



# COMMUNITY - PSE PORTAL PROPOSAL

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**We have a world-class post-secondary system in Alberta that we don't use to the fullest. This failure costs Alberta families and businesses, and we don't even realize it.**

**But we can change that.**

PREPARED BY

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## The Current Intersection Between PSE and Alberta Communities

It is no longer good enough to "just get a degree." To secure a job, students today must have:

- volunteer hours
- a proven track record in leadership
- real-life experience
- research (and sometimes published papers)



Currently, when you enroll in a post-secondary institution, you gain access to what is essentially a job board. In it, companies post positions available -- some pay, some are for course credit. Many of these are internships that require you to be a 3rd- or 4th-year student. Usually, large companies and government jobs dominate these listings. And up until recently, many of them were supported by the STEP program.

Another option that connects students with community groups and businesses are research-based programs that allow students to work on a project or perform a task for school credit. This system is highly underutilized. Why? There is a lack of awareness in both the student population and area businesses., The red tape seems to over-complicate even the most simple of interactions.

The third option businesses and groups have to connect with students is by contacting a specific department or someone they know. They can explain what they need, and the onus is then on the department to identify a program, path, or student who can meet those needs.

In all of these systems, the university acts as an intermediary between companies and students. They connect people to what are usually great jobs or volunteer opportunities, and they have significant, positive outcomes when they work.

## The Current Intersection Between PSE and Alberta Communities (Continued)

However, there are problems with this:

- **Not accessible** by many Alberta businesses and groups.
- **Lack of awareness** about the system.
- **Limited** in what they offer.
- **Rigid requirements.** Doesn't seem to be friendly to short-term needs and is structured toward traditional types of internships and jobs
- **Inequality.** A large portion of students are left out
- **Bias is built-in**
  - Discrimination can and does happen to businesses seeking help and students seeking jobs.
  - You must be well-connected, have money, or be a large enough institution to reach out to students.
- **It's fragmented.** Post-secondary students and institutions must maintain a multitude of systems to provide all of these services.
- **Driven by money.** Businesses, charities, and other groups must have the money to hire students or pay for help and expertise.
- **It's a time management nightmare.** Students must perform this work in addition to going to school full time, working part or full time, volunteering, studying, and fulfilling their research and other requirements.

## The Current System



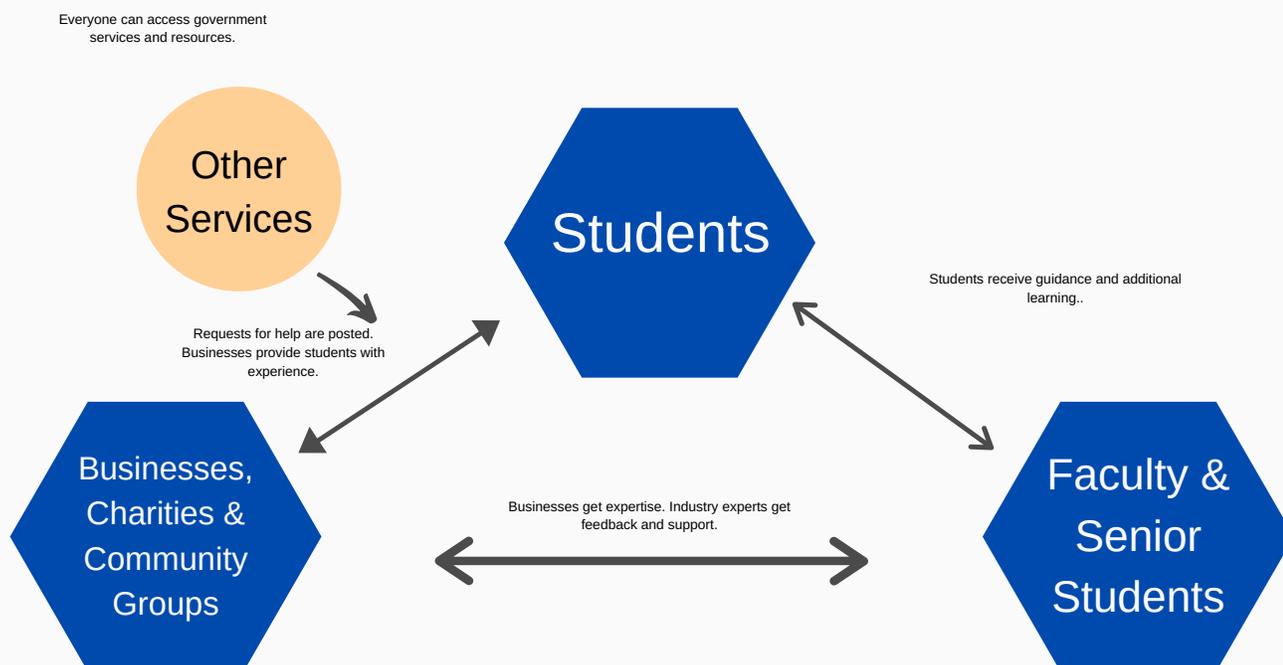
## The Solution: A Community-PSE Portal

Imagine if all Albertans could get tutoring help, business advice, childcare, business services, student employees, and access other resources just by logging into a website. How successful would our families and businesses be?

Imagine what would happen if students could learn from businesses, gain experience, solve problems, and fill their resume that will help them secure a job in the future. Many post-secondary students dream of opportunities like these. Imagine if they could earn course credit or pay for that work, build relationships with potential employers, and get feedback?

I propose Alberta create a centralized, online portal that Alberta's businesses, charities, and community groups could access to communicate with Alberta's post-secondary students. All Albertans could search for and get the support they need to do amazing things. There wouldn't be long processes to go through each time, no need to commit to expensive contracts or have to meet strict requirements to get a few minutes of expertise.

Here's how it would work:



## For Students:

When a student enters a post-secondary institution, he or she gains access to the portal. Here, they fill out things like their resume and decide which types of projects interest them. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, their student number pulls up their courses, major, and the number of credit hours they have. This information would then filter requests from the community to display a list of projects, jobs, and help requests from across the province.

Some of these jobs might be for pay. However, supervisors or the system can also assign a percentage of points for each task, which students would accumulate until they had enough to earn course credit. (This method of credit would work in a similar way that many work program courses do now). The job could be for an hour, or it could be a long-term project or position.

The student would answer questions, take on a project, or work with their chosen group. They would collect any money owed to them via a government-like escrow system, and they could now add that experience to their resume.



## For Businesses, Community Groups & Charities:

As a business owner, I would register with the portal when I received my business licence. While I was setting up my business, I discover that I needed some marketing materials. So, I log into the portal, explain what I need, and I post an amount I'm willing to pay for it. Soon, a first-year graphic design student contacts me, so we chat, agree on scope, and the student completes the work. I provide feedback and release the pay, which I'd put in escrow earlier.

Let's say business is going well. Now, I need someone to help keep everything organized and maybe write a report on the pros and cons of expanding. I log in and see a business student with an impressive resume who is looking for work. By offering a work program contract, I can do what I need to, and I can check their work once a week to make sure there are no errors. The student, in turn, gets a course credit for that work just as they would now through experience-based course credit programs.

Now, let's say there is an error. Neither of us knows what it is. The student can take their work to their supervisor. This expert would identify the problem quickly and direct the student to the materials he or she needs to learn more about it. Or, if it's a big problem, I can hire a professional or a more senior student. I would provide feedback on the student and grant them the credit.

Daycares could hire early childhood development students. Schools could have advanced college students come into the classroom to cover the loss of their educational assistants. A local documentary filmmaker could hire music students to compose a score. Then, pay local audio engineers to mix and produce it. The possibilities are endless.

Some departments could even offer services to the community at large. They could run the appropriate police checks (which students would require anyway) and add students to a database willing to tutor, for example. Parents could hire a tutor for their child, who is struggling with Calculus. Or, Grade 9 teachers could then work with a few students to set up an after-school study session for children who are struggling.

## Advanced Students and Faculty:

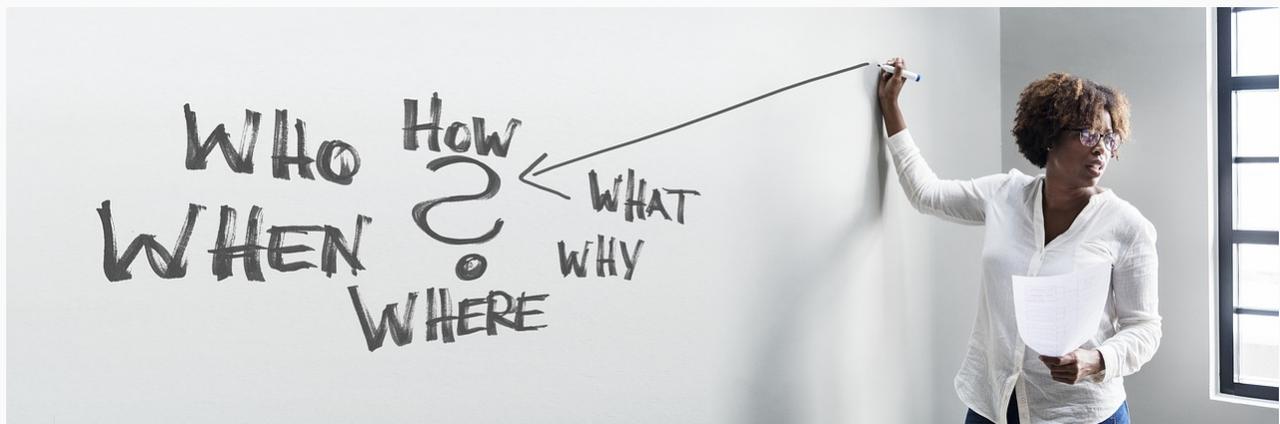
Supervisors and faculty members can benefit from this centralized system, too. Let's say I'm a master's student or professor looking for a research project. I look in the portal, and I find that the local parks committee is looking for an advisor and a report. I have some time available, so I take the job.

Maybe a community north of Fort MacMurray is seeking advice on an infrastructure project. Or, I could be doing a study on a specific type of eldercare program. I reach out to a company offering this type of care and discuss a partnership. (This is easy because I'm connected immediately to the business, and they can see my credentials and know I'm not a fake.) I agree to share my findings and help them find solutions to any problems in exchange for gathering data or gaining insights. We run everything through the ethics committee as we do now, and we get started. Again, there are endless possibilities.

Supervisors would play a role here, too. As with the current systems, they must review and sign off or grade the student's work. (Unless the position posted is more like a job posting than a project.) They would help oversee the project, at least to a minimal degree, and help address any serious issues that arise.

They'd also be talking to local businesses, which would help show the community the value of the post-secondary institution. They'd build priceless bonds while strengthening communities. (The system would use an algorithm to determine what type of supervisor to assign to a specific job.)

To be clear: They already perform this work in the current system. However, this system would reduce the amount of paperwork and red tape to clear these projects.



## The Pros of a Community-PSE Portal:

- **Eliminate duplication and save money.** Some of these programs already exist, but they're fragmented. A comprehensive portal would streamline them.
- **Give rural Albertans equal opportunities.** Rural Albertans who commute to post-secondary institutions or have recently graduated could get experience virtually by taking small projects (contracts). Businesses could access resources they otherwise couldn't. And because the government runs the portal, there is less risk than with other alternatives currently offered online.
- **Improve diversity.** The system could hide the names of students and business owners to protect their race, ability, and gender.
- **We're stronger together.** Students get the experience necessary to secure good jobs, while communities find help. Supervisors can access jobs, resources, and network. Post-secondary facilities can show the value they provide while making Alberta better.
- **Fewer mistakes and losses.** Businesses avoid hiring expert help even when they need it due to cost and accessibility. This aversion leads to costly mistakes and waste. The community portal would provide businesses with options.
- **Higher student retention after graduation.** Students would build bonds, which would increase the likelihood that they will get hired here and stay here.
- **Connect government services to businesses and students.** Governments would have an easy way for businesses and groups to access the many grants and financial incentives for hiring students. The data collected could help identify issues and inform decisions about investments and cuts. Once set up, the government could also add services such as the government job board.
- **Low upfront costs.** Much of the technology needed already exists. However, it would still require staff for construction, maintenance, administration, etc.
- **Ability to recoup costs.** The portal could be monetized and support Alberta businesses (as well as share news items and information) if the need arises. This option means that the government could sell the entire system to recoup some of their investment if Alberta's needs change. (Not its data or users.)
- **It's flexible.** It's customizable and can be adapted as the province's needs change.
- **Control stays where it needs to.** Post-secondary institutions and faculty would still have control over what constitutes a job worth a course credit in the same way they do now. They could continue to use the same paperwork.

## The Cons of a Community-PSE Portal:

- It would require a commitment to get everyone enrolled and promote the program.
- There are upfront costs associated with creating the system and maintaining it.
- It is a new way to work and seek help. It might take time to get people used to the idea.
- It would mean programs currently in place would become redundant as the portal goes online.
- Staff with expertise and experience may be required to help manage some disciplines. The government could offset the costs of these new staff positions by giving them "career counselling" or "entrepreneur counselling" type duties. They could follow up on projects and help guide businesses or students to resources.
- The instability of government programs like these means that these programs often get cut. It would mean getting everyone on board only to see the system abandoned in four years when the government changes.
- It may require some changes to current rules surrounding businesses and university operations.

**Alberta is stronger when  
Albertans work together.**

**Let's make that easy, affordable,  
and accessible.**

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