

# Rebuilding Alberta's Post-secondary Education (PSE) system: Funding model considerations to future-proof PSE

Presented to The Mintz Expert Panel by:

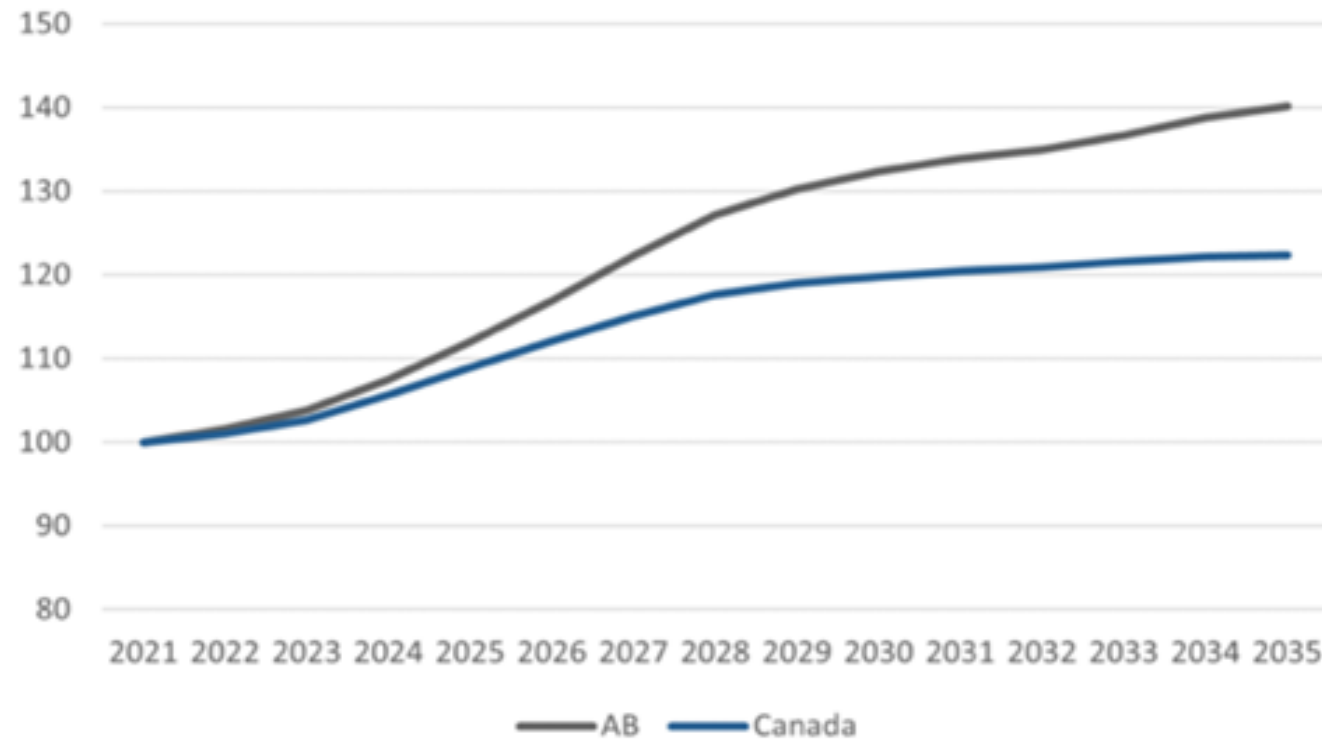
The Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations (CAFA)  
The Alberta Colleges and Institutes Faculties Association (ACIFA)

May 7, 2025



# Current Status: High Risk

## Population Age 18-21, Canada vs. Alberta, 2021-2035\*



**Access Crisis:**  
Alberta's PSE  
sector is *not*  
*prepared* for the  
anticipated surge  
in student  
enrolments from  
2025 – 2035.

# Risk Factor 1

## Significant budget cuts

### Changes in Provincial Transfers to Institutions by Province – 2012 to 2023\*

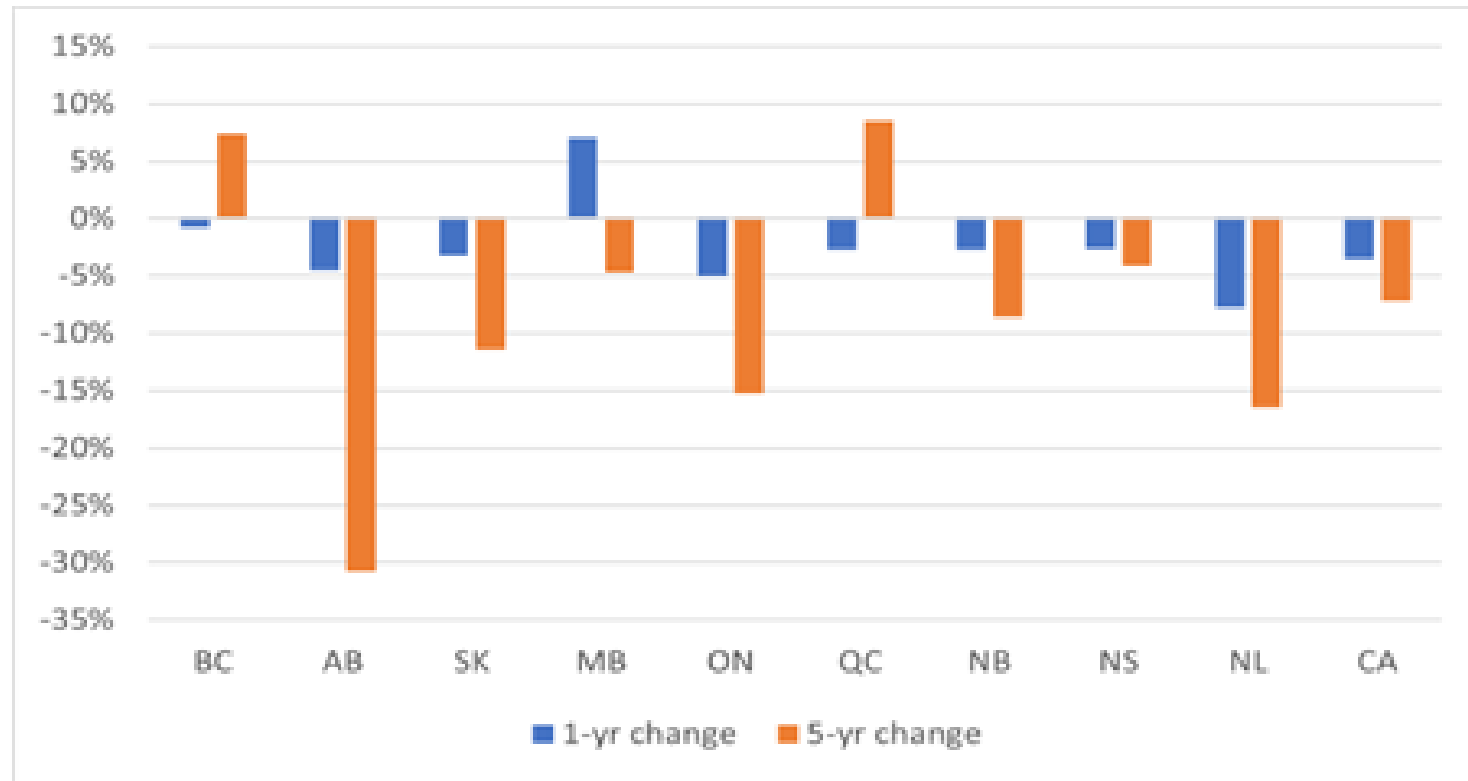


**Alberta PSE funding cut by 31% between 2019-20 and 2023-24.**

# Risk Factor 1 (continued)

## Significant budget cuts

### 1- and 5-Year Change in Budgeted Transfers to PSE Institutions by Province, 2023\*



## Risk Factor 2

# Unpredictable PSE funding

The current model is not conducive to future planning.

- Base Operating Grants fluctuate year over year.
- Some IMA metrics reflect factors outside PSI control:
  - Enrolment numbers can fluctuate with population growth or availability of high-paying energy sector jobs that don't require prior training.
  - Graduate employment is susceptible to economic cycles, and careers often take years to establish.
  - When At Risk allotments are not met, the focus turns to past analysis instead of future planning.
  - Rural colleges and universities can't scale up or down with short-term budget cuts.

# Risk Factor 3

## Unsustainable international student revenues

### Lethbridge College and U of L react to international student cap



polytechnic, formerly Red Deer College, is facing a \$10 million deficit alongside a 65 per cent reduction in international students. (Heather Marcoux/CBC News)

### Changes to study permits are forcing Alberta PSIs to make big cuts

Alberta post-secondary institutions are facing difficult decisions to cut or suspend programs following changes to international student study permits.



Students walk across Olds College campus amid the frost-lined trees in recent weeks. | Doug Collie MVP Staff

### Central Alberta college losing \$5.1 million in funding due to fewer international students

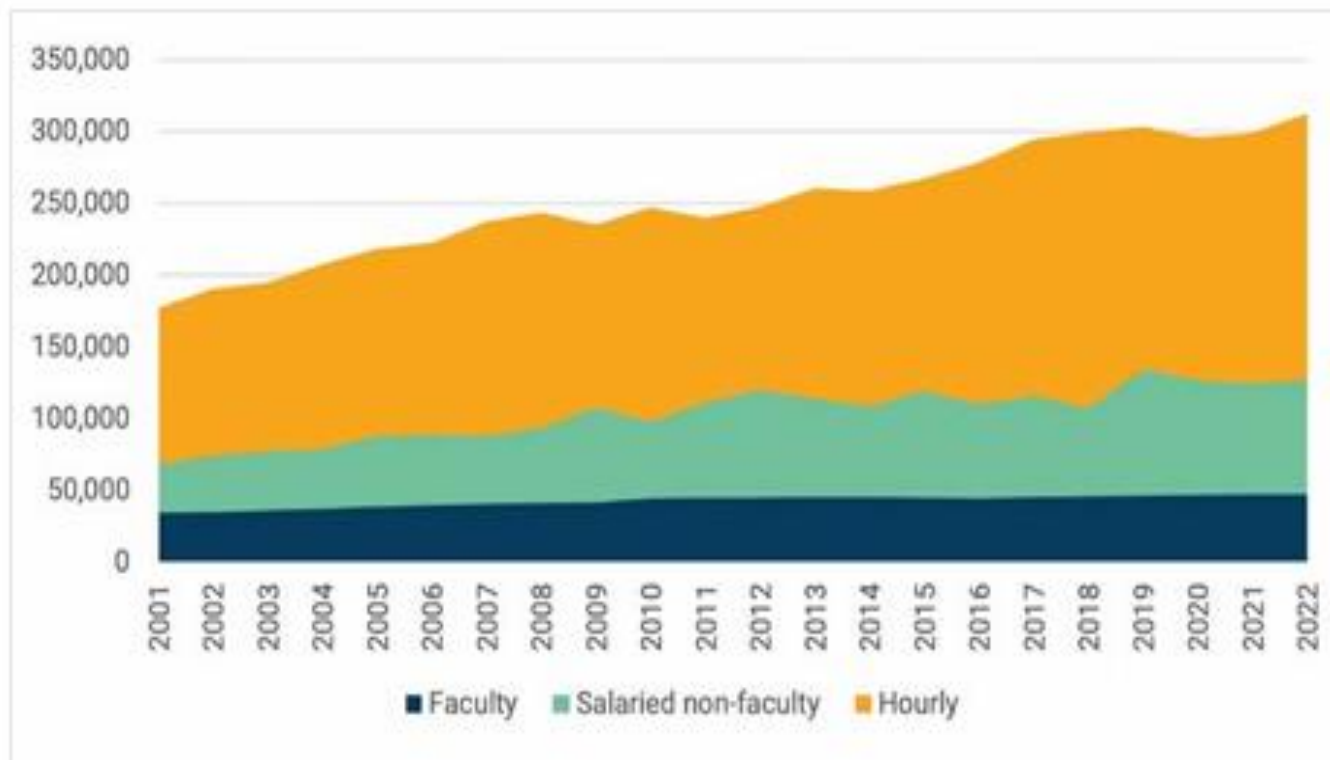
Olds College is suspending three programs due to lower international student enrolment and smaller funding grants from the provincial government in recent years.

**Reduced international student revenues also result in operational and academic deficits for domestic students**

# Risk Factor 4

## Challenging faculty workloads and work conditions

**Total Staff by Status – Canadian Universities 2001-2022\***



- Post-pandemic learners need more attention, special accommodations.
- AI use demands both greater vigilance and opens up entirely new fields.
- Over-reliance on short-term academic faculty suppresses long-term academic quality.
- Increasing faculty retirements
- Public PSIs subject to more regulations than private PSIs, resulting in more administrators, fewer frontline faculty.
- Gaps between collective bargaining agreements and market realities.

# Alberta faces a choice.

## Maintain current state of PSE:

Unpredictable funding model, unsustainable KPIs, continued budget cuts, programs closing, overregulation, maxed out faculty unprepared to serve a 40%+ demographic bump in 18-21-year-olds (who will then access PSE elsewhere).

## Invest to re-invigorate PSE:

Predictable funding, reduced red tape, realistic goals, programs delivering **both** short-term market skills **and** long-term adaptive skills, work conditions that attract top research and teaching faculty, the #1 PSE choice for thousands of new 18-21-year-old Albertans.

# Recommendation 1A:

## Preserve what works, remove what doesn't.

### What works:

1. Preserve and protect free collective bargaining between institutions, and faculty and staff unions to make Alberta competitive in attracting and retaining top teaching and research faculty.
2. Unleash Alberta's research capacity: reduce regulation around research oversight.
  - "Academic freedom in research is the tool faculty use to do their jobs, just as 3D modelling software is the tool engineers use to do their jobs."
3. Re-invest in post-secondary operational grants to reduce overreliance on international students. Negotiate consistent, multi-year funding with the federal government through initiatives such as labour market transfer agreements (LMTAs) and/or invest in Foundational Learning Assistance Programs (FLAPs) with provincial funding alone.

## Recommendation 1B:

# Preserve what works, remove what doesn't.

### 4. Sustainable Rural Colleges and Communities

- Rural colleges = strong heritage with history stretching back 100+ years.
- Succession planning in agriculture – rural colleges support successive generations to stay and thrive in farming.
- PSE has a significant impact on sustainability of both rural colleges and the communities they are located in and serve, particularly Indigenous communities.
- Rural colleges play substantial applied research roles supporting unique infrastructure (farms, breweries, meat labs, greenhouses, vet stations etc.) around the subject areas they serve.
- Fewer education options, fewer program offerings force students to go elsewhere to get the training they want & need...and may even abandon pursuing PSE.
- Funding caps pit bigger institutions *against* smaller ones as they each have to compete for a limited pot of dollar support.

# Recommendation 1C:

## Preserve what works, remove what doesn't.

### What doesn't work:

- Performance Based Funding (PBF)
  - Research indicates that PBF Models like Alberta's IMAs and At Risk Targets are ineffective drivers of academic quality or research innovation:

Measuring research output with an exclusive or excessive emphasis on performance metrics neglects the diversity and totality of scholarly activity.\*

The imperative to maximize Research Excellence Framework (REF) scores increasingly drives how research itself is conducted, affecting what is studied, how it is funded and where it is published. It also influences academic hiring and promotion decisions, with candidates' "REFability" often trumping all other considerations. What began...as a "light touch" periodic appraisal has spawned internal university bureaucracies that continually monitor and increasingly seek to manage individuals' research. +
  - At Risk and IMA allocations will leave Alberta's institutions vulnerable to funding cuts, even as enrolment levels are starting to surge.

\*"Performance Metrics: CAUT Policy Statement," Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2018. Accessed online 2 October 2019: <https://www.caut.ca/content/performance-metrics>  
+Sayer, Derek. Rank Hypocrisies: The Insult of the REF, Sage, 2015.

## Recommendation 2: Commit to “Both/And” PSE Funding

The criteria for Targeted Enrolment Envelope (TEE) funding has a bias against Arts and Humanities programs. Why it matters:

- Employers seek graduates with the adaptive skills imparted by Arts and Humanities education:
  - Creativity, critical thinking, problem assessment, complex information processing, communication.
  - Demand for adaptive skills is projected to grow by 19 per cent in the U.S. and 14 per cent in Europe by 2030.\*
- Align funding to support **both** skills tied to short-term market conditions **and** long-term adaptive skills always in demand across sectors.
  - E.g., collapsed demand for coders vs. Prompt Engineers

Align targets around realistic program completion timelines (5-6 years vs. 3).

\* <https://academicmatters.ca/the-ugly-side-of-performance-based-funding-for-universities-2/>

## Recommendation 3:

# Invest in making Alberta research a global gold standard

- Innovation can't be predicted but can be cultivated by investing in varied research.
- To ensure international credibility, and attract alternate investors and commercialization, make research:
  - Arm's length from industry and government (although it may respond to priorities of both).
  - Developed, monitored, and conducted by qualified faculty.
  - Peer reviewed.
- Ensure rural colleges are part of the research picture: they play substantial applied research roles around the subject areas they serve.
- Integrate an arm's length, peer review grounded Alberta Research Agency as a PSE Centre of Excellence.

# Next Steps

CAFA and ACIFA thanks The Mintz Expert Panel for inviting input from our two associations, representing over 5,500 continuing and contract faculty members.

We suggest a second round of stakeholder engagements on the Panel's draft recommendations (prior to finalizing) from:

- Students: College, polytechnic and university
- PSE Student Services staff
- Rural and Urban Municipalities and Community Members
- Indigenous communities and Indigenous learners
- Online learners and researchers (Athabasca University)
- Employers
- And, of course, faculty.

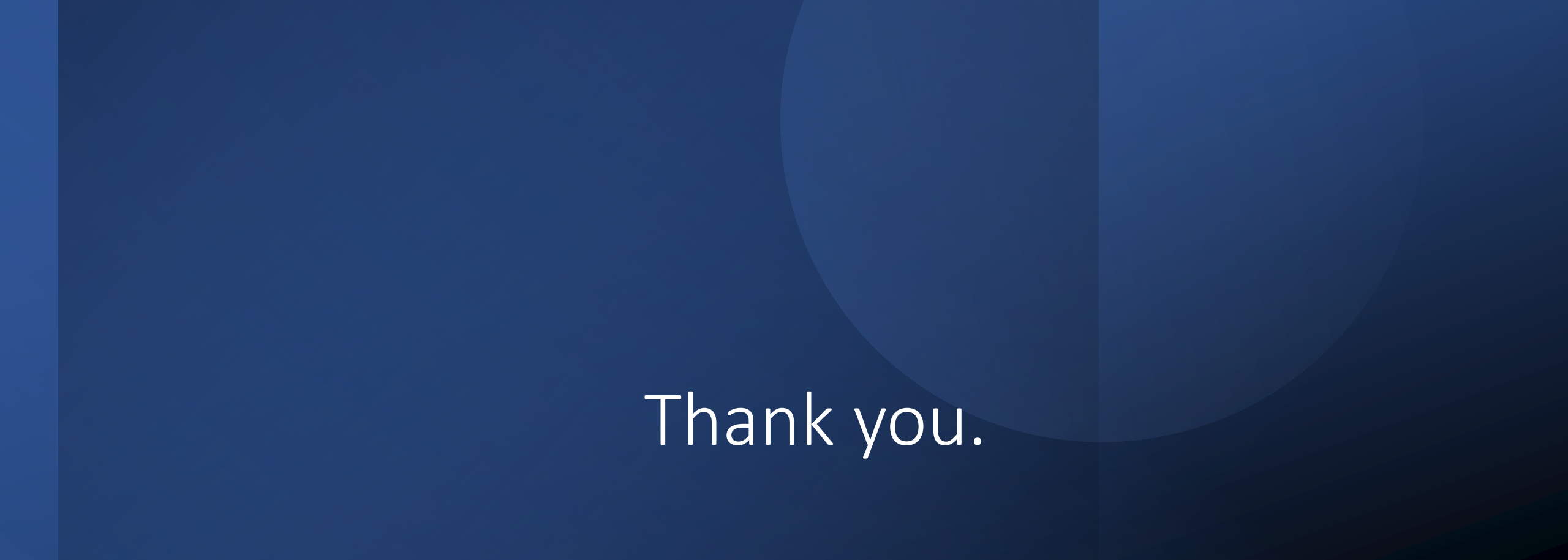
# About CAFA and ACIFA

## Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations

- Federation of university academic staff associations in Alberta.
- Represents the interests of four dues-paying faculty associations (AUFA, GMUFA, MRFA, ULFA)
- Coordinates provincial activity across PSE working with ACIFA, TUCFA, and AASUA
- Members represent 3,000 academic staff.
- Objectives: To promote the quality of education in the province and well-being of Alberta universities and their academic staff.

## Alberta Colleges and Institutes Faculties Association

- Representative body for college and polytechnic academic staff associations in Alberta.
- 13 member associations from Alberta University of the Arts, Northwestern Polytechnic, Keyano College, Lakeland College, Lethbridge Polytechnic, Medicine Hat College, NAIT, NorQuest College, Northern Lake College, Olds College, Portage College, Red Deer Polytechnic, and SAIT.
- Member associations represent 7,000 academic staff at more than 20 communities across the province.
- Objectives: Supporting labour relations, advocating for quality education, facilitating collaboration, and representing members provincially and nationally.



# Thank you.

CAFA and ACIFA have prepared a comprehensive report that expands on all the points in this presentation. The Panel will receive our report next week.