

# FACULTY CIRCUIT

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER of ACIFA • January 2007



The Canadian Council on Learning is concerned because Canada, unlike most other developed countries, does not articulate a national strategy or national objectives for post-secondary education. Page 4

## President's message

By David Purkis



Well here it is, 2007 already. How did that happen? I know I certainly wasn't expecting it this soon. Oh well, there's nothing for it I guess but to let that belt out a notch, clutch that list of resolutions firmly, and face the new year.

What can we look forward to in post secondary education in

Alberta this year? I think it's safe to say we are going to see some significant changes: a new Premier, Cabinet, Minister and Deputy Minister, and the combining of Advanced Education with Innovation and Technology should guarantee plenty of change. There

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## The "A Learning Alberta" initiative: update

By Brett Bergie

The "A Learning Alberta" initiative, a comprehensive review of the province's post-secondary education system launched by the Government of Alberta in

2005, continues to evolve after a brief hiatus during the governing party's leadership race. With a new leadership firmly in place in government and with its renewed

emphasis on post-secondary education, ACIFA is expecting that the "A Learning Alberta" initiative will move forward with

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Alberta College & Institutes Faculties Association  
2007 Spring Conference: "Who Are You?"

# Keynote Speaker Announced

Bani Dheer is a nationally recognized expert on North America's youth demographic. Bani conducts research on young consumers, employees, and citizens between the ages of 18 and 34. She has directed nationwide alcohol reduction campaigns targeting college and university students and has extensive experience conducting behavioral research to eliminate tobacco use among teens. She directed the first national study on Canadian ethnic youth for the federal government and developed a strategy

for increasing volunteerism and civic engagement among this group.

Aside from her research duties, Dheer regularly speaks to commercial and public sector organizations about effective strategies for engaging youth. In her forthcoming book, *The Future of Work*, Bani identifies seven trends shaping the future direction of the workplace and the increasingly widespread demand for more meaningful work.

Bani holds a B.A. and an LLB, from the University of British Columbia.



# Call For Submissions

We invite you to complete a session proposal form for the 2007 ACIFA Spring Conference. Forms are available from your local faculty association office, or forms can be downloaded from ACIFA's website: [www.acifa.ca/](http://www.acifa.ca/).

Your session proposal must address one of the following theme strands:

Faculty  
Student Population  
Changing Industry Expectations  
Post-Secondary Education Power-Brokers

Please return session proposal forms to: Lynn Devlin, ACIFA Executive Officer  
#412, 10357 – 109 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 1N3  
[devlinl@acifa.ca](mailto:devlinl@acifa.ca)

The deadline for submissions has been extended to February 23, 2007.

The 2007 ACIFA Spring Conference will be hosted by the **Lethbridge Community College Faculty Association** at the Radisson Hotel & Conference Centre in beautiful Canmore, Alberta, from May 27 through to May 30.

The ACIFA Spring Conference enables faculty from across the province to gather to share ideas, learn about new teaching resources, and network with colleagues. All faculty are welcome to attend the spring conference in Canmore. Please watch for more information on the conference in upcoming editions of the *Faculty Circuit*.

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a renewed vigour.

Premier Ed Stelmach has identified some top priorities for the province, which include managing growth pressures, improving Albertans' quality of life, building a stronger Alberta, and providing safe and secure communities. The premier has also placed a strong emphasis on the new Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology; it ranks in the new Cabinet as the second most important ministry behind the so-called super-ministry, President of the Treasury Board. This level of precedence for Advanced Education and Technology is a strong indication that the government believes, as ACIFA does, that there is an inextricable link between the function of the post-secondary education system and the objectives articulated by the new premier.

The “A Learning Alberta” initiative was first introduced under the previous governing administration, but the framework still requires much development and the commitment of time from government and stakeholders alike. Throughout the review

process, ACIFA has argued strongly in favour of realistic and predictable base operations grants to institutions, as the necessary first step in creating an accessible, affordable, and high quality system, and ACIFA pushed for action on longstanding concerns: faculty attraction and retention and the backlog of deferred maintenance in the post-secondary education sector.

Since the release of the “A Learning Alberta” report last summer, ACIFA has been actively lobbying the government to revamp its strategic framework into a comprehensive plan to address the challenges facing the system. As the “A Learning Alberta” report stands, there are few details and few timelines governing its implementation. The government, however, has indicated that the report was never intended to be the conclusion of the system review, but rather the policy framework is to undergo further development.

As a first step toward this commitment, the government released this past autumn its tuition and affordability policy, which will limit tuition increases to the growth in inflation starting in September 2007. The key highlight of this policy is the

government's promise to inject the system with \$136 million in new money over three years to help compensate the public institutions for the stricter limits on their flexibility to increase tuition revenue.

However, other important policy areas still need development, and as such, ACIFA has renewed its lobby effort to call on the government to put into place a key recommendation from the “A Learning Alberta” report. This recommendation calls for the establishment of a stakeholder working group to more clearly define roles and responsibilities of learning providers, and to “ensure future design and direction [...] to meet the complex diversity of learners' needs.”

If there is to be a comprehensive, long-term policy plan for post-secondary education in this province, then this working group will no doubt be instrumental in shaping such a plan. Thusly, ACIFA is seeking a commitment from the government to ensure that faculty—a group that offers a valuable, frontline perspective on the issues, which is different from that of the administrations'—will be directly represented on the stakeholder working group.



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# Canada's post-secondary education system has an uncertain future: Canadian Council on Learning

By Brett Bergie

The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), an independent, non-profit corporation funded by the federal government, released late last year a major study on the state of Canada's post-secondary education system. The study, *Canadian Post-Secondary Education: A Positive Record – An Uncertain Future*, attempts to look beyond the general trends of post-secondary education, and it seeks to present a more comprehensive understanding of how Canada's post-secondary education system is performing, particularly relative to other developed countries. The report also poses some challenges facing the system that require attention.

One of the first major challenges that the report outlines is the fact that Canada, unlike most other developed countries, articulates neither a national strategy nor national objectives for post-secondary education. Those tasks are left to each of the provinces.

Granted, education in the context of the Canadian Constitution is a provincial matter, but according to Paul Cappon, President and CEO of the CCL, the future of Canada's post-secondary education system is uncertain in the absence of a clear national agenda and goals, national measures to assess achievement of objectives, and a systemic goal of cohesion and coherence among all the facets.

The report contains two major sources of data: first, it presents

an analysis of currently available national and international data on post-secondary education systems; second, to gauge Canadians' interest and awareness in these issues, the CCL commissioned a comprehensive public opinion poll in the spring of 2006 to collect the views of 2,000 respondents on a wide range of post-secondary education topics. The poll was carried out in all 10 provinces (not the three territories), and its results are considered accurate to within plus or minus 2.2%, 19 times out of 20.

While established data on post-secondary education in Canada is extensive, the CCL notes that there are many gaps in the data that hinder the ability of decision-makers and observers to understand fully the trends and challenges of the system. For example, the CCL reports that data collected from different provinces lacks consistency in collection and reporting, and it is therefore difficult to compare data in national and international contexts.

There is also a critical shortage of data on Canada's community colleges, and existing information on this sector has a limited utility. The CCL hopes to produce its post-secondary education report annually, and over time, the CCL will endeavour to fill some of the gaps in data.

Existing data on post-secondary education does confirm many

trends and challenges that affect the country, which—at least of the problems—are particularly acute in Alberta. There are anticipated labour-market shortages in key professions and occupations (health, skilled trades) that require a response from the post-secondary education system. Additionally, as the Baby Boomers are poised to retire in waves over the next decade, coupled with the increasing need for a knowledgeable and highly skilled workforce, post-secondary education will have a key role in responding to these pressures.

However, Canada's capacity to make great strides in both innovation and research is at risk. Canada is well below the OECD average in the production of doctorates. Consequently, Canada risks having a shortage of doctorates at a time when demand is both global and competitive. A shortage of doctorates will have far-reaching effects for teaching, knowledge creation, and innovation.

Canada's overall research and development intensity lags behind other developed countries, too. In fact, Canada is ranked 15<sup>th</sup> among OECD member countries for research and development activity. However, Canada is relying more heavily on its post-secondary education institutions for research and development activity than is the case in most other OECD countries. Conversely, business expenditures on research and

development in Canada lag way behind those in countries with comparable levels of economic development.

One of the more striking statistics recorded in the CCL report is that one in every five adults—or nine million Canadians—have literacy levels below the minimum considered necessary for success in the knowledge economy, and yet, the post-secondary sector is still largely designed to respond to the needs of traditional, younger learners. There is a growing need for the post-secondary education system to respond to adult learners' requirements: more flexible, affordable, and responsive methods of accessing post-secondary education.

Meanwhile, the perspectives of Canadians show strong support for post-secondary education.

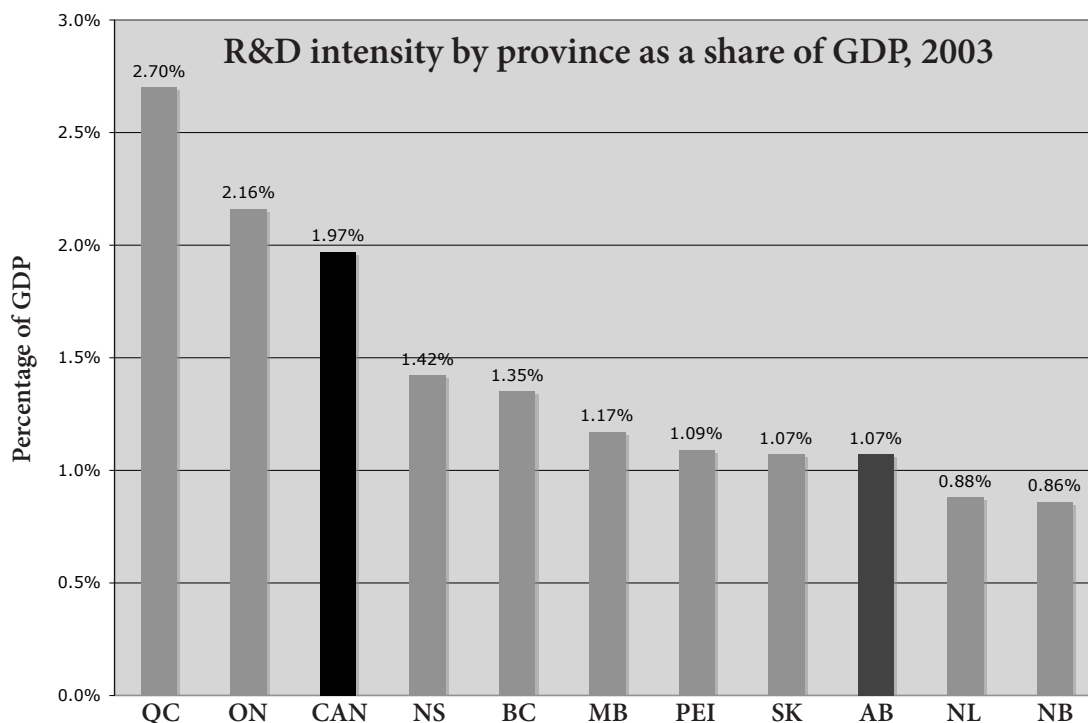
There is a strong support for education for its own sake, and for encouraging a range of personal values and social behaviours. Also, 53% of respondents believe that getting a college or university education is more difficult today than it was a decade ago, and 78% of Canadians believe that, compared to 10 years ago, getting a college or university education is more important. Eighty-seven percent of Canadians agree that “a highly skilled and educated workforce is the single most important thing Canada needs to ensure its economic future.”

The report goes on to note that there are some very positive trends in Canada's post-secondary education system as well. Canada's post-secondary education attainment rate is ranked second in the world, and Canada ranks fifth in the world in terms of

university degrees granted. The report notes that the second-place ranking for overall post-secondary education achievement reflects the impact of the college systems in the various provinces.

The report cautions, however, that Canada's positive standings have slipped in recent years as other countries increase their investments in post-secondary education and make strides in post-secondary education attainment rates.

Much of the report's findings emphasize that Canada's post-secondary education system—like those of other countries—exists in a competitive and global context, and yet, while other countries are designing national post-secondary education objectives to advance their national interests—innovation, productivity, and economic growth—Canada is not.



Note 1: Data for Quebec and Ontario exclude cities in the National Capital Region.

Note 2: Includes all sectors of funders and performers in the natural sciences, engineering, social sciences, and humanities.

Source: Sharepe, A. *Challenges Facing Canada in the Areas of Productivity, Innovation and Investment*. Presentation to Conference on Canada's Competitiveness and Prosperity, organized by the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity. Ottawa. p. 10.

# Survey on education in Alberta: fall 2006

By Public Interest Alberta

The online Survey on Education in Alberta was commissioned by Public Interest Alberta and completed by 4047 Albertans from across the entire province. Nearly 2000 individuals provided additional written comments. The following provides highlights of the views expressed by those participating in the most comprehensive public survey of opinions relating to education ever conducted in Alberta.

## **Fundraising and Fees**

There were strong expressions of concern regarding the nature, extent, and consequences of fundraising and school fees:

- Three out of every four respondents believe fundraising in schools goes to pay for basics; two out of every three respondents believe there is too much reliance on fundraising from casinos.
- More than one out of every two respondents believes school fees should be prohibited in publicly funded schools.

## **Educational Outcomes**

There was widespread concern that students are not getting the education they need to achieve important educational outcomes:

- Eight out of every 10 respondents cite high school completion rates as poor or unacceptable.
- Nearly half of all respondents (49%) and 73% of parents of children with special needs believe the current education system does not give students what they need to achieve their full potential.

## **Funding for Education**

Overwhelming numbers of respondents expressed concern regarding the inadequacy of funding:

- Eighty-one percent of respondents indicate current funding levels are insufficient to achieve desired class sizes.
- Eighty percent of all respondents and 91% of the parents of children with special needs believe that current funding levels negatively impact the ability of every student to achieve his or her potential.
- Approximately three out of every four respondents believe current funding levels are insufficient to modernize old schools or make necessary repairs to schools.
- Seventy-three percent of respondents and 84% of parents of children with special needs believe funding levels negatively impact the quality of education in Alberta.

## **Class Size and Composition**

Respondents expressed concerns that large class sizes negatively affect learning, particularly in light of classrooms where students have highly diverse needs:

- Fifty-eight percent of respondents feel there are too many students in the class they or their child attends; 55% believe class size negatively impacts learning.
- Eighty percent of parents and students responding to the survey indicate that the needs of students appear to be very diverse in Alberta classrooms.

## **Specialized Resources**

Respondents have identified problems related to accessibility to important specialized resources. Areas of particular concern are:

- Specialists to test students for special education needs,
- Teaching/classroom assistants, and
- Well equipped science laboratories.

## **Special Education**

The education of children with special needs was an area of strong concern:

- One-third of parents of children with special needs believe their children are not in a learning environment that best meets their needs.
- Fifty-five percent of parents express frustration with the ability of the system to address the special needs of their child.

## **Evaluating How Well the Performance of Education in Alberta Reflects the Government's Vision and Mission for Education**

The overwhelming majority of respondents concluded that the realities of Alberta's classrooms do not reflect the government's vision and mission for education in several important ways:

- Seventy percent of all respondents and 85% of parents of students with special needs do not believe Alberta's education system makes the success of every student a priority.
- Eighty percent of all

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respondents, 85% of those working in education, and 89% of parents of children with special needs believe funding for education is not a priority of the government.

- Eighty-one percent of all respondents, 87% of parents of children with special needs, and 88% percent of those working in education disagree that the Alberta government places a high priority on public education.
- Ninety percent of all

respondents indicate that education issues will influence how they vote in the next election.

### About Public Interest Alberta

Public Interest Alberta (PIA) is a province-wide organization focused on education and advocacy on public interest issues. PIA exists to foster in Albertans an understanding of the importance of public services, institutions and spaces in Albertans’ lives, and to build a network of organizations and individuals committed to advancing the public interest. PIA’s members believe that

the primary responsibility of government is to advance the collective interests of the citizens of Alberta. This entails a commitment to accessibility, equity, and democracy in our society and institutions.

PIA is a non-partisan organization that undertakes a wide range of activities to promote the public interest. PIA welcomes the support and participation of organizations and individuals in Alberta who are committed to advancing the public interest. Visit [www.pialberta.org](http://www.pialberta.org) for more.

## The labour scene

As seen by Terry Sway, ACIFA Labour Relations Officer



We are at the stage in collective bargaining where the letters for the “notice to bargain” have been sent to the employers and the “exchange” of opening “positions” or “interests” is almost upon us. On June 30, 2007, collective agreements will expire for the following associations: Lethbridge Community College Faculty Association, Lakeland College Faculty Association, and the SAIT Academic Faculty Association. Additionally, the collective agreement for the Grant MacEwan College Faculty Association will be re-opened to reconsider salary.

The current trend is to sign three-year agreements. Notwithstanding extensions due to retroactive issues, all current collective agreements are of three-year terms.

Interest based bargaining appears to be making a resurgence

at some of the post secondary institutions. There are a number of differences between “interest based” bargaining and “traditional” bargaining. The former is designed to incorporate “problem solving” techniques that allow the parties to explore options with the intent at arriving at an agreement that is of mutual gain to both parties.

Traditional bargaining, simply put, is an exchange of positions, where either party submits their proposed change to make the language current. Then, through meaningful dialogue, each party attempts to persuade the other to agree to the proposed changes, additions, or deletions to the current collective agreement.

Regardless of the process used, collective bargaining remains the single most important responsibility of the faculty association. *The Post Secondary*

*Learning Act* [sec. 85 - (3)], explicitly states, “Each academic staff association shall have the exclusive authority, on behalf of the academic staff members, to negotiate and enter into an agreement with the board of the public post-secondary institution.”

This means all individual members of the association must rely on the association to negotiate all terms and conditions of their employment. In addition, the association is responsible to protect these “rights” during the life of the agreement.

Technically speaking, the protection of members’ rights is commonly referred to as the association’s “Duty of Fair Representation.”

If you have questions about this or other labour related issues, please contact Terry Sway at the ACIFA office.

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are new people for us to become acquainted with and new working relationships to build while familiarizing a fresh group of officials with the issues as we view them.

ACIFA launches into the New Year with a variety of worthy endeavors. ACIFA is one of the active participants in Public Interest Alberta, and they are busy gearing up for a possible election this year, working on an advocacy campaign to help positively place educational issues in the public eye.

Within ACIFA, Presidents Council will be, among other activities, developing a provincial election campaign, seeking a resolution to the long-standing challenges surrounding member dues, discussing a proposed federated membership in the Canadian Association of University Teachers, and at the spring AGM, members will be voting on some changes to the constitution.

The Negotiations Advisory Committee will continue to examine on-going labour issues and the Professional Affairs Committee are developing a new resource website, plus of course getting ready for another exciting spring conference, this year in Canmore.

So, it looks like those interesting times we observed last year are only going to accelerate. Happy New Year!

Alberta Colleges & Institutes  
Faculties Association

**acifa**

## ACIFA Award for Innovation in Teaching

On an annual basis, ACIFA recognizes creative and effective teaching practices by awarding an instructor, or a team of instructors, with the ACIFA Award for Innovation in Teaching. The Award was established to recognize and encourage the use of innovative and creative teaching methods that lead to improved and engaged student learning.

The Award, which is accompanied by a cheque for \$1,500, is presented at the annual ACIFA Spring Conference, and the recipient's faculty association also receives a \$500 cheque.

Please visit your local faculty association office or the ACIFA website, [www.acifa.ca](http://www.acifa.ca), for more information on eligibility criteria, submission processes, and deadlines.

## Editorial

The views expressed in Faculty Circuit are those of individuals and do not necessarily reflect ACIFA's policies and positions.

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