

2019 Alberta Provincial Election CAFA Questionnaire on Post-Secondary Education Issues

The Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations (CAFA) is a non-partisan organization comprised of the academic staff associations at the province's four comprehensive academic and research institutions - the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, the University of Lethbridge, and Athabasca University.

On behalf of its member associations, CAFA invites each of the main political parties to respond to the following brief questionnaire on post-secondary education issues.

1. Post-secondary education (PSE) will play a crucial role in helping to shape Alberta's future development.

What is your party's vision for the Alberta PSE system? Will your party make post-secondary education a priority?

Our party is committed to supporting PSE. We are interested in increasing the number of STEM grads, increasing enrollment in the trades, addressing deferred maintenance costs, boosting post-secondary enrollment and making post-secondary more accessible to low income Albertans.

2. Albertans continue to support public investment in post-secondary education despite the province's current budget challenges. As long as provincial funding remains uncertain from year to year, Alberta post-secondary institutions are unable to make long-term plans for the future.

Will your party commit to providing stable, predictable, multi-year funding that will allow PSE institutions to plan effectively for the future?

The Alberta Liberals understand how important it stable and predictable funding is. Optimal planning requires stability and knowledge. We will committed to providing stable, predictable multi-year funding that means the needs of PSE institutions.

3. The real costs of delivering world-class teaching and research at Alberta universities continue to increase faster than the rate of CPI inflation. Given the relative inelasticity of their revenues, the long-term sustainability of these institutions has been called into question.

Will your party commit to increasing funding for the Alberta universities going forward to keep pace with the rising costs of delivering world-class teaching and research? How does your party plan to ensure the long-term sustainability of these institutions?

We recognize the immensely important role our post-secondary institutions play in all aspects of our future. We will work with PSE institutions to determine sustainable funding models that match rising costs.

4. Despite efforts to eliminate barriers to access to PSE, post-secondary participation rates in Alberta remain comparatively low, especially in the critical 18 – 34 age group. Indigenous and rural learners, in particular, continue to be underrepresented in our system.

What measures does your party propose to take to reduce barriers to access and to increase participation in PSE across the province - especially among groups that are currently underrepresented - while preserving the quality of the system?

We support increasing the number of scholarships and financial supports available to marginalized and underrepresented groups including persons with disabilities, Indigenous people and low-income Albertans.

5. The barrier to access to PSE most often cited by Albertans is cost. One way the provincial government has attempted to limit the burden on students and their families is through a tuition freeze, which has been extended to cover the 2019-20 academic year. While students have welcomed it, the tuition freeze will put more pressure on the budgets of already hard-pressed post-secondary institutions if the provincial government does not backfill the loss in tuition revenue.

Will your party commit to backfilling to the post-secondary institutions the loss of revenue due to the tuition freeze for 2019-20?

At present time we have no plans to backfill revenue loss from the tuition freeze but moving forward we will ensure their is fair funding and revenue for PSE institutions.

6. In recent years, successive provincial governments have taken steps to streamline and repurpose research funding to ensure that research undertaken at Alberta universities aligns more closely with a set of 'provincial priorities' dictated by the government. This deliberate attempt to reshape publicly- funded academic research to serve particular goals, such as economic diversification, raises questions about the independence and future direction of research at our universities.

Does your party support ongoing efforts to align publicly-funded research carried

out at Alberta's universities more closely with 'provincial priorities' determined by the government? Should the provincial government be setting the research agenda in our universities?

We support giving PSE institutions full freedom in determining their research policies. It is vitally important that research be free of political interference.

7. The pressure to turn out 'job ready' graduates in areas of high labour market demand, and the concentration of resources in the STEM disciplines, has led some to question the value of the 'liberal arts education'. Yet demand for liberal arts programs at our post-secondary institutions remains strong, and there is much evidence to show the crucial importance to our society of studies in the social sciences, humanities, and fine arts.

Does your party recognize the important role of liberal arts education in building the kind of society, and the kind of future, Albertans want? What steps will your party take to ensure that liberal arts education at our post-secondary institutions is properly supported?

We recognize that liberal arts education is a vital and important part of our PSE system. We will maintain funding to liberal arts programs.

8. Collaboration among post-secondary institutions is one of the guiding principles of the Alberta PSE system. With the recent extension to two community colleges of the power to grant their own four-year degrees, however, it would appear that the Campus Alberta concept is dead, and so-called 'credential creep' will continue. Does Alberta need more undergraduate universities? Does the province have the financial resources required to support these universities? Is collaboration between institutions still a viable option?

Does your party support recent changes to the PSLA that give the Minister of Advanced Education the authority to extend to community colleges the power to grant their own degrees, as a first step towards full university status? What is your party's vision for collaboration within Campus Alberta?

Credential Creep and Campus Alberta are both complicated issues. We cannot commit to a position at this time. We will commit to further study and consultation and welcome input from all PSE stakeholders.

9. Disbursements from Access to the Future Fund (AFF), a fund with the Heritage Trust Fund, have been frozen in recent years, as part of a strategy to reduce the provincial deficit. In the

past, the AFF provided much-needed funds to support innovation within the post-secondary system and to match donations to post-secondary institutions from private donors. At a time when institutional budgets are stretched, and funds for innovation are at a premium, allocations from the AFF should be resumed without delay.

Will your party commit to the immediate resumption of allocations from the Access to the Future Fund to support innovation across the post-secondary system?

We will commit to a resumption within the next 2 fiscal years. The AFF was an investment in the future, which was the purpose of the Heritage Fund. We support putting an end to use of the Heritage Fund as crutch for reducing the deficit.

10. Recent changes to Alberta's labour legislation failed to address a longstanding anomaly affecting the academic staff at Alberta's public post-secondary institutions – namely, the power of the boards of governors of these institutions, under the terms of the Post-secondary Learning Act, to choose which employees or groups of employees are designated academic staff members, and thus members of the academic staff associations which bargain with boards on their behalf. While a designation, de-designation, or failure to designate may now be appealed to the ALRB, the unique power of the boards, as employers, to determine the membership of the academic staff associations – that is, the other side in bargaining – cannot be allowed to stand.

Will your party commit to amending the PSLA to remove the statutory power of post-secondary boards to designate and de-designate individual employees and groups of employees as academic staff members?

We have committed to in depth consultations on Employment Standards and Labour Laws. That will include consultation on this particular issue before we reach a definitive decision.