



Athabasca University

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

***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 institutional renewal and strategic reinvention at Athabasca University. The bold new vision articulated in ***Imagine: Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities*** calls on every member of the University community to imagine and embrace ***four strategic themes*** that will transform the University and the learners and communities we serve. Grounded in Athabasca University'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 Norm—Adopting innovative ideas, taking calculated risks, and
- Moving Beyond the Now—Making change through agility and adaptability.

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 entire AU community created and affirmed "shared values and commitments" that define the organizational culture and drive faculty and staff members to deliver on ***Imagine***. The final component of the plan, the ***Priority Outcomes Strategic Roadmap***, provides concrete critical actions and priority outcomes to ensure that milestones and successes are not only achieved and celebrated, but also lead to ongoing breakthroughs at all levels of the University.

***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 Faculty of Graduate Studies (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 Faculty of Graduate Studies 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.

Over the last 10 years, the Faculty of Graduate Studies has grown to serve 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 graduate 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, the province, the nation and internationally, the Faculty of Graduate Studies advances Athabasca University’s reputation within Alberta’s Comprehensive Academic and Research Institutions (CARI) system, and as a quality provider of inclusive, accessible, flexible, digitally enabled graduate education.

The Faculty of Graduate Studies collaborates with all academic units that develop and deliver graduate education, as well as all other units that support academic priorities. Thus, the Faculty of Graduate Studies has a central role in AU’s integrated planning framework. The mission of the Faculty of Graduate Studies 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 student population; and
- advancing Athabasca University’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 as FGS moves forward over the next four years. These sessions were held before and during the

drafting of *Imagine*, and the ongoing input into both plans sharpened FGS's goals and priorities as AU's strategic vision and direction clearly emerged. In 2017, planning sessions were conducted to envision a strategic role for enhancing graduate education with three major areas of focus emerging—**Quality**, **Collaboration**, and **Service**. These three concepts are the foundation for the work ahead and complement the themes of *Imagine and the I-CARE Values* expressed in *Imagine*.



A strong focus on **Quality** across graduate programs drives FGS to contribute to the continuous improvement of current online graduate programs; 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 FGS accomplishes its goals and addresses the issues that cross graduate programs. It is also 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 Faculty of Graduate Studies regards **Service** as a critical area in the next four years as FGS responds to the needs of a broader graduate student population. It is not only a process by which FGS delivers resources to graduate students but is also the outcome of its mission and philosophy. Service spans a wide range of activities and resources including support for teaching, mentorship and supervision by faculty; maintaining graduate student academic requirements and standards and offering educational and professional development sessions 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. As FGS addresses the growing needs of emerging communities of learners, highly responsive and effective service standards will lead to increased levels of graduate student satisfaction and make FGS the go-to place for graduate education and research resources.

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

The goals of the Faculty of Graduate Studies 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 Faculty of Graduate Studies’ goals may fit under more than one of the three success elements, and most relate to the element of *Teaching and Learning Success*. Throughout this plan, the concepts of **Quality, Collaboration** and **Service** are interwoven into all the strategic directions and success elements.

**GRADUATE EDUCATION: TRANSFORMING LIVES, TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES**

**Faculty of Graduate Studies’ Strategic Goals 2018-2022**

<p><b>Moving Beyond Place: Transforming Communities Through Belonging and Relationships</b></p>	<p><b>Teaching and Learning Success/AU Success</b></p>
<p><b>Goal 1: To establish an inclusive community of interdisciplinary graduate learning, research and collaboration among graduate students and faculty</b></p>	<p><b>Creation of a digital community of creative activity that supports and fosters graduate research, learning, collaboration, and innovation</b></p>
<p><b>COLLABORATION</b></p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ACTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the Office of the Provost and Vice President Academic (OP and VPA) and the Vice President Finance and Administration (VPFA), establish a stable and reliable funding formula for FGS.</li> <li>• Facilitate interdisciplinary communications across graduate programs to increase engagement and collaboration (integrated communication systems).</li> <li>• With graduate programs, University Relations, and the Research Centre, initiate relationships with external communities, business and industry, and post-secondary institutions to assess emerging societal learning, teaching and research needs at the graduate level.</li> <li>• Leverage AU’s digital expertise and resources to build interdisciplinary clusters of knowledge sharing and research dissemination.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SUCCESS MEASURES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial balance and security; resources for Innovations in interdisciplinary learning, research, and collaboration.</li> <li>• Increase in number of opportunities to connect students and faculty in interdisciplinary learning and research, communities of practice, and other scholarly activities.</li> <li>• Number of partnerships that contribute to increased understanding of community needs; number of community-based and interdisciplinary teaching and research experiences that open new avenues for collaboration with other institutions.</li> <li>• Number of opportunities for graduate student and faculty engagement.</li> </ul>

<b>QUALITY</b>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>ACTIONS</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consolidate research courses to expand access to quality interdisciplinary, cross-faculty courses for graduate students.</li> <li>• Foster interdisciplinary learning opportunities for students in current and new programs.</li> <li>• Work with Information Technology Services (ITS), Student and Academic Services (SAS) and graduate programs to create an electronic gathering place (hub) for graduate students and faculty.</li> <li>• Work with graduate programs and the Research Centre to research and develop new training opportunities for graduate students.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>SUCCESS MEASURES</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost savings; positive evaluation comments on benefits of interdisciplinary learning and research; increased offerings of interdisciplinary and cross-faculty courses.</li> <li>• Track student enrolments in courses outside a student's home program.</li> <li>• 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. Improved student satisfaction and increased interaction among graduate students and faculty attributable to the hub.</li> <li>• Number of training opportunities experienced by students (e.g. Mitacs)</li> </ul>
<b>SERVICE</b>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>ACTIONS</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch initiatives that enhance interdisciplinary learning and linkages among students and between students and faculty.</li> <li>• Work with SAS to assess and continuously improve business processes.</li> <li>• Work with SAS, the Research Centre, and University Relations to continue to assess and advocate for student financial support.</li> <li>• Increase awareness of awards and scholarships through regular communications to graduate students and via AU's social media sites.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>SUCCESS MEASURES</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased attendance at webinars, annual educational forum, and graduate student conference.</li> <li>• Streamlined written communications between FGS and graduate programs and students using electronic forms; greater security and accuracy in data collection and distribution of information to graduate programs and students.</li> <li>• Monetary value of student awards; number of graduate student awards.</li> <li>• Number of students applying for awards/scholarships; number of students successful in receiving awards and scholarships; identification of students needing financial aid such as loans or bursaries.</li> </ul>

Moving Beyond Open: Bridging Open and Inclusion	Teaching and Learning Success/AU Success
<p><b>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</b></p>	<p><b>Greater acknowledgement and inclusion of Indigenous cultures, histories, world-views and traditional knowledge; increased representation of Indigenous students in AU’s graduate programs</b></p>
<b>COLLABORATION</b>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>ACTIONS</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work across graduate programs, and with Indigenous colleagues and communities, to understand and support Indigenous learning, teaching and research needs and methodologies.</li> <li>• Collaborate with graduate programs and Indigenous communities to understand and integrate traditional knowledge and Indigenous pedagogies in graduate courses, programs and research methodologies.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>SUCCESS MEASURES</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in cross-cultural learning and sharing opportunities that highlight Indigenous ways of knowing, and acknowledge Indigenous cultures and protocols.</li> <li>• Curriculum (new and revised) process includes consistent Indigenous ways of knowing and pedagogies; increased community involvement to reflect Indigenous traditions. Number of students using Indigenous methodologies.</li> </ul>
<b>QUALITY</b>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>ACTIONS</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate discussions with academic units and Indigenous partners to explore and identify Indigenous approaches and content for graduate programs.</li> <li>• Consult with Graduate Program Directors and Indigenous colleagues to re-imagine the doctoral dissertation to reflect Indigenous methodologies.</li> <li>• Strengthen support for the use of Indigenous methodologies, cultures and languages in doctoral dissertations.</li> <li>• Work with Indigenous communities to develop graduate level professional development activities that relate to Indigenous research, career development and other specific areas of interest.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>SUCCESS MEASURES</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of workshops/webinars on how graduate programs’ curricula can reflect Indigenous perspectives, methodologies, and practices in a holistic way.</li> <li>• Number of cross-faculty discussions of Indigenous methodologies and research methods that are aligned with Indigenous knowledge and cultural values.</li> <li>• Inclusion of Indigenous cultures and languages in research methodologies and doctoral dissertations. Inclusion of Indigenous Elders on doctoral committees, where applicable.</li> <li>• Number of new, graduate-level professional development opportunities that incorporate Indigenous perspectives and interests.</li> </ul>

<b>SERVICE</b>	
<b><i>ACTIONS</i></b>	<b><i>SUCCESS MEASURES</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with graduate programs and University Relations to develop strategies to attract and retain Indigenous graduate students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased number of Indigenous graduate student enrolments; increased number of Indigenous graduate students who complete graduate programs; student satisfaction survey re: service.</li> </ul>
<b>Moving Beyond the Norm: Adopting Innovative Ideas, Taking Calculated Risks</b>	<b>Teaching and Learning Success/AU Success</b>
<b>Goal 3: To advance excellence in graduate student supervision through innovative approaches and supports for faculty and grad students</b>	<b>Increased student satisfaction, high quality student research projects, theses and dissertations</b>
<b>COLLABORATION</b>	
<b><i>ACTIONS</i></b>	<b><i>SUCCESS MEASURES</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with graduate programs to establish guidelines and procedures that facilitate supervision of graduate students.</li> <li>• Work with graduate programs to develop initiatives that support effective supervision.</li> <li>• Work with AUGSA to create a sense of community among graduate students that promotes learning and collaboration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased participation of graduate programs in the development of guidelines and procedures; graduate programs implement the guidelines and procedures.</li> <li>• Number of faculty attending educational forums, webinars; increased number of “hits” on website resources relating to supervision.</li> <li>• Number and types of activities implemented with AUGSA, follow-up evaluations.</li> </ul>
<b>QUALITY</b>	
<b><i>ACTIONS</i></b>	<b><i>SUCCESS MEASURES</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide oversight on effective supervision strategies.</li> <li>• Ensure students and their committee members are aware of each of their Intellectual Property (IP) rights.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased student satisfaction with supervision; 100% successful oral examination outcomes; increased faculty attendance at webinars and forums on supervision; increased compilation of accurate data (e.g. time to complete, student progress reports); 100% completion of Annual Progress Reports from thesis and doctoral students.</li> <li>• Evidence of adherence to AU guidelines regarding Intellectual Property (e.g. copyright, authorship, co-authorship, inventions/patents, etc.); number of IP inquiries, clarifications and complaints from faculty and students.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance FGS’s status as a source of information on national and international issues and trends in graduate education.</li> <li>• Work with graduate programs to re-imagine forms of the thesis and dissertation that preserve quality and scientific rigor.</li> <li>• Promote the impact of graduate student research and scholarly activities across all digital platform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progress on advancing FGS’s institutional role as the go-to resource for issues and trends in graduate education:</li> <li>• Number of new ways of constructing research for the thesis and dissertation to increase innovative and non-traditional ways of conducting research and presenting research findings.</li> <li>• Number of reported student publications and conference presentations; number of awards/scholarships, grants, media coverage.</li> </ul>
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**SERVICE**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>ACTIONS</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize different approaches to provide oversight and support of quality learning and supervision.</li> <li>• Provide supports for and recognize excellence in graduate teaching and supervision.</li> <li>• Work with Grad Programs, SAS and ITS to develop business processes that enhance the graduate student experience.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>SUCCESS MEASURES</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of faculty attending mentoring workshops and webinars; FGS representative in attendance at Faculty Council meetings, and discussion forums.</li> <li>• Number of nominations to the Excellence in Graduate Supervision Award; number of other faculty awards or forms of recognition for superior teaching and supervision.</li> <li>• FGS forms are 100% electronic; implementation of consistent student email system, and consistent registration and fee collection procedures across all graduate programs.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Moving Beyond the Now: Making Change Through Agility and Adaptability</b></p>	<p><b>Teaching and Learning Success/ Research &amp; Development Success</b></p>
<p><b>Goal 4: To increase AU’s reputation as a leader in quality, innovation, and research-informed graduate education within Alberta, among the CARIs and in Canada</b></p>	<p><b>Greater visibility and recognition of AU as a CARI and a quality provider of graduate education across Alberta and Canada</b></p>

<b>COLLABORATION</b>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>ACTIONS</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate greater collaboration on research and best practices in graduate education among CARIs and other Canadian post-secondary institutions.</li> <li>• Contribute to the mutual goals of AU and organizations that promote quality in graduate studies and research.</li> <li>• Work with University Relations, the Research Centre, and graduate programs to promote awareness of the importance of graduate programs to a strong, vibrant university, province and country.</li> <li>• Raise awareness of FGS’s contribution to the overall success of graduate programs and Athabasca University.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>SUCCESS MEASURES</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased number of opportunities to contribute to broader discussions of issues and innovations in graduate education.</li> <li>• Greater participation of AU graduate faculty in academic and professional organizations.</li> <li>• Increased integrated communication across digital platforms re: grad student success stories, faculty and supervision excellence, and innovative student and faculty research activities.</li> <li>• Increased number of cross-faculty FGS presentations, communications, and activities that demonstrate FGS’s role as a champion and advocate for graduate programs.</li> </ul>
<b>QUALITY</b>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>ACTIONS</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote innovation and achievement in graduate teaching and student research activities across digital platforms.</li> <li>• Support graduate programs’ efforts to attain national and international accreditation for AU’s graduate programs.</li> <li>• Continually advocate for, and actively participate in, quality initiatives across graduate programs to promote continuous improvement and excellence.</li> <li>• Continue to work with graduate programs and the OP &amp; VPA on a learning framework.</li> <li>• Create opportunities for graduate students to enhance their research abilities and interact with other graduate students and universities.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>SUCCESS MEASURES</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater recognition through increased numbers of national and international grants, publications, conference presentations, awards of excellence.</li> <li>• Ongoing progress on achieving national and international accreditations, such as AACSB and Middle States; enhanced reputation.</li> <li>• Delivery of quality program reviews, new program proposals, continuous improvement efforts, and measures that inform effective decision making (e.g. tracking of enrolments, completion rates, thesis route, student satisfaction surveys, etc.)</li> <li>• Course and program outcomes will reflect concepts of the learning framework.</li> <li>• Increased attendance at regular online and in person workshops, participation in annual graduate student conference, annual 3MT and other competitions. Number of graduate students from other CARIs attending webinars.</li> </ul>

<b>SERVICE</b>	
<p><b><i>ACTIONS</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with graduate programs to improve quality of direct services to graduate students, faculty and other constituents.</li> <li>• Conduct annual reviews of institution-wide and FGS-wide standards, regulations, policies and procedures.</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>SUCCESS MEASURES</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in levels of service quality e.g. annual student satisfaction survey; number of student complaints regarding response times by faculty or staff.</li> <li>• FGS Reports of annual assessment reviews inform decision-making relating to graduate programs' standards, policies, and procedures.</li> </ul>

***Conclusion***

This Strategic Plan not only presents a blueprint for the work of the Faculty of Graduate Studies 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 Athabasca University’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.