

## POST-SECONDARY PATHWAYS IN ALBERTA



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*Qualifications: The Link Between Educational and Occupational Pathways and Labour Market Outcomes* is a project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The four-year project investigates the nature of pathways within postsecondary education, and between postsecondary education and the labour market. As part of this project, the *Provincial Pathways* profile series lays the groundwork for further inquiry contrasting and comparing educational and occupational pathways in Canadian provinces and territories.

### Alberta: Overview

Alberta has an established history of programs and initiatives to optimize transferability of credits between institutions and education sectors (CMEC, 2003). The Alberta Council for Admissions and Transfer (ACAT) was established in 1974, so along with British Columbia, has the benefit of a sustained infrastructure for the study and organization of educational pathways.

### Post-Secondary System Description

Alberta's postsecondary system operates under the jurisdiction of Alberta Advanced Education. Twenty-six public institutions are governed by the *Post-Secondary Learning Act*.<sup>1</sup> Alberta institutions are classified according to a nomenclature developed in the province's *Roles and Mandates Policy Framework for Alberta's Publicly Funded Advanced Education System* (2007). A goal of the Framework was to map out strengths and mandates for each sector in order to promote a "seamless" and differentiated system (cf. Alberta Learning, 2002). The sectors include:

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<sup>1</sup>Government of Alberta (2003). Post Secondary Learning Act. Retrieved from [http://www.qp.alberta.ca/1266.cfm?page=p19p5.cfm&leg\\_type=Acts&isbncln=9780779737932](http://www.qp.alberta.ca/1266.cfm?page=p19p5.cfm&leg_type=Acts&isbncln=9780779737932)

- Comprehensive and academic research institutions (Athabasca University, University of Alberta, University of Calgary, and University of Lethbridge)
- Baccalaureate and Applied Studies Institutions (eg. Mount Royal University, MacEwan University)
- Polytechnical Institutions (e.g. NAIT Polytechnic and SAIT Polytechnic)
- Comprehensive Community Institutions (eg. Keyano College, Red Deer College)
- Independent Academic Institutions (eg. the King's University College)
- Specialized Arts and Culture Institutions (eg. The Banff Centre) (CICIC, 2016)

The public system in Alberta is supplemented by private religious institutions and private vocational institutions. In addition to baccalaureate degrees offered by the province's research universities, applied baccalaureates are offered by Alberta university-colleges, and at its two large technical institutes, NAIT and SAIT (Schmaus & Wimmer, 2013). Alberta is one of four Canadian provinces who have adopted the university-college model (Skolnik, 2011).

Alberta Learning Information Service [[ALIS](#)] is a one-stop portal for work and learning. From the ALIS site, student or potential students can access career planning tools, and [ApplyAlberta](#), a portal through which users can apply for admission to one or more Alberta institutions. [TransferAlberta](#) has information and search functions for students who are looking to move courses or programs between institutions. Distance education in Alberta is offered via [eCampus](#), a consortium the province's postsecondary institutions. Athabasca University, a member of this consortium, is a fully distance institution offering both undergraduate and graduate degree programs. It is considered to be the first open university in Canada (Andrews, Holdaway & Mowat, 1997).

## Pathways in the Province

Alberta has an established transition system. Transfer and articulation in Alberta is highly coordinated, particularly within disciplines where there are active articulation committees. There are also many examples of career laddering and program transfer, for example nursing diploma to degree programs. University transfer programs offer students the opportunity to begin a degree program at a college and obtain up to two years of credits that are transferable to a university provided they meet the admissions requirement of the receiving institution (ACCC, 2011). Alberta has also engaged in a number of interesting dual-credentialing pilots seeking to improve transitions from secondary schooling to mid-skilled college programs in high-needs areas (ACCC, 2011).

### History and present efforts to improve pathways

Lethbridge Junior College, founded in 1957, was the first college to offer university transfer programs in partnership with the University of Alberta (Andrews, Holdaway & Mowat, 1997; Dennison & Gallagher, 1986). The subsequent *Public Colleges Act* (1958) enabled all colleges to offer a combination of university level and non-university level courses (Andrews, Holdaway & Mowat, 1997).

Dennison and Gallagher (1986) note that the transfer function of colleges as "junior colleges" diminished as these institutions offered more community-based, technical, vocational and adult education programming. In keeping with this shift, the colleges began to serve more diverse populations, including more adult students. The number of colleges increased, and led to the creation of a Colleges

Commission in 1969 designed to parallel an existing Universities Commission (Andrews, Holdaway & Mowat, 1997). This period was characterized by growing concerns and debates between these two sectors regarding the restrictive and unpredictable nature of student transfers (Andrews, Holdaway & Mowat, 1997).

As a consequence, the provincial government recommended that the Colleges Commission and the University Commission be dissolved in order to support the creation of a Department of Advanced Education that would oversee all postsecondary education and reduce barriers for student mobility between institution types (Andrews, Holdaway & Mowat, 1997). The Department was formed in 1972 and recommended the creation of the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer and the implementation of an Alberta Transfer Guide (Andrews, Holdaway & Mowat, 1997; Dennison & Gallagher, 1986).

Technical and vocational learning, originally housed in the province's two main technical institutes, expanded as colleges began to offer more programs of this variety (Higher Education in Alberta, 2016). These expansive arrangements were crystallized in *Technical Institutes Amendment Act* in 1981 (Dennison & Gallagher, 1986).<sup>2</sup>

In 2002, the province released *Campus Albert: A Policy Framework*. The document outlined a common vision for the province's 26 post-secondary institutions. The goal of the Framework is to provide a system that maximizes the flexibility and transferability of learning, using both face-to-face and online learning opportunities. Following the Framework, in 2004, the *Postsecondary Learning Act* replaced separate acts for universities, colleges, technical schools, and the Banff Centre for the Arts (Schmaus & Wimmer, 2013). Alberta's *Roles and Mandates Policy Framework* followed in 2007, providing further clarity about how each sector of the system was to operate. A vision for the entire adult learning system, including higher education, technical and vocational learning, and community and adult literacy learning was articulated in the 2006 report [A Learning Alberta](#).

### **ACAT**

The Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer [ACAT] was founded in 1974 as an independent arm's length entity reporting to the Minister of Learning (ACAT, 2009b; CMEC, 2003). The [Principles, Policies and Procedures Framework](#) outlines its activities, which to the present day include conducting research and promoting cooperation among institutions. ACAT has published the Alberta Transfer Guide annually since 1974.

ACAT consists of a council, secretariat, and a number of articulation committees. The Council is appointed by the Minister of Learning and consists of a chair and representatives from public colleges, universities and technical institutes; private colleges; secondary-level education; and representatives from the public for a total of fifteen members (CMEC, 2003). ACAT conducts ongoing research, monitoring graduate outcomes, student mobility patterns, and flows of students between sectors of the education system (Alberta Innovation and Advanced Education, 2009a).

ACAT also works along with other provincial articulation and transfer committees, particularly in the Western provinces. In 2006, Alberta and BC started working together toward cross-provincial [protocol](#) that would help the two provinces map transfers across their borders (CMEC, 2007). Presently, Alberta's

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<sup>2</sup> Technical Institutes Amendment Act, 1981 (Hon. Mr. Horsman)(Bill 98)(Ch. 75) 1R. 165; 2R. 178; C. of W. 181; 3R. 184; A. 189.

Transfer System include agreements with institutions in B.C. and the Northern Territories (Alberta Learning Information Service [ALIS], 2016). <http://alis.alberta.ca/ps/aas/transfers.html>

## Trades

Trade and industry training are administered by the Apprenticeship and Industry Training sector of Alberta's Ministry of Advanced Education. The Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board is appointed according to the terms and mandate of the [Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act](#). The Board works with industry to establish standards for training and apprenticeships, and acts in an advisory capacity, providing recommendations to the Minister of Advanced Education.

Trades training in Alberta is offered through two institutes of technology: the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) in Edmonton, and the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology in Calgary (SAIT), as well as numerous colleges. Employers, workers, and learners are linked through the province's service portal, [My Tradesecrets](#), which also provides users with links to course offerings. The site distinguishes between regulated and unregulated trades, as well as "designated occupations" for which there are established training routes. Alberta also has a well-established youth apprenticeship program.

In 2015, Alberta, BC and Saskatchewan established the [New West Partnership](#) agreement to increase trade and labour mobility across the three western provinces. The agreement includes streamlining and standardizing occupational standards and pathways so that credentials and work experience will be more portable (New West Partnership, 2016). Alberta is also part of two national initiatives to harmonize trades training and certification across the country. <http://tradesecrets.alberta.ca/learn-on-the-job/apprentice-mobility-and-trade-harmonization/>

## PLAR

Prior learning recognition is incorporated into the *Campus Alberta Framework* (2002). A PLAR conference held in 2006 (CMEC, 2007), followed by the release of *Advancing PLAR in Alberta: An action plan*. The document describes initiatives to be integrated within existing programs and frameworks, including workplace learning, adult and community literacy, and the formal education system. PLAR initiatives occur and are maintained by individual post-secondary institutions.

## Summary

The originally decentralized system in Alberta has consolidated into a centralized system, rationalized by the articulation of mandates for different sectors. The organization of the system in this manner may have made it easier for the system as a whole to adapt to the increasingly significant role of university-colleges as full degree providers. Alberta is exemplary for its detailed policy work in mapping out the roles that different institutions play in its system. The Alberta Articulation and Transfer committee (ACAT) has a well-established role, including the long-standing provision of transfer guides for the province's institutions. Transfer and articulation efforts in Alberta appear to be focused primarily on strengthening pathways from mid-skill credentials to full degree programs. Recent years show growth in the research capacities of ACAT, and cooperative initiatives with other Western provinces toward greater labour market mobility and cross-provincial credential recognition. Although ACAT engages in research, it is oriented to internal uses rather than public consumption or public policy analysis.

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