this spring, 2016 fire, economic downturn, crash in oil prices, crash of the Fort McMurray real estate market, and COVID-19 pandemic have all added to the dire position Keyano College is in. Removal of the Northern Living Allowance will significantly affect not only the staff at Keyano College, but the community as a whole – particularly those who rely on affordable local post-secondary opportunities.

Your government has committed to ensuring affordable, accessible post-secondary education for all Albertans. Denying rural students access to quality instructors because instructors can no longer afford to live in Fort McMurray without the Northern Living Allowance would be a betrayal of that commitment. The Northern Living Allowance is essential. Please don't cut it.

Sincerely,

Anna Beukes  
ACIFA President



## UNBCFA Letter of Appreciation



Anna Beukes  
President ACIFA  
ATA Building  
Suite 317, 11010 – 142 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta  
T5N 2R1

Dear Anna and colleagues,

We are writing on behalf of the UNBC-FA Executive Committee and membership to thank you and your Faculty Association for your generous support during our recent strike. We cannot overstate how much it meant to our members to discover that Canadian faculty across the country were paying attention to our struggle once again - not only paying attention, but supporting us financially in solidarity. The employer has promised us a long and bitter strike, so we are especially grateful for your support.

Thanks again for your support during our strike, and know that we now stand with you in solidarity as we all work to maintain fair and reasonable working conditions for universities across Canada.

Gratefully yours,

Stephen Rader  
President UNBC-FA

Paul Siakaluk  
Vice-President UNBC-FA





## ACIFA IMPORTANT DATES OF 2020/21

### 2020

#### October

24 (Saturday)	ACIFA Annual General Meeting	Edmonton
24 (Saturday)	Presidents' Council Meeting	Edmonton
24 (Saturday)	Negotiations Advisory Committee	Edmonton
24 (Saturday)	Professional Affairs Committee	Edmonton

### 2021

#### January

29 (Friday)	Executive Council Meeting	Online Meeting
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#### March

12 (Friday)	Executive Council Meeting	Online Meeting
13 (Saturday)	Presidents' Council Meeting	Online Meeting

#### April

17 (Saturday)	Executive Council Meeting	Online Meeting
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#### 2021 Annual Conference, Banff Springs Hotel

May 9 (Sunday)	Presidents' Council Meeting	Banff Springs Hotel
	Negotiations Advisory Committee	Banff Springs Hotel
	Professional Affairs Committee	Banff Springs Hotel
May 11 (Tuesday)	Annual General Meeting	Banff Springs Hotel
May 9-11 (Sunday to Tuesday)	ACIFA Spring Conference	Banff Springs Hotel

### Future ACIFA Annual Conferences 2022 – 2024

2022	May 8	Hosted by Lakeland College Faculty Association at Jasper Park Lodge
2023	May 7	Hosted by Alberta University of the Arts Faculty Association at Chateau Lake Louise
2024	May 11	Hosted by NAIT Academic Staff Association at Jasper Park Lodge



## ACIFA MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS

Alberta University of the Arts Faculty Association

Grande Prairie Regional College Academic Staff Association

Keyano College Faculty Association

Lakeland College Faculty Association

Lethbridge College Faculty Association

Medicine Hat College Faculty Association

NAIT Academic Staff Association

NorQuest College Faculty Association

Northern Lakes College Faculty Association

Olds College Faculty Association

Portage College Faculty Association

Faculty Association of Red Deer College

SAIT Academic Faculty Association

Contact ACIFA at [admin@acifa.ca](mailto:admin@acifa.ca), or 780-423-4440

Website: [www.acifa.ca](http://www.acifa.ca)

Come visit us at our office in the Alberta Teachers' Association building:

317, 11010 142 St. NW

Edmonton, AB T5N 2R1

### Did you know you can find the following on the ACIFA website?

Association Newsletters

Collective Agreements

Information about ACIFA Awards

Copies of Submissions to the Government from ACIFA

and much more!



# acifa

Alberta Colleges & Institutes Faculties Association



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