



POLICY 9.06

POSITION POLICY

Technology and Infrastructure

POLICY INTENT

To outline the position of AUSU regarding the need for government funding for information technology (IT) at Athabasca University (AU) and for broadband internet access.

POLICY RESEARCH

Athabasca University (AU) operates predominantly as a virtual campus and offers distance education for students across Alberta, Canada, and the world. This requires advanced information technology (IT) infrastructure in order to operate efficiently for faculty, staff, and students. As a virtual campus, it also means that the university has different capital needs compared to other post-secondary institutions. While AU does maintain some physical buildings, there is a significant need for IT capital investments to implement new software and technology.

Historically, AU has not received sufficient funding to meet its IT needs especially in relation to capital expenditures. This lack of funding significantly impacts the learning experience that students have, and needs to be addressed. As a leader in distance education, Athabasca University is in a unique position to develop, implement, and maintain leading edge information technology, if they can receive appropriate funding.

The Government of Alberta provided \$184 million in 2018-19 to infrastructure projects across the province, and nearly half a billion dollars since 2015, for a wide variety of projects that ensure students have access to modern learning environments.¹ These infrastructure projects have included building and classroom modernization initiatives, new facilities, and repurposing spaces as modern learning environments among other initiatives. Yet, only \$4.9 million was dedicated to Athabasca University to implement the recommendations of the Coates Report.²

The Government of Canada has dedicated \$750 million to a Broadband Fund looking to close the technology gap in rural Canada, remote communities, and First Nations communities that struggle with broadband internet access – a major problem in Canada and among Athabasca University students.³ While most Canadians enjoy internet access equal to or better than 50 mbps download speed less than half of rural Canadians do, which represents a major barrier for any Athabasca University student studying outside a major centre. Athabasca University prides itself on the distance education model, a model where students can study anywhere and anytime but without broadband internet access that model has a significant barrier. The problem is even more acute in First Nations communities, where only 24% of those communities have internet access.⁴

Be it resolved that the Athabasca University Students' Union will advocate to the provincial and federal governments to provide sufficient funding for the research, development, and implementation of new information technologies and virtual education technologies at Athabasca University.

Be it further resolved that the Athabasca University Students' Union will advocate to the provincial and federal governments to develop and expand high speed internet connectivity to all Canadians regardless of geographic or financial barriers.

¹ 2019 Alberta Advanced Education annual report

² [Athabasca](https://news.athabascau.ca/announcements/announcement-delivering-on-imagine/) University (June 8, 2018). *Athabasca University on path to long-term success*. Retrieved from <https://news.athabascau.ca/announcements/announcement-delivering-on-imagine/>.

³ Government of Canada. *Broadband Fund: Closing the Digital Gap*. Retrieved September 3, 2021 from <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/internet/internet.htm>.

⁴ Government of Canada. *High Speed Access for All: Canada's Connectivity Strategy*. Retrieved September 3, 2021 from https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/139.nsf/eng/h_00002.html.