



Acadia Students' Union Policy Position:

Digital Learning Opportunities Through Online Course Offerings

Purpose

To promote relevance, accessibility, and quality in education through online course delivery at Acadia University by (I) calling for a balanced expansion of online course offerings to keep Acadia competitive with peer institutions while upholding academic integrity and campus community values, and (II) ensuring digital learning opportunities remain equitable and student-centered.

Principles

Accessibility & Flexibility: Online learning should not replace in-person education but offer a flexible, high-quality alternative for students with diverse needs ranging from scheduling issues to accessibility needs and learning contexts.

Equity: Students who enroll in online courses should receive the same quality of education, support services, and academic standards as students attending in-person classes.

Institutional Relevance & Retention: Students who need online options will seek them out, either at Acadia or elsewhere. To retain enrollment, Acadia must offer flexible, high-quality online courses in a variety of subjects.

Academic Integrity and Instructional Quality: A healthy balance must be maintained between online offerings and on-campus instruction to ensure student-faculty engagement is not diminished, and that faculty workloads are reasonable and sustainable.

Student-Centered Design: Online courses should be co-developed with student input while remaining innovative and engaging for both learners and faculty.

Concerns

Lack of Digital Learning Opportunities: When Acadia does not offer online courses that meet students' scheduling, accessibility, or program flexibility needs, students will register for those

courses elsewhere, weakening Acadia's competitiveness and student retention while making completion of studies more challenging for students. In a world that is rapidly digitizing, including the education sector, students should not face a lack of digital learning opportunities.

Lack of Infrastructure and Support: Students enrolled in online courses often face greater difficulty accessing virtual equivalents of essential campus services—such as academic advising, writing support, and IT assistance—compared to students attending in-person classes. In addition to possible technical difficulties students might face in their online courses, students should be made aware of the resources available to them. Though online courses are great for students with unexpected schedules, including but not limited to working students, students with dependents, mature students, alongside students with accessibility needs, without adequate training on how to navigate online learning platforms, there might be barriers for learners unfamiliar with online systems. Thus, online learning should be centered around students and their needs.

Overreliance on Online Learning: A rapid increase in online offerings without a staffing plan could lead to fewer professors physically present on campus, placing disproportionate service and advising responsibilities on remaining faculty and reducing access for in-person students. Without proper safeguards, expanding online learning could unintentionally reduce the quality of mentorship, classroom experiences, and individualized academic support. Online learning opportunities should prioritize balance in online and in-person learning opportunities offered to ensure resources are equitably distributed.

Resolutions

(I) Balanced Expansion of Online Course Offerings

ASU supports the strategic expansion of online courses to keep Acadia competitive and responsive to student needs. When Acadia lacks flexible online options, students turn to other institutions, making degree completion harder. Expanding online offerings in a variety of areas helps retain students, especially those with accessibility needs. Online learning should enhance, not replace, Acadia's personalized educational experience.

(II) Ensuring Digital Learning Opportunities Remain Equitable and Student-Centered

Online courses should be student-centered via course considerations regarding being accessible, and free from unnecessary in-person requirements. Acadia must invest in digital tools like secure proctoring and open-access materials to reduce barriers for students. Support services such as advising and writing help must be available virtually, and course formats should be clearly labeled during registration. Online learning quality and accessibility should be regularly reviewed, with student input guiding future improvements.

Conclusion

Expanding online course offerings is critical to ensuring Acadia remains a top choice for students navigating an increasingly flexible and technology-driven world. But this expansion must be thoughtful and grounded in the values that make Acadia unique: *"diversity, inclusivity, equity, and respect, excellence in academic, research, scholarly, professional, and personal achievement, environmental stewardship and sustainability, and responsible management and allocation of resources,"* all stated under Acadia 2025.

Online learning at Acadia should reflect the mission to provide an *"unparalleled learning experience"* rooted in liberal education, community engagement, and innovation. It should support diverse learners and protect the quality of campus life and instruction.

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Disclaimer: The ASU has utilized and referred to the Policy Paper on Online Learning by Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (prepared by Christopher Fernlund, VP of University Affairs at TDSA, Tyler Lively, Academic Affairs Commissioner Alma Mater Society at Queen's University, Joyce Wai, Deputy Commissioner of Policy Alma Mater Society at Queen's University, and Justin Bedi, Research Analyst at OUSA in Spring 2016) along with other external research in creation of this policy.