

# Northern AB Institute of Technology, October 14 - Selected Highlights

## ISSUES, CONCERNS AND SUGGESTED DIRECTIONS RAISED BY PARTICIPANTS

- It is important to recognize the role and potential of training in the trades. One NAIT study showed that apprenticeship completers, after five years, “made more money, started more businesses and employed more people” than those who completed any other program. (*Dean*)
- “We are turning away so many qualified applicants,” 4-5 qualified applicants for each one accepted in some fields. NAIT has a finite space, a huge need for capital space, and is over capacity in some areas. Thus, infrastructure renewal is a central concern. (*administrator*)
- Funding is a major concern. NAIT used to be 70% funded by the provincial government; the level is now 46%. (So, a 6% increase from government actually results in a 2.76% increase in total funding.) Tuition has not kept pace with the costs of training students, and NAIT has \$70 million in deferred maintenance. (*administrator*)
- It is difficult for NAIT to compete with industry and business for faculty and, as a result, technical institutes are facing a growing labour shortage in this regard. This has become one of NAIT’s major concerns. (*administrator*)
- The government’s approach to the perceived skills shortage in Alberta seems to be a series of “quick fixes” (e.g. immigration) instead of systematic long-term planning. As a result, too many Albertans are being denied access to this important form of education. (*support staff*)
- Students are increasingly faced with barriers to their education, including rising tuition costs, lack of support for low-income students, and limited classroom size. Students with averages of over 85% are being turned away from medical programs. (*student representative*)
- The physical limitations of facilities are a serious concern. “I’m teaching in the same lab in which I graduated in, in the 1970s. The situation is unsafe, run down, too small. We use “unfair rationing”, and turn far too many people away.” (*instructor*)
- Even if you hired more instructors, the labs are not there, so you cannot expand. (*instructor*)
- It is heartbreaking to see young people work for three years at academic upgrading in order to get into a Psychology program, and then be turned away because of restrictions imposed by lack of space and equipment. (*Instructor*)
- The increasing use of online courses raises concerns about the instructors’ ability to meet the very demanding needs of these students. “I



have to answer them all, one at a time.” (*instructor*)

- The government seems to be moving toward “dumbing down and diluting” some trades, which is very much the wrong direction, and may well result in threats to the health and well-being of workers. (*instructor*)
- There is an important difference between problems of rural and urban Alberta in the context of these issues. While urban centres are extremely overcrowded, “there is space galore in rural Alberta.” There are opportunities to make rural Alberta more dynamic by relocating some programs to rural settings. (*instructor*)
- There is a growing problem with some private providers that “promise the moon, but don’t deliver.” Students have been “cheated, neglected and mistreated” by some of these firms, they get very little transfer credit for their work because of the inadequacy of the programs, and there is little recourse for students. Also, while NAIT programs have to meet stringent accreditation requirements, these private firms seem to be unregulated by government, and yet they make extensive use of student loan money. (*instructor*)
- We need to find out more about how long it takes students to pay off these massive debts, and how many are forced into declaring bankruptcy. And, we are in the position of actually encouraging high levels of debt. (*student*)
- The Alberta government still seems to be stuck in the rut of “low skills, low wages.” Their view is essentially “minimize the expense of education to government” instead of seeing it as the most productive investment we can make. (*instructor*)