CAFA Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations

GenAI in Alberta Post-Secondary Education: Pursuing Opportunity while Protecting Academic Integrity

October 2, 2026

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To whom it may concern,

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has precipitated a “sea change” in the development, delivery, quality, and perceived value of higher education everywhere. The impacts of AI on the way faculty teach and conduct research, how and what students learn, and the aptitudes that graduates bring to future workplaces, are extensive and unprecedented.

Earlier this year, Alberta’s Ministry of Advanced Education convened an Expert Panel on AI to larify how AI will affect the post-secondary sector. (It is worth noting that the panel itself included industry representatives, technology entrepreneurs, and one faculty member from the University of Calgary medical school.) The Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations (CAFA) was invited to meet with the Expert Panel in September. We presented our perspectives on the opportunities and challenges of AI, which we believe warrant nothing short of the best thinking and concerted attention of government, institutions, faculty, students, industry, and the public.

This Whitepaper on Generative AI is the comprehensive, research-grounded basis for our presentation to the government. It outlines critical considerations for the thoughtful, strategic, and responsible integration of GenAI in post-secondary classrooms, labs, student support spaces, and administrator boardrooms. It also offers five recommendations for establishing Alberta as an exemplar for understanding and wisely integrating AI in academic practice.

What is decided now can affect the bedrock of higher education in Alberta for decades to come. I invite you to get informed, and join the conversation.

Sincerely,

Lee Easton

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Premise

The Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations (CAFA) asserts that Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in Alberta post-secondary education (PSE) will succeed or fail to the extent that faculty have primary authority in determining when GenAI contributes to learning or research and when it interferes with them. Enacting measures to ensure the governance, development, implementation, and oversight of GenAI in higher education are grounded in professional academic standards rather than vendor offerings or ministerial guidance, will keep post-secondary teaching and research high quality, evidence-based and verifiable, and viable across a broad range of potential applications, including the workplace.

CAFA perceives four critical considerations for developing a successful and sustainable AI framework that works for Alberta post-secondary institutions and advances provincial economic and societal priorities:

1) The primacy of Academic Freedom
2) Augmentation over Automation: Human-centred AI
3) Faculty-led AI Integration
4) Indigenous Ways of Being and Proper Consultation
5) Sufficient Funding to Build and Maintain an Exemplary Model

Each is explored below.

Critical Consideration 1: The Primacy of Academic Freedom

Darian-Smith (2025) argues that political pressures on higher education increasingly erode institutional autonomy by reframing scholarship as merely an extension of individual free speech rather than a structured, professional practice grounded in expertise and accountability. While organizations such as Scholars at Risk and the Coalition for Academic Freedom in the Americas (2024) emphasize that academic freedom overlaps with expression, they stress that it is fundamentally distinct because it is embedded in the norms of research, teaching, and disciplinary standards, all of which require scholarly rigour and responsible responses. Extending this framing, the European Parliament (Maassen et al., 2023) highlights that academic freedom also carries a broader civic responsibility, positioning universities as contributors to democratic resilience and responses to social crises.

Within this environment, Rasheed et al. (2025) identify growing risks associated with the use of AI in educational settings, particularly how algorithmic bias can reinforce systemic inequities and disproportionately affect certain student groups (Nguyen, 2020). At the same time, AI-based proctoring systems raise significant privacy concerns due to their reliance on intrusive data collection through webcams, microphones, and personal devices (Collins & Hodge, 2021), while broader AI monitoring practices introduce risks related to data security breaches, unauthorized

access, and the normalization of surveillance cultures that may suppress creativity and openness in learning environments.

Similarly, Alhafidh (2025) notes that poorly designed AI governance frameworks may unintentionally restrict legitimate academic expression, as highlighted by the OSCE (2020), while also warning that AI systems often reproduce embedded historical and cultural biases within their training data (Singh, 2023).

Institutional principles, such as those articulated by Mount Royal University, reinforce that responsibility for academic integrity must remain with individuals rather than technological tools, requiring that any AI use be properly authorized, verified, and cited.

Specific to universities, Johnson, Johnson, and McCurdy (2024) emphasize that academic freedom is essential for enabling critical inquiry, challenging dominant paradigms, and safeguarding truth-seeking scholarship. They further argue that sustaining these values in the AI era requires coordinated responsibility across the entire academic ecosystem, including researchers, institutions, funders, policymakers, developers, and the public, with peer review continuing to serve as a critical safeguard against the risks posed by AI-generated content.

No academic staff member should be required to use a particular AI system in teaching or research, or be disadvantaged in workload assignment, evaluation, tenure, or promotion for declining to do so. Likewise, academic staff should be free to use AI tools where appropriate from a pedagogical or scholarly standpoint, subject to applicable law, research ethics, privacy, security, intellectual-property obligations, and collegially approved academic standards. Institutional approval should be required only where use engages institutional systems or procurement, student or employee information, confidential or restricted research data, or comparable legal and security obligations (Colonescu, 2026).

A case in point: The Queen's University Digital Bargaining Report underscores the importance of preserving faculty autonomy in relation to AI adoption, including the right to refuse AI use for reasons tied to equity, Indigenous sovereignty, intellectual property, or privacy. It also stresses that refusal should not negatively affect evaluation outcomes and affirms core principles that AI should improve rather than degrade working conditions, that academic freedom includes the right not to use AI, that AI must not reproduce systemic discrimination, and that collective bargaining structures must protect vulnerable academic workers while upholding broader collective rights.

Critical Consideration 2:
Augmentation over Automation in Human-Centred AI

Rajabi, Taghipour, Cukierman, and Doleck (2023) caution that increased reliance on ChatGPT may inadvertently weaken the critical thinking and hands-on learning experiences that instructors intentionally design into coursework. They also note that reduced student

dependence on instructors for clarification and feedback can limit informal, ongoing interactions that often serve as important opportunities to assess student understanding and learning progress.

Guambe et al. also emphasize that while AI can provide useful support in higher education—particularly through research assistance and content generation—it fundamentally lacks the contextual awareness, empathy, and nuanced judgment required for effective teaching. As a result, core educational functions such as emotional support, motivation, and mentorship remain distinctly human strengths, with educators uniquely positioned to foster critical thinking, creativity, and responsible reasoning in ways AI cannot replicate.

Vieriu and Petrea (2025) underscore this distinction by arguing that AI is best positioned as a supplementary tool that supports explanations rather than fully completing tasks on behalf of students. They further underscore that meaningful human interaction and emotional nuance remain beyond the capabilities of current AI systems, making them essential components of effective teaching and learning.

From a policy perspective, Miao and Holmes (2021) stress that AI must remain under human control and function to strengthen the capacities of both students and educators rather than replace them. They emphasize the need for AI systems that are responsible, transparent, equitable, and subject to continuous evaluation, while also prioritizing human interaction and democratic educational values over efficiency-driven models. Their guidance further highlights the importance of addressing fairness, accountability, bias, privacy, and human rights within AI policy, ensuring that people remain central in the design and governance of educational technologies.

Expanding on this human-centred approach, Arshad et al. (2025) argue that effective AI systems must prioritize well-being, trust, and skill development over efficiency alone, with AI serving as an augmentative tool rather than a replacement for human judgment. They stress that human oversight is especially critical in high-stakes contexts such as education, where accountability cannot be delegated to opaque or “black-box” systems. Accordingly, primary responsibility must remain with human designers and institutions, while transparency is essential for fostering trust and enabling critical engagement with AI outputs. They further conclude that robust governance requires comprehensive and responsible frameworks, regulation, and meaningful stakeholder participation.

Similarly, Fui-Hoon Nah et al. (2023) emphasize that human-centred AI must be grounded in empathy, transparency, responsible governance, and the development of strong AI literacy, ensuring users are equipped to engage critically with AI systems rather than passively relying on them.

Kolhatin (2025) extends this argument by framing AI as a force for transformation rather than replacement within education. In this model, educators evolve into new roles such as learning

designers, cognitive coaches, algorithm auditors, and learning analytics interpreters, all of which reinforce the continued necessity of human expertise. This approach positions technology as an enabler of educational practice while highlighting the importance of accountable and responsible frameworks that balance innovation with humanity, privacy, equity, and protection. It also calls for broad, multi-sector governance involving government, academia, industry, civil society, and media to ensure responsible implementation.

The Australian Framework for Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education (Lodge et al., 2025) reinforces these principles through its emphasis on human-centred education, inclusion, accountability, Indigenous knowledges, adaptive skills development, and evidence-informed innovation. It further highlights the need for work-integrated learning to evolve so that students are prepared for AI-enhanced professional environments.

Of particular relevance to unionized faculty, the Queen's University Digital Bargaining Report raises concerns about faculty intellectual property being used to train AI systems that may ultimately replace academic labour. It also asserts that human evaluation—not AI-generated summaries or automated detection tools—must remain central to disciplinary processes in order to preserve fairness and academic integrity.

Johnston (2026) highlights the growing strain placed on post-secondary institutions, noting that they have underestimated the workload associated with unauthorized AI use and the labour required for AI monitoring and enforcement. This is occurring alongside broader structural pressures, including automation and austerity-driven staffing reductions, which are increasing demands on remaining employees and intensifying concerns about workload sustainability.

Critical Consideration 3: Faculty-led AI Integration

Vieriu and Petrea (2025) find that student experiences with AI in academic contexts are marked by both opportunity and concern. Nearly half of surveyed students expressed worry about receiving inaccurate AI-generated responses, while others raised concerns that reliance on such tools could weaken critical thinking skills and foster dependency on technology. At the same time, students also reported clear benefits, including faster studying, clearer explanations, more effective summaries, and improved understanding of complex concepts through simplification.

In response to these mixed outcomes, Vieriu and Petrea (2025) emphasize the need for structured institutional safeguards. They recommend comprehensive AI training for both educators and students to ensure informed use of these tools, alongside the development of validation standards and clear guidelines to prevent overreliance. Also highlighted: longitudinal research to better understand the long-term academic impacts of AI integration, plus the importance of strengthening privacy and bias protections.

For instance, colleges and universities could, at a minimum, cover institutionally managed accounts accessible by faculty, students and staff; privacy, security, data retention, data residency, and data governance protections; protection of intellectual property in course materials, student work and unpublished research; and AI training developed jointly by faculty, librarians, privacy specialists, Indigenous representatives, and instructional support staff (Colonescu, 2026).

Complementing this perspective, Miao and Holmes (2021) stress that effective AI integration in education must begin with pilot initiatives grounded in teachers' real classroom needs. AI may be useful for low-stakes formative feedback, scheduling, triage, translation, or improving access, provided that it does not eliminate qualified human availability or final responsibility (Colonescu, 2026). Miao and Holmes contend that AI should function as an assistance to, rather than a substitute for core teaching practices, reinforcing rather than displacing the role of educators. This requires providing teachers with clear, evidence-based guidance and robust criteria for evaluating AI tools, while also ensuring that institutional decision-making continues to recognize and preserve trust in teacher expertise and professional authority.

Additionally, Miao and Holmes emphasize that AI implementation must be assessed not only in terms of efficiency but also in relation to its broader pedagogical and social impacts. This includes careful consideration of how AI affects human interaction, educational values, and the development of higher-order thinking skills. They also suggest that training and capacity-building should occur prior to deployment, ensuring that educators are prepared to engage with AI tools in ways that are pedagogically sound and ethically responsible.

When it comes to institutional governance, the Queen's University Digital Bargaining Report highlights several key considerations. In relation to employment and hiring equity, it notes that AI systems can reproduce systemic bias and may disadvantage protected groups if used in recruitment or evaluation processes. It therefore calls for collective agreements that restrict AI use in personnel decisions, safeguard the right to refuse – or to use – AI, and ensure that equity committees review AI systems prior to implementation. It also emphasizes that faculty workload standards should not be based on assumptions of AI use, recognizing the risk of unfairly normalizing increased productivity expectations.

In fact, more sustained instructor-student interaction, may well appreciate in value in the era of GenAI. It is important that institutional policymakers and collective bargaining teams recognize and reasonably reflect the time required for student attendance and identity verification, supervised activities, individual consultations, oral checks, and oral examinations. As these are simpler to enable in smaller classes, measures such as adjusted teaching assignments, instructional design support, and lower course enrolment caps may warrant consideration (Colonescu, 2026).

The report also flags the significant privacy risks associated with expanding AI and digital infrastructure in higher education. It warns that broad data collection practices can threaten both

privacy and academic freedom, particularly when institutional data is stored or processed through US-based cloud services that may expose it to foreign access. As alternatives, it recommends exploring privacy-focused platforms such as Nextcloud or LibreOffice, while ensuring that faculty are fully informed about the risks associated with mandated digital systems.

Broader institutional responses are beginning to emerge. Usher (2025) notes that universities are increasingly supporting “AI champions” by providing time release, targeted funding, professional development opportunities, and instructional design support to encourage experimentation and innovation in teaching practice. This reflects an effort to build internal capacity while managing the rapid uptake of AI technologies across academic settings.

However, Cowan (2023) cautions that structural inequalities within the academic workforce may limit meaningful engagement with these tools. Faculty precarity and inequity, she argues, reduce the time, stability, and institutional support necessary for thoughtful experimentation and critique. As a result, she emphasizes that faculty must remain actively involved in shaping decisions related to curriculum design, assessment practices, and the selection of learning technologies in order to ensure that academic governance remains grounded in academic expertise.

Johnston (2026) also notes that institutional data systems increasingly track employee behaviour across campuses, generating detailed insights into workplace patterns that could be used to frame operational cuts or restructuring decisions. In response, she argues that unions must negotiate protections covering the entire data lifecycle—from collection through to deletion—and ensure robust protections for worker data. Central to her argument is the need for ongoing consultation and co-governance structures that give all staff – both academic and administrative – meaningful influence over how workplace technologies are selected, implemented, and regulated.

She may be referring to shared governance – often the most advisable approach in initiatives that span both academic and administrative jurisdictions. For instance, while faculty must retain primary authority over the pedagogical and scholarly use of GenAI, operational aspects – such as software procurement, data privacy, security, and employment – could be jointly managed by administrative staff in conjunction with academic staff associations, president’s councils and other affected academic groups.

Critical Consideration 4:
Indigenous Ways of Being and Proper Consultation

Quince, Andersen, and Day (2025) emphasize that cultural safety is not an optional feature but a foundational requirement in the design and deployment of generative AI systems. When these systems fail to account for Indigenous cultural contexts, they risk censoring Indigenous voices and reinforcing existing inequities in digital and educational spaces. In response, the authors

underscore the principle of Indigenous data sovereignty, which affirms the right of Indigenous peoples to determine how their data is collected, accessed, used, and shared. This perspective reframes data governance as a matter of self-determination rather than technical management. Accordingly, they argue that Indigenous peoples must not only be consulted but positioned as leaders and co-designers throughout the entire AI lifecycle. Institutions, in turn, carry a clear responsibility to actively support Indigenous-led AI initiatives, ensure meaningful participation in governance structures, protect data sovereignty rights, and embed cultural safety training across all levels of implementation.

Building on this foundation, Lewis et al. (2020) argue that responsible AI development requires sustained partnership with specific Indigenous communities rather than generalized or symbolic consultation. They stress that AI systems should be shaped by principles of relationality, reciprocity, and accountability, ensuring that technologies reflect and respect the communities they affect. Indigenous protocols, they contend, should not sit alongside governance frameworks but actively guide them, shaping how AI is designed, deployed, and evaluated. This also requires designers to critically examine their own cultural assumptions and actively work to reduce embedded biases within technological systems. Importantly, responsibility must extend across the entire technology stack—from infrastructure to application—while Indigenous communities retain authority over how their data is collected, used, and governed.

Colonescu (2026) notes that some knowledge should not be digitized, disclosed, or used as training material at all. As such, consultation should not become a procedural substitute for Indigenous authority, consent, or co-governance regarding their data, where these are required.

Expanding on these principles within a higher education context, Lewis, Whaanga, and Yolgörmez (2025) propose that AI integration in Alberta post-secondary education should be grounded in a deliberate synthesis of Western research methodologies and Indigenous epistemologies. Rather than privileging one knowledge system over another, they advocate for an approach that values both as complementary. Central to this vision are the OCAP and CARE frameworks, which assert Indigenous ownership, control, access, and stewardship of data, ensuring that data governance aligns with Indigenous rights and priorities rather than external institutional interests. The British Columbia health care system's references to "two-eyed seeing" in healthcare delivery, which aims to strike a balance between Western protocols and Indigenous perspectives (Wieman & Malhotra, 2023) is one possible model to consider.

Similarly, Deckker and Sumanasekara (2025) identify persistent gaps in representation and participation, noting that Indigenous peoples remain largely absent from both the development and operational phases of AI systems. This exclusion raises serious concerns about equity, legitimacy, and cultural safety in technological design. To address these risks, they emphasize the importance of embedding robust data protection mechanisms that safeguard against unauthorized access and misuse. They also argue that AI systems must be explicitly aligned with Indigenous governance standards for cultural data, helping to prevent outcomes that replicate patterns of "modern digital colonialism" through technological means.

In a complementary analysis, Datta and Starlight (2024) highlight the transformative potential of bringing Indigenous and Western knowledge systems into meaningful dialogue. Rather than treating these as separate or competing frameworks, they suggest that integration can foster collaboration, dismantle stereotypes, and build relationships grounded in reciprocity and trust. This approach is closely aligned with broader decolonization efforts and contributes to cultural revitalization by recognizing the value of multiple epistemologies in shaping knowledge production and institutional practice.

Tamtik (2023) further develops this idea by identifying shared principles between Indigenous and Western understandings of innovation. In both traditions, innovation is deeply connected to creativity, understood as the ability to recombine existing knowledge in ways that produce meaningful, novel, and beneficial outcomes. Indigenous perspectives, however, place particular emphasis on interconnectedness—across knowledge systems, ecosystems, peoples, and places—as a guiding principle for understanding innovation. At the same time, Western scholarship increasingly echoes similar ideas through the growing emphasis on interdisciplinarity in higher education, suggesting a convergence of perspectives around the value of crossing disciplinary and conceptual boundaries.

Langeveldt and Pietersen (2024) extend this discussion by calling for a decolonizing approach to AI that actively identifies and mitigates algorithmic bias while ensuring diverse representation in system design and development. They argue that AI should be intentionally designed to support historically marginalized learners rather than reproduce existing inequities. This requires a deeper interrogation of the assumptions and power structures embedded within AI systems, including the integration of Indigenous knowledge systems and perspectives into design processes. In addition, they emphasize the importance of involving local communities directly in AI development and deployment to ensure that systems are culturally appropriate, socially responsive, and responsive to the needs of those they are intended to serve.

Furthermore, Miron and Kenth (2026) caution that uncritical engagement with generative AI introduces potentially significant risks related to privacy, bias, surveillance, accessibility, and informational accuracy. As a result, they argue that AI literacy must be treated as a foundational competency alongside traditional academic literacies. However, they also stress that AI literacy cannot be limited to technical proficiency alone. Instead, it must include the capacity for critical evaluation and a deeper understanding of the broader social, ethical, and societal implications of generative AI, ensuring that users are equipped not only to use these tools but to question and contextualize them responsibly.

Critical Consideration 5:
Sufficient Funding to Sustain an Exemplary Model

Sufficient Funding to Build and Maintain an Exemplary Model

In a presentation to the Mount Royal Faculty Association, faculty members stressed that a properly planned and implemented AI framework for Alberta PSIs requires a commitment to significant and sustained funding; this is not something that can be achieved “off the side of someone’s desk”. In fact, the responsible integration of AI at the post-secondary level requires a commitment to the renewal rather than merely revision, of the curriculum at every institution.

New methods of learning evaluation must be supported by evidence-based guidelines on the most efficient ways to implement them; new considerations for research, regardless of the field of study, calls for authentic engagement with researchers to develop protocols that anticipate and reflect the widest possible applications of AI; students, faculty, administrators, and non-academic staff will all require access to training and professional development in AI literacy, alternative learning assessment design and implementation, and how to recognize and address the mental health concerns related to accessing certain AI content; and everyone – the public as well as PSI stakeholders – seeks transparency regarding the ecological footprint of large AI data centres, including their massive draw on local water supplies and atmospheric heating effects.

It is therefore imperative to authentically engage faculty, students, administrators and staff at Alberta’s universities, colleges and polytechnics; all organizations potentially employing graduates; K-12 educators and planners whose syllabi must anticipate and prepare students for an AI-integrated post-secondary environment; and Indigenous leaders whose perspectives can be vital to understanding and wisely responding to the human effects of AI in higher education, without delay. Consultation with these critical stakeholders, thoughtful consideration of their input, and appropriate and responsible integration of key insights that emerge will ensure that Alberta’s AI model is well-thought-out and carefully rolled out. In other words, a PSE sector exemplar.

In Conclusion

Based on our research, observations, and assessment of both the opportunities and challenges of AI in Alberta’s post-secondary sector, we contend that the responsible use of GenAI in Alberta’s colleges, universities and polytechnics can be furthered through attention to the critical considerations as previously outlined and further reflected in the following recommendations:

1. **Distinguish faculty authority over academic matters**: Protect shared governance of institutional operations and champion the right of faculty both to use or not to use AI.
2. **Respect Indigenous values**: Make governance community-specific, Indigenous-led, and attentive to whether certain types of knowledge should be digitized at all.
3. **Account for the added work**: Validate increased AI-related workload when more individual contact is needed for student attendance and identity checks to oral examinations.
4. **Provide equitable, secure access**: procure institutionally managed AI services for all faculty, with strong privacy, intellectual-property, accessibility, and data-governance terms.

5. **Commit to sufficient and sustained funding**: Successfully introducing and implementing AI at Alberta PSIs will require significant initial and ongoing funding to properly address the strategic, structural, operational, and human aspects of AI in higher education.

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