

Government creates categories for PSE

Framework limits research to the University of Alberta, University of Calgary, and University of Lethbridge, as well as recognizing baccalaureate institutions

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Senior News Editor

The Government of Alberta has taken the first step towards clarifying the roles and mandates of postsecondary institutions in the province by categorizing them all into six distinct groups.

The Roles and Mandates Policy Framework, put together by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology, clearly defines the role of each postsecondary institution in the province and limits research to the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge.

Alberta Minister of Advanced Education and Technology Doug Horner explained that when he first entered into his position, he didn't feel that there was "enough coordinated planning—enough of a campus Alberta approach." This framework, he said, will hopefully provide the needed clarity around "what everybody is supposed to be doing in the system because not everybody can be everything and all things to all people."

Horner explained that discussions with student representatives and school administrations began early last year, with the most recent draft of the framework being presented in November. Currently, working groups have yet to finish putting details on implementing roles and mandates, and it's expected that they won't report back in time for changes to be made for the upcoming 2008 budget year.

But so far, the initial response to the framework from university administrators has been generally positive.

"It very clearly, I think, assigns to the University a continuing role at the undergraduate level, but also for the first time is unambiguous in that universities are where we're going to do graduate education," said Carl Amrhein, University of Alberta Provost and Vice-President (Academic).

"I think the government was very bold and, quite frankly, the Minister resisted a lot of political pressure to make the document not as crisp and clear as it currently is," Amrhein continued. "So I think from the University's point of view, it's a terrific

framework. However [...] the details will be the deciding factor on some of these things."

So far, Amrhein said that discussions have been both productive and useful, but he noted that the final funding formula may dampen his enthusiasm.

"On the other hand, once the finance people are finished with it, we may have some concerns."

U of A Students' Union Vice-President (External) Steven Dollansky noted that the Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) was successful during the consultation process in making sure that the category the three universities fell into included a focus on teaching and avoided redundancy.

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"The idea is that they can strategically invest and know where their capacity is so that we don't have three nanotechnology centres when we only necessarily need one," Dollansky said. "We'd be better off and benefit from economies of scale—and, at the same time, taking into account pure geographic needs so that we're not teaching, for example, about farm animals here in the middle of the city when Lakeland has excellent agriculture programs."

Mike Selnes, U of C Students' Union VP (External) and Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) President, said that he thinks the effects of this framework will touch more on the administrative level. He also added that with instructional excellence now defined as a core mandate, he hopes an increased focus will be put on ensuring "the needs of undergraduates are met as much of the needs of graduate

students."

"It's really important that we do see sustained development for undergrads, and we're hoping this framework will allow that to happen," Selnes said.

Mount Royal President Dave Marshall said that he was happy with the creation of a distinct category for a new kind of institution at the university level that focuses only on undergraduate instruction.

"Mount Royal today is essentially the baccalaureate institution that the government's proposed," he said. However, he shared Amrhein's apprehension for how the final nuances will appear.

"The catch—and it always is the case with things like this—is of course in all the details," Marshall said. "If it's implemented poorly, then the risk is that you've created an institution delivering a lot of degrees that nobody wants to take."

U of A Graduate Students' Association President Julie Charchun also highlighted the need to look beyond provincial borders when considering what constitutes a good research opportunity.

"As a graduate student, you look everywhere. You're looking internationally, so just within Alberta is kind of a small context," she said, adding that while research programs in Alberta may be top-of-the-line, as long as there's limited support for the personal needs of graduate students, studying in the province will remain a less-than-ideal option.

"We should be making sure that those opportunities are as desirable as other career opportunities in Alberta—and right now, they're not," Charchun said.

"You have to make a lot of sacrifices to be a graduate student, and you have to really want to learn."

However, Horner stressed that the government is beginning to look at making students' quality of life an important part of the equation.

"Rather than just compete with the rest of the world on a dollar basis, which isn't always the end-all," he said, "we recognize as a government that grad students are going to play a key role in the diversification of our economy."

NINT key to province's future—Horner

NINT • CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"Once students realize [that] their professor is passionate [about] what he or she is talking about, they're that much more passionate about the material."

Doug Horner, provincial Minister for Advanced Education and Technology, said that in the case of nanotechnology, the large potential for Alberta's economic success in the field is a large factor in funding. However, he added that this also means an emphasis on education.

"It's not research at the expense of instruction when you consider that graduate students are going to be involved heavily in the research side of this, and researchers are your future instructors."

Last May, the Alberta government pledged \$130 million over five years to nanotechnology with the goal of getting a \$20-billion share to the world nanotechnology market by 2020. Additionally, the federal government renewed its funding of NINT's core research and operations last December, committing \$36 million over the next



LAUREN STIEGLITZ

A LITTLE FUNDING NINT helps create a balance between teaching and research.

three years.

"You have to strike a balance" between research and teaching, Horner said. "No question about that.

"[But] it makes a lot of sense for Alberta to be looking toward what it could mean for our economy if nanotechnology is developed here."

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