



POLICY 9.26

POSITION POLICY

AU Student Financial Aid Office

POLICY INTENT

To outline the position of AUSU regarding the need for an improved experience for funded Athabasca University (AU) students and increased access to financial support and advice for AU students.

POLICY RESEARCH

AUSU Council believes that the experience learners receive in relation to the registration of their courses and programs is foundational to their overall experience at Athabasca University (AU) and should be consistent across all types of funding. How a student pays for their education should not impact the level of service they receive from the institution. In addition, the method by which students register for courses should also be consistent for all students.

The implementation of a new Customer Relation Management System may result in the consistency that students deserve. However, it must also be acknowledged that the difference between the course registration experience of students who utilize student financial aid for funding of their education has historically been very different from that of students who have sufficient resources to pay for their education.

Some of the issues identified through student interactions with the AUSU office encountered by individuals who use the AU Office of Student Financial Aid¹ include

- Poor and inconsistent response times when learners contact the office;
- Minimal phone support due to perceived lack of appropriate level of human resources;
- The multiple steps necessary to apply for admission, register for a program, apply for funding, and complete the Course Registration Plan, which can be prohibitive for some learners and many do not know where to turn for guidance;
- If a learner makes an error in their Course Registration Plan, it means that they cannot begin their learning and must wait up to an additional four months due to the lengthy process;
- AU's current reactive approach to advising learners in the lengthy start-up process, coupled with the long wait times for a response to requests, which results in confusion and frustration for learners and avoidable errors; and
- A lack of transparency and inconsistencies in processing times during the registration procedure, as there is little to no communication with the learner between the time the learner submits their Course Registration Plan to the time the learner is formally registered for the courses, which results in the inability to correct any errors along the way

In comparison to the learners' experience when self-funded, whereby learners have much more control over the process and can see where they are at, the process for funded students is much more complex.

Therefore, providing all learners with the same platform for registering for courses would provide learners with greater control over this fundamental aspect of their post-secondary experience. Furthermore, additional human resources within the Office of Student Financial Aid would assist learners who require increased support throughout their funded post-secondary educational journey.

Be it resolved that the Athabasca University Students' Union will advocate to Athabasca University to provide students with sufficient resources from the Student Financial Aid Office.

Be it further resolved that the Athabasca University Students' Union will advocate to Athabasca University to improve the experience of funded students registering for their courses and to improve communications between the Office of Student Financial Aid and funded AU students.

¹ Athabasca University Students' Union. (August 2020). AUSU Member Concerns Tracking. Data in aggregate can be requested via ausu@ausu.org, not published for privacy reasons.