

Office of the Governing Council

October 31, 2007

Athabasca University Students' Union
Peace Hills Trust Tower
1200 10011 109 St.
Edmonton, AB T5J 3S8

Dear AU Students:

I am very pleased to learn, through your elected AUSU representatives, that you share our excitement and satisfaction at the recent Government of Alberta allocation of \$30 million in capital funding for the new Academic and Research Centre on our Athabasca campus. This level of government support does indeed, as your student leaders say, clearly demonstrate the province's strong commitment to post-secondary education and to AU students in particular.

In response to your question about how AU will use these funds to enhance student services, it is first important to emphasize that, as dedicated capital funding, this \$30 million grant is specifically earmarked to cover construction costs of the new building in Athabasca. None of the money may be diverted to operational uses. That said, however, acquisition of our new building will allow us to enhance student services in many ways.

As you may know, AU academic and support staff members have for some time now been suffering from a critical shortage of work space. Our main campus was designed to house a staff serving the academic and support needs of a 10,000 member student body. Last year, in contrast, 37,000 students enrolled at AU. In the past five years alone, our staff complement has grown by more than seven per cent annually, and finding adequate office space, meeting space, research space, etc. has grown increasingly difficult. Many staff members have been forced to work in environments that are not suited to their professional needs, and such compromises have impacts on operating efficiencies and, inevitably, if not addressed on the quality of service provided to students.

The new Academic and Research Centre will greatly strengthen Athabasca University's leadership role in addressing distance education challenges and opportunities. In addition to providing badly needed space and services for the academic and research centres of the university, including work space for 210 additional staff members, it will enhance and support increased collaboration between researchers and academics giving impetus to research into teaching practices, innovations and implementation

strategies associated with e-learning. It will also house the university's new Technology Enhanced Learning Research Institute – an Institute dedicated to using technology in learning. All of these improvements are destined to have a direct positive impact on the quality and quantity of the university's academic and research programs.

In addition, in 2010, when academic and research staff move into the new building, the space they now occupy in the existing main Athabasca campus building will be renovated to house student support staff. The altered building will be transformed into the Athabasca University Learning Centre and, in addition to expanded student service facilities, will house a significant teaching laboratory.

These are indeed exciting times for AU and for current and prospective AU students. These and other proposed capital projects as well as the planned introduction, over the next several years, of a number of new academic programs, the creation of several new research institutes, including the Technology Enhanced Learning Research Institute mentioned above, the adoption or creation of innovative educational technology in support of distance learners and the planned expansion of our student financial supports are positioning AU to both broaden its outreach and expand its services to students. Over the coming few years, AU students will benefit from a broader range of academic choices and enhanced opportunities to participate in research, and they will be supported by a broader (and deeper) range of non-academic services.

Thank you for your letter and your interest in the changes affecting your university. At AU, the focus is on you, the student, and all developments, whether they involve bricks and mortar, technological innovation or academic research, are calculated to enhance the opportunities that we can provide to you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joy P. Romero". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Joy Romero, P.Eng., MBA PM
Chair
Athabasca University Governing Council

cc: Frits Pannekoek