



NEWS RELEASE

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AUSU Parts Ways with CAUS

Union plans to focus on distance education and US accreditation issues

Athabasca University Students' Union – As of November 1, 2005, AUSU will no longer be a member of the Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS), which represents the students' unions of the four universities of Alberta.

The decision was made after several months of discussion and re-prioritizing and in no way indicates a lack of support for CAUS's goals or initiatives.

This year, Athabasca University (AU) became the first and only Canadian university accredited in the United States as a provider of post-secondary learning. As a result, AU is expecting an influx of U.S. students, many of whom will now be able to obtain additional funding for studying at AU. Additionally, AU graduates are already beginning to reap the benefits of holding a degree through a U.S. accredited institution, a credential that is now viewed very favourably by graduate departments south of the border.

AUSU wishes to devote more resources to ensuring that AU students understand the benefits of attending a U.S. accredited institution and take full advantage of the opportunities now available to them. Additionally, as the students' organization of a national university, AUSU has come to recognize that its focus often differs from that of the Alberta schools, which, appropriately, focus on provincial lobbying.

Another factor of importance this year is the increasing profile of distance education. No longer considered second-rate, a university degree from a high-quality distance university is recognized by employers and government representatives as a viable, and even a desirable credential. Athabasca University is a world leader in distance education theory and practice, offering the world's premiere master's degree in distance education and publishing the respected *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning (IRRODL)* (1). The achievements of AU have been recognized by the new Alberta Advanced Education Ministry, and distance education has become a hot topic.

AUSU believes that Athabasca University's approach to distance education can enhance the quality of post-secondary learning, and that AU graduates are skilled, independent learners with quality degrees obtained through hard work and an extraordinary level of interaction with experienced faculty. This enhanced level of interaction between students and professors elevates undergraduate learning by fostering the kind of mentorship

between professors and students that normally only occurs at the graduate level.

To promote the excellence of an Athabasca University degree, as well as the new opportunities available to AUSU members resulting from U.S. accreditation, AUSU believes that separating from CAUS will free up needed time and resources for a focused lobbying effort on behalf of AUSU's nearly 36,000 members across Canada, as well as its international members. As the students' association of the largest university in Alberta, and the fastest growing at a rate of nearly 10% per year, AUSU must remain responsive to changing trends in our member demographics and ensure that our lobbying efforts are in the best interests of the majority of these members at all times.

AUSU would like to wish the remaining CAUS members the very best, and assert its support for their initiatives over the coming year. There is no question that lower tuition, a better student loans program, and an increase in base funding for our universities benefit us all. AUSU looks forward to the possibility of working with all of the CAUS member universities, individually, or as part of CAUS, in the future. Students should watch the front page of the AUSU website -- www.ausu.org -- for updates on new lobbying strategies.

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REFERENCES

(1) - The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning (IRRODL) is available online at: <http://www.irrodl.org/>