Indigenous Acknowledgement

Athabasca University respectfully acknowledges that we are on and work on the traditional lands of the Indigenous Peoples (Inuit, First Nations, Métis) of Canada. We honour the ancestry, heritage, and gifts of the Indigenous Peoples and give thanks to them.
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Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022

GRADUATE EDUCATION

Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities
Background and Context: Reimagining Athabasca University

The Faculty of Graduate Studies’ Strategic Plan 2018-2022 has been developed during a period of strategic reinvention. The bold Athabasca University (AU) strategic plan Imagine: Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities identifies four strategic themes that will transform the University, our learners, and the communities we serve. Grounded in AU’s unique history and story, the four “moving beyond” themes provide a vision for how AU will leverage its past and determine its future so that individuals and their communities can achieve their highest potential.

As a university community, we are committed to:

- **Moving Beyond Open**
  Bridging open and inclusion

- **Moving Beyond Place**
  Transforming communities through belonging and relationships

- **Moving Beyond the Now**
  Making change through agility and adaptability

- **Moving Beyond the Norm**
  Adopting innovative ideas, taking calculated risks
The Imagine Plan also lays out three broad strategic success elements—Teaching and Learning Success, Research and Development Success, and AU Success—elements that will ensure the University reaches its common goals, and advances its position as a leader in accessible, inclusive, and flexible post-secondary learning.

**The Faculty of Graduate Studies**

Within this context of accelerating change and institutional renewal, the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) embraces AU’s vision and the strategic directions and priority outcomes of Imagine. The plan guides our current and future actions, and reminds the FGS that our ultimate goal is to provide excellence in graduate education. In each of the strategic themes of Imagine, the FGS has identified areas where ‘moving beyond’ has relevance, practical applicability, and outcomes that will positively affect the lives of graduate students and the communities in which they live and work.

**Role of the Faculty of Graduate Studies at AU**

In 2008, the FGS was established to serve as the home for AU’s growing number of graduate programs, including its first doctoral programs, the Doctorate in Education (EdD) in Distance Education (2007) and the Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA) in 2009. The creation of the FGS also met Campus Alberta Quality Council’s requirement that institutions offering doctoral-level programs must have a Faculty of Graduate Studies to provide oversight and support services for doctoral and other graduate programs.

The FGS serves a highly diverse and widely distributed population of graduate students and faculty. FGS supports high-quality, accessible and flexible online graduate education by creating policies and practices that support academic standards of excellence and ensure consistency and quality across programs. The FGS also works with academic faculties and
administrative departments across the University to create a connected community of intellectual engagement and cross-disciplinary collaboration. As a key advocate for graduate education across the University and beyond, the FGS advances AU’s reputation within Alberta’s Comprehensive Academic and Research Universities (CARU) system, as a quality provider of digitally enabled graduate education.

The FGS collaborates to develop and deliver graduate education, and support academic priorities, playing a central role in AU’s integrated planning framework. The mission of the FSG is to support excellence in inclusive, accessible and flexible graduate education and the research and scholarly activities associated with it.

**Working collaboratively with graduate programs and external partners, FGS achieves its mission by:**

- supporting a connected and inclusive community of intellectual engagement and achievement;
- maintaining high academic standards;
- providing superior service with activities and supports for an inclusive, distributed graduate learner population; and
- advancing AU’s role as a leader in inclusive, accessible, quality online graduate education.

**Overview of the Faculty of Graduate Studies Strategic Plan 2018—2022**

The Faculty of Graduate Studies Strategic Plan 2018-2022 is the result of several planning sessions where faculty, staff, students and alumni were invited to share their thoughts and identify priorities. In envisioning a strategic role for enhancing graduate education, three major themes emerged—*Quality*, *Collaboration*, and *Service*. 
The FGS is committed to **Quality** across all graduate programs. This drives the FGS to enhance graduate programs and provide resources and opportunities for graduate students, explore and facilitate the development of new programs to address emerging societal needs, advocate for graduate programs within and outside of the university, and enhance AU’s position as a leader of inclusive, accessible, digitally-enabled graduate education within Alberta, Canada, and internationally.

**Collaboration** is the means by which the FGS accomplishes its goals and addresses the issues that cross graduate programs. It is a key component of AU’s integrated planning framework illustrating that cross-faculty and interdisciplinary collaboration is essential to expanding AU’s teaching, learning and research impacts. Collaboration is at the heart of FGS’s initiatives to build inclusive relationships, and create welcoming learning communities within the context of understanding,
transformation, and renewal. Collaboration also strengthens the position and influence of graduate programs within the University and among students and stakeholders.

The FGS regards Service as a critical area in the next four years as FGS responds to the needs of a broader graduate student population. Responsive and effective services for graduate students is the outcome of the mission and philosophy of the FGS. This includes support for teaching, mentorship, and supervision by faculty, maintaining graduate student academic requirements and standards, and offering educational and professional development opportunities for graduate students and faculty. The FGS also provides website resources, interdisciplinary and cross-faculty academic experiences for graduate students, and advocacy and resources for student awards and scholarships.

**Strategic Goals for the Faculty of Graduate Studies**

The goals of the FGS for 2018-2022 align with the strategic themes of “Moving Beyond” and are organized under the three success elements of Teaching and Learning Success, Research and Development Success, and AU Success. The goals are organized under the FGS strategic themes of Quality, Collaboration and Service.
Graduate Education: Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities

Faculty of Graduate Studies’ Strategic Goals 2018-2022

Moving Beyond Place: Transforming Communities Through Belonging and Relationships

Goal 1: To establish an inclusive community of interdisciplinary graduate learning, research, and collaboration among graduate learners and faculty

Teaching and Learning Success/AU Success

Creation of a digital community of creative activity that supports and fosters graduate research, learning, collaboration, and innovation

COLLABORATION

ACTIONS

• Work with the Office of the Provost and Vice President Academic (OPVPA) for resources for graduate education.

• Facilitate interdisciplinary communications across graduate programs to increase engagement and collaboration.

• Initiate relationships with external partners to assess emerging societal learning, teaching, and research needs.

• Leverage AU’s digital expertise and resources to build interdisciplinary clusters of knowledge sharing and research dissemination.
SUCCESS MEASURES

• Financial balance and security; resources for innovations in interdisciplinary learning, research, and collaboration.

• Increased number of opportunities to connect students and faculty in interdisciplinary learning and research, communities of practice, and other scholarly activities.

• Increased number of partnerships that contribute to community needs, interdisciplinary teaching and research.

• Increased number of opportunities for graduate learners and faculty engagement.

QUALITY

ACTIONS

• Consolidate research courses for graduate students.

• Foster interdisciplinary learning opportunities for students.

• Work with Information Technology Services (ITS), Student and Academic Services (SAS) and graduate programs to create an electronic gathering place for graduate students.

• Work with graduate programs and the Research Centre to research and develop new training opportunities for graduate students.

SUCCESS MEASURES

• Increased offerings of interdisciplinary and cross-faculty courses.

• Student enrolments in courses outside a student’s home program.
• Progress on the creation of a digital hub for graduate information, resources, innovative teaching and research practices, as well as graduate student and faculty communication and activities.

• Number of training opportunities experienced by students.

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**SERVICE**

**ACTIONS**

• Launch initiatives that enhance interdisciplinary learning.

• Work with SAS to assess and continuously improve business processes.

• Work with SAS, the Research Centre, and University Relations to increase capacity for student awards.

• Increase awareness of awards and scholarships to graduate students.

**SUCCESS MEASURES**

• Increased attendance at webinars, annual educational forum, and graduate student conference.

• Streamlined communications and accurate data collection.

• Monetary value of student awards; number of graduate student awards.

• Increased number of students applying for and receiving awards/scholarships.
Moving Beyond Open: Bridging Open and Inclusion

Goal 2: To contribute to AU’s university-wide efforts to build relationships of trust and understanding with Indigenous communities and to foster greater awareness of Indigenous ways of knowing and teaching

Teaching and Learning Success/AU Success

Greater acknowledgement and inclusion of Indigenous cultures, histories, world-views and traditional knowledge; increased representation of Indigenous learners in AU’s graduate programs

COLLABORATION

ACTIONS

• Work across graduate programs, and with Indigenous colleagues and communities, to understand and support Indigenous learning, teaching, and research methodologies.

• Collaborate with graduate programs and Indigenous communities to integrate traditional knowledge.

SUCCESS MEASURES

• Increase in cross-cultural learning and sharing opportunities that highlight Indigenous ways of knowing.

• Indigenous ways of knowing and pedagogies; increased community involvement.
QUALITY

ACTIONS
• Facilitate discussions to identify Indigenous approaches and content for graduate programs.
• Re-imagine the doctoral dissertation to reflect Indigenous methodologies.
• Include allowances for the use of Indigenous methodologies, cultures and languages in doctoral dissertations.
• Work with Indigenous communities to develop graduate level professional development activities.

SUCCESS MEASURES
• Number of workshops/webinars on how graduate programs’ curricula can reflect Indigenous perspectives, and practices in a holistic way.
• Cross-faculty teaching and research that is aligned with Indigenous knowledge and cultural values.
• Inclusion of Indigenous cultures and languages and inclusion of Indigenous Elders on committees.
• Graduate-level professional development opportunities that incorporate Indigenous perspectives and interests.
SERVICE

ACTIONS

• Develop strategies to attract and retain Indigenous graduate students.

SUCCESS MEASURES

• Increased number of Indigenous graduate student enrolments.
Moving Beyond the Norm: Adopting Innovative Ideas, Taking Calculated Risks

**Goal 3:** To advance excellence in graduate learners supervision through innovative approaches and supports for faculty and graduate students

**Teaching and Learning Success/AU Success**

Increased learner satisfaction, high quality learner research projects, theses, and dissertations

**COLLABORATION**

**ACTIONS**

• Collaborate with graduate programs to strengthen supervision of graduate students.

• Work with graduate programs to develop initiatives that support effective supervision.

• Work with Athabasca University Graduate Students’ Association (AUGSA) to create a sense of community among graduate students that promotes learning and collaboration.

**SUCCESS MEASURES**

• Increased participation of graduate programs in the development of guidelines and procedure.

• Faculty participation to increase supervision efficacy.

• Number and types of activities implemented with AUGSA.
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Kim Jones
EdD Candidate, Winner of the 2018 AU 3MT®

"I would definitely recommend a graduate program at AU. The flexibility of the programs is especially appealing for those, like myself, who wish to continue their academic journeys and progress their careers while, at the same time, effectively balance their work obligations and family life. While it hasn't always been easy, pursuing AU graduate studies has been incredibly enriching and it has expanded my knowledge, abilities and confidence in my area of expertise."

Rita Prokopetz
EdD Candidate, 2nd Runner Up 2018 AU 3MT®

"The biggest benefit of all was that the 3MT® experience, from beginning to end, helped me prepare for my own proposal defence presentation. Most importantly, I had the opportunity to “practice” in front of scholars!"

Dustin Purnell
MC Graduate, Winner of the 2019 AU 3MT®

"My participation in the 3MT competition is going to be a fantastic piece to add to my resume!"
QUALITY

ACCTIONS

• Provide oversight on effective supervision strategies.

• Enhance FGS's status as a source of information on national and international issues and trends in graduate education.

• Work with graduate programs to re-imagine forms of the thesis and dissertation that preserve quality and scientific rigor.

• Promote the impact of graduate student research and scholarly activities across all digital platforms.

SUCCESS MEASURES

• Increased student success and satisfaction with supervision; faculty participation, and completion of Annual Progress Report.

• Progress on advancing FGS's institutional role as the go-to resource for issues and trends in graduate education.

• Increase innovative and non-traditional ways of conducting research and presenting research findings.

• Number of reported student publications and conference presentations; number of awards/scholarships, grants, media coverage.
SERVICE

ACTIONS

• Utilize different approaches to provide oversight and support of quality learning and supervision.

• Provide supports for and recognize excellence in graduate teaching and supervision.

• Develop business processes that enhance the graduate student experience.

SUCCESS MEASURES

• Increased FGS presence and participation of faculty.

• Excellence in Graduate Supervision Award.

• Electronic forms and stream-lined communication systems.
Moving Beyond the Now: Making Change Through Agility and Adaptability

Goal 4: To increase AU’s reputation as a leader in quality, innovation, and research-informed graduate education within Alberta, among the CARUs and in Canada

Teaching and Learning Success/ Research & Development Success

Greater visibility and recognition of AU as a CARU and a quality provider of graduate education across Alberta and Canada

COLLABORATION

ACTIONS

• Collaboration on research and best practices in graduate education among CARUs and other Canadian post-secondary institutions.

• Contribute to organizations that promote quality in graduate studies and research.

• Promote awareness of the importance of graduate programs to a strong, vibrant university, province and country.

• Raise awareness of FGS’s contribution to the overall success of graduate programs and AU.
SUCCESS MEASURES

• Contribute to broader discussions of issues and innovations in graduate education.

• Greater participation of AU graduate faculty in academic and professional organizations.

• Integrated communication across digital platforms to promote success in graduate education.

• Activities that demonstrate FGS’s role as a champion and advocate for graduate programs.

QUALITY

ACTIONS

• Promote innovation and achievement in graduate teaching and research activities across digital platforms.

• Support graduate programs’ efforts to attain national and international accreditation.

• Advocate for, and participate in, quality initiatives across graduate programs to promote continuous improvement and excellence.

• Continue to work with graduate programs and the OPVPA on a learning framework.

• Create opportunities for graduate students to enhance their research abilities and interact with other graduate students and universities.
SUCCESS MEASURES

• Recognition through increased numbers of national and international grants, publications, conference presentations, and awards of excellence.

• Achieve national and international accreditations, such as AACSB and Middle States; enhanced reputation.

• Delivery of quality program reviews, new program proposals, continuous improvement efforts, and measures that inform effective decision making.

• Course and program outcomes will reflect concepts of the learning framework.

• Increased attendance in workshops, the annual graduate student conference, 3MT, and other initiatives.

SERVICE

ACTIONS

• Improve quality of direct services to graduate students.

• Conduct annual reviews of institution-wide and FGS-wide standards, regulations, policies, and procedures.

SUCCESS MEASURES

• Levels of service quality and student satisfaction.

• Inform decision-making relating to graduate programs’ standards, policies, and procedures.
David Thomson
VP Academic, AUGSA, MBA Student

When I first started my MBA journey, I thought the learning was just about the curriculum. As I progressed through my courses, how I was being taught added to the learning value. After attending the Graduate Student Research Conference for the first time, I realized my learning has entered a whole new level. To feel the enthusiasm of fellow students through face-to-face dialogue, including those I have interacted with online in person for the first time, has created a whole new dimension of learning value for me. Athabasca University continues to amaze me with the depth of experience provided to those who take advantage of it. Thank you for a great weekend and for all of the new connections I have gained.”

Mary-Anne Parker
MAIS Graduate Student

This was my second conference experience and they keep getting better. The chance to connect with peers and instructors is so valuable and having the chance to hear other folks’ academic journeys helps validate and improve my own. I began the conference a stranger and left a colleague.

Camille MacRae
MAIS Student

My education gave me a sense of empowerment, worth, self-efficacy, and safety. My graduate experience has shown me how I can help others.”
David Thomson  
VP Academic, AUGSA, MBA Student  

When I first started my MBA journey, I thought the learning was just about the curriculum. As I progressed through my courses, how I was being taught added to the learning value. After attending the Graduate Student Research Conference for the first time, I realized my learning has entered a whole new level. To feel the passion, and enthusiasm of fellow students through face-to-face dialogue, including meeting those I have interacted with online in person for the first time, has created a whole new dimension of learning value for me. Athabasca University continues to amaze me with the depth of experience provided to those who take advantage of it. Thank you for a great weekend and for all of the new connections I have gained.”

Mary-Anne Parker  
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This was my second conference experience and they keep getting better. The chance to connect with peers and instructors is so valuable and having the chance to hear other folks’ academic journeys helps validate and improve my own. I began the conference a stranger and left a colleague.”
Where I live the only option before AU was to move 3 hours away for 2-3 years. I would also have to leave my full time job, which is not doable financially. AU gave me the opportunity to advance my education, to explore the topic I am passionate about, and in turn bring what I have learned back to my field and clients.”

Louisa Clapper
Master of Counselling
Leta Monague

MAIS

The journey was long and painful, but I could not have done it without the staff at Athabasca University. Apart from the professors I mentioned, the others are exceptional and I enjoyed learning from them.

I am very proud to say I am a graduate of this fine university!
Conclusion
This Strategic Plan not only presents a blueprint for the work of the FGS over the next four years, it also complements and helps to fulfil the goals articulated in Imagine. As AU moves forward with an ambitious strategic agenda to “transform lives and transform communities,” the FGS has established goals that support the development of inclusive graduate learning communities, create strong support systems for graduate students to succeed, and enhance AU’s position as a leader in accessible, inclusive, innovative, and digitally enabled education.
This plan is focused on working collaboratively with graduate programs, as well as internal and external partners, to deliver excellence in online graduate education. The FGS’ goals are embedded in the integrated planning framework, signifying the broad and intensive role and relationship FGS has with all internal units at AU and with the broader provincial, national, and international communities. FGS envisions AU graduate education as a world leader in providing quality graduate education and in influencing trends in higher education.