



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF EXTENSION



Community-University Partnership
for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families



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University of Alberta studying zero fee education model in Drayton Valley to build a resilient, inclusive economy in rural Alberta

Edmonton/Drayton Valley—The Government of Canada's [Future Skills Centre](#), the University of Alberta [Faculty of Extension](#), the [Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families](#), and the [Town of Drayton Valley](#) are pleased to announce funding to research a cutting-edge, no-cost education initiative aimed at helping rural Albertans train for new careers without leaving their communities.

Supported by \$659,174 in federal funding from the Future Skills Centre, the two-year [research project](#) will examine the impact of a [Zero Fee Tuition](#) concept already underway in the Town of Drayton Valley. New partnerships with the University of Alberta's Faculty of Extension and other post-secondary institutions across the province will allow the Town to provide expanded offerings for the 2021 program year.

The participatory research will explore how a rural community reinvents itself through a Zero Fee Tuition model by working alongside the entire community, including businesses and industry, community organizations, citizen groups, local and provincial government, educational institutions, and students participating in the program.

"By examining the initiative's implementation and outcomes, this research can provide an innovative model for other towns and regions seeking to become more resilient in the face of declining industries and other shocks to their economies," said lead researcher [Maria Mayan](#), Associate Director of the Community-University Partnership and Interim Dean, Faculty of Extension.

Pedro Barata, Executive Director of the Future Skills Centre, says that the concept of free education in the Alberta town of Drayton Valley is a perfect example of ways in which the Future Skills Centre is investing in innovative and radical approaches to training, building capacity, and filling future skills gaps. "This is just one of the exciting shock-proofing projects that the Future Skills Centre is investing in to build a future playbook for shared prosperity, and help Canadian workers and businesses seize opportunities in our future economy."

The Zero Fee Tuition concept, the only one of its kind in Canada, is a unique approach to economic transition for communities like Drayton Valley that are grappling with unemployment and recession. By subsidizing tuition costs, the initiative aims to stimulate the economy and

provide hope by increasing post-secondary opportunities for students, and providing options for extended studies for mature learners looking to upskill in their current careers or reskill into new career paths.

Drayton Valley, which has relied heavily on an economy fuelled by jobs in the oil and gas sectors, has experienced a significant recession since 2014, with a nearly 80 per cent increase in unemployment. The COVID-19 pandemic has added further pressure, compromising the remaining sectors that sustained the community.

Zero fee education has the potential to reinvigorate the region and contribute to transformational change by removing financial barriers and creating locally-tailored educational opportunities.

"We were looking for a way to support our community as the economic climate presented several challenges for our town and our residents, and are excited to be partnering with the University of Alberta as it conducts this research project," said Michael Doerksen, Mayor of Drayton Valley. "Investing in education will help drive Drayton Valley to a more sustainable and resilient future; from an economic standpoint, the initiative also encourages our youth and families to remain in the community and will also put Drayton Valley on the map as a community of choice for families and businesses," he added.

The findings from the research project will help determine how a model of free education can be developed and sustained, and the initial outcomes of such a model on the creation of a resilient and inclusive economy.

"We can use this information to inform policy and practice at municipal, provincial, and federal levels and across numerous sectors," said Mayan, noting that studies have shown a connection between increased education and lower poverty rates, increased economic growth, and an increased standard of living.

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The University of Alberta in Edmonton is one of Canada's top teaching and research universities, with an international reputation for excellence across the humanities, sciences, creative arts, business, engineering, and health sciences. Home to more than 38,000 students and 15,000 faculty and staff, the university has an annual budget of \$1.9 billion and attracts more than \$500 million in sponsored research revenue. The U of A offers close to 900 rigorous undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs in 18 faculties on five campuses—including one rural and one francophone campus. The university has more than 275,000 alumni worldwide. The university and its people remain dedicated to the promise made in 1908 by founding president Henry Marshall Tory that knowledge shall be used for "uplifting the whole people."

The Town of Drayton Valley is a dynamic community with a vibrant and active population focused on family and opportunities that provide stability in a changing economy. Drayton Valley is looking to become a leader in providing high-quality education, training, and skills development for its residents.

Recognizing that education is a key element in overcoming barriers and increasing employability, the Town has made a commitment to investing in education in the community to serve the broader region.

The project ‘Examining the outcomes of zero fee education in building a resilient, inclusive economy in rural Alberta’ is funded by the Government of Canada’s Future Skills Centre.

Le projet ‘Examen des impacts de l’éducation gratuite sur la construction d’une économie résiliente et ouverte à tous’ est financé par le Centre des Compétences futures du gouvernement du Canada.

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