Pilot 2 Review

March 27, 2015

Table of Contents

Introduction

eTutor Alberta is a collaboration of public post-secondary institutions (PSIs). This project had two pilot phases. Pilot 1 began February 24, 2014 and closed June 27, 2014. Pilot 1 had nine participating institutions (Background and Evaluation report available). Pilot 2 of the eTutor Alberta project opened on September 2, 2014 and ran until December 12, 2014. Two additional PSIs joined Pilot 2, bringing the total to eleven participating institutions:

1. Bow Valley College
2. Concordia University College
3. Grande Prairie Regional College
4. Lakeland College
5. Lethbridge College
6. MacEwan University
7. NAIT
8. NorQuest College
9. Northern Lakes College
10. Olds College
11. Red Deer College

Each participating institution contributes an Institutional Coordinator to serve on the eTutor Alberta Advisory Committee. This Advisory Committee functions as the operational decision making body of eTutor Alberta and members are responsible for reporting decisions back to their own Senior Student Services Officer (SSSO) or Senior Academic Officer (SAO). This group meets on the last Friday of each month via Blackboard Collaborate.

For the second pilot, the Advisory Committee decided to continue the service as offered in the first pilot with some modifications. The second pilot ran on the following principles:

- Only asynchronous writing and eQuestion support was offered for this pilot.
- Users self-registered using an email address.
- The consortium used CTDLC's model of managing by usage rather than BCcampus's model of managing by the institution's enrolment FTE.
- Each institution provided 150 hours of tutor time per term.
- Each institution had at least one tutor to commit five hours per week.
- Each tutor followed a flexible schedule based on day rather than set time blocks.
- eTutor Alberta strove to have 6-7 days of coverage per week.
- Each institution signed up for one peak week, during which their tutor or back up tutor would offer an extra two hours to the service (new decision).
- The Committee adopted the CTDLC writing protocols, which are well established and tested.
- Each institution was responsible for
    - hiring and compensation of their own tutors,
    - ensuring tutors were trained in the writing protocols,
    - assigning a primary institutional coordinator,
    - determining how to supplement existing institutional tutor services,

- o signing an MOU prior to participation in eTutor Alberta,
- o having tutors and the institutional coordinator sign confidentiality agreements prior to participation,
- o the printing and distribution of marketing materials provided by eTutor Alberta.

The SSSO group of Alberta was the executive sponsor for the eTutor Alberta project for the Pilot period (see Appendix 1 eTutor Alberta Structure and Roles). This system is currently being reevaluated in recognition of the different reporting structures at PSIs. Future executive sponsorship of eTutor Alberta will most likely be a mix of SSSOs and SAOs from Alberta.

Relationships of Support

eTutor Alberta is a system sustained by the interaction and support of several different collaborations. There are 4 major collaborations involved in the functioning of eTutor Alberta.
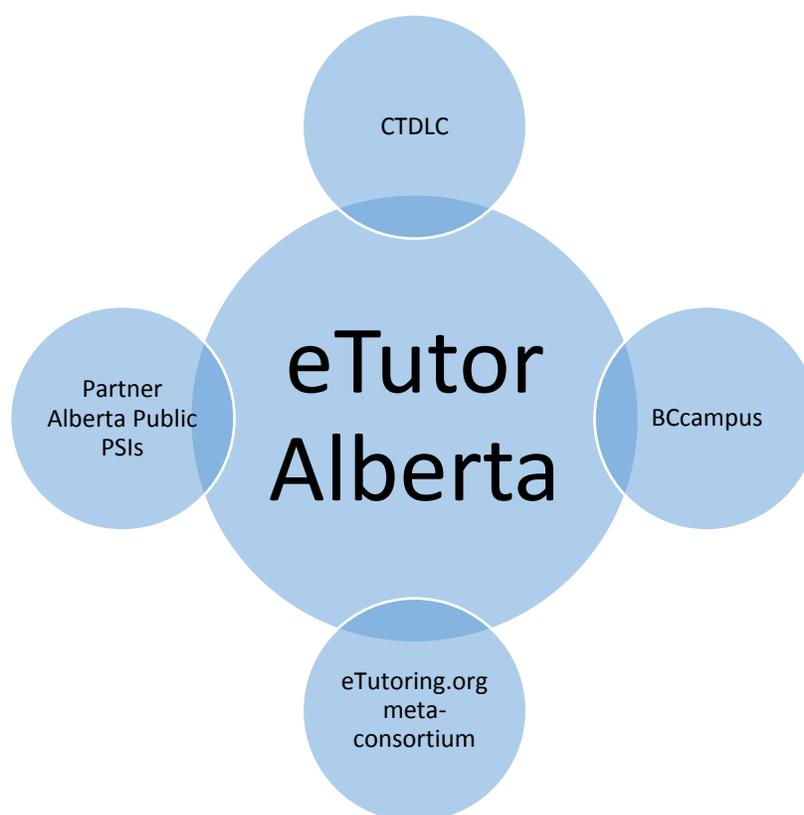

Figure1: eTutor Alberta support relationships

The first is the collaboration amongst our partner Alberta Public PSIs. Each institution provides support for the project through promotion to faculty and students, platform and protocol support through the Institutional Coordinator, and protocol and tutor support through the tutors themselves.

The Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC) is also a source of support. As the creators of the eTutoring.org system, they advise eTutor Alberta on best practices for organization, marketing, different methods for the creation of a consortium. They also provide all eTutor Alberta tutors and Institutional Coordinators eTutoring.org protocol training. All new tutors must take part in an asynchronous training

seminar and complete a sample paper. This paper is then reviewed by the eTutor Alberta Coordinator based on a tutoring rubric provided by CTDLC. The eTutor Alberta Coordinator is also provided support with protocol questions, technical support in using the platform, and advice and support for reviewing tutor work through the CTDLC.

eTutor Alberta belongs to a meta-consortium of organizations using the CTDLC protocols and platform. Currently this meta-consortium meets a few times a year via teleconference and Adobe Connect rooms. This group discusses successes, challenges, changes to protocols, and other issues affecting eTutoring.org. Members of the meta-consortium often share research and information on how each group is using the platform and protocols. This allows all members of the meta-consortium to learn from one another and form best practices.

BCcampus offers platform support to eTutor Alberta. The server for eTutor Alberta is housed and run by BCcampus. This group offers support for any technical issues that might arise. The BCcampus Helpdesk directly liaises with the eTutor Alberta Coordinator regarding any planned outages or technical issues. These issues range from problems with student access to the eTutor Alberta platform to issues on the server that are beyond the expertise of the Coordinator. BCcampus has resolved these types of issues very promptly.

It should be noted that the eTutor Alberta platform is very stable. We have experienced few technical difficulties, and any we have encountered have been fixed very quickly. The platform has a very high level of stability, making it ideal for a student support technology.

Mission

The primary mission of the eTutor Alberta (eTA) pilot project is to establish a collaborative asynchronous electronic tutoring service for writing instruction within Alberta's publicly-funded post-secondary institutions.

Goals

The goals of the eTA Pilot 2 project were as follows:

- To successfully pilot and evaluate a collaborative asynchronous writing tutoring service.
- To be the front runners in developing a pathway for the expansion of online asynchronous and synchronous online tutoring covering a broad range of subject areas.
- To communicate the benefits of inter-institutional collaborative learner services.

Structure of the Pilot 2 Review

The review of Pilot 2 of eTutor Alberta relies on data obtained from the eTutor Alberta platform. The data examines total numbers of student accounts, submissions, ESL vs non-ESL submissions, cross-institutional collaboration, and student satisfaction.

Findings and Discussion

During Pilot 2, a total of 568 unique student accounts were created, and 699 papers were submitted for review. In addition, 46 eQuestions were asked by students. Figure 2 breaks down student account creation by institution. While numbers differ quite dramatically between institutions, it should be noted that these numbers reflect new student accounts created during the second pilot. Students who created accounts during Pilot 1 and used the eTutor Alberta service in Pilot 2 are not reflected in this figure. The pilot period (both Pilot 1 and 2) saw the creation of 915 unique student accounts, meaning that 68% of the pilot period student accounts were created in Pilot 2.
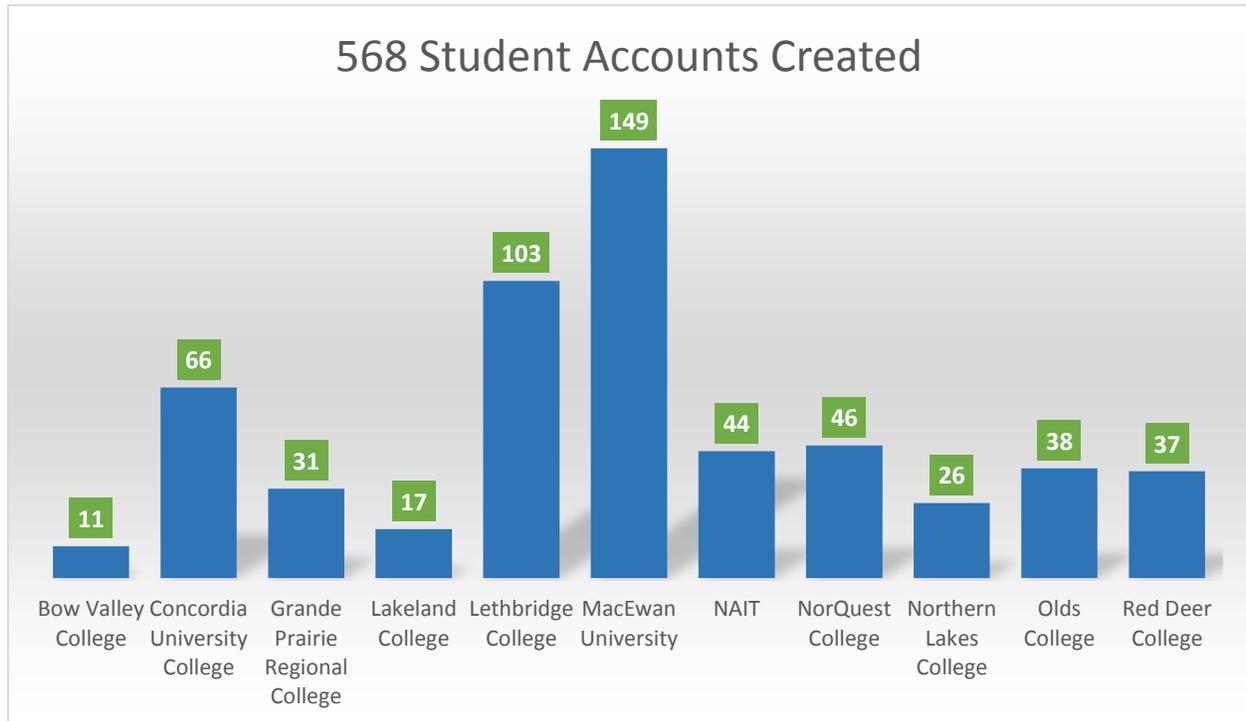

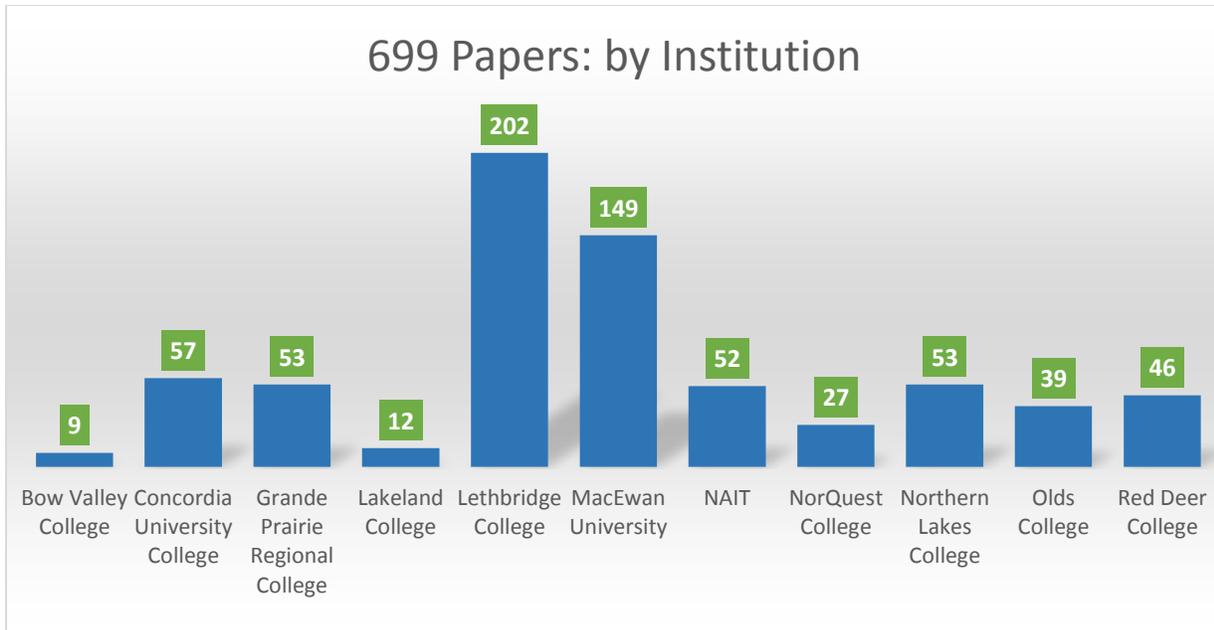Figure 2: Number of Unique Student Accounts by Institution in Pilot 2

699 Papers: by Institution

Institution	Papers
Bow Valley College	9
Concordia University College	57
Grande Prairie Regional College	53
Lakeland College	12
Lethbridge College	202
MacEwan University	149
NAIT	52
NorQuest College	27
Northern Lakes College	53
Olds College	39
Red Deer College	46

Figure 3: Total Papers Submitted, by Institution

eQuestions, by Institution

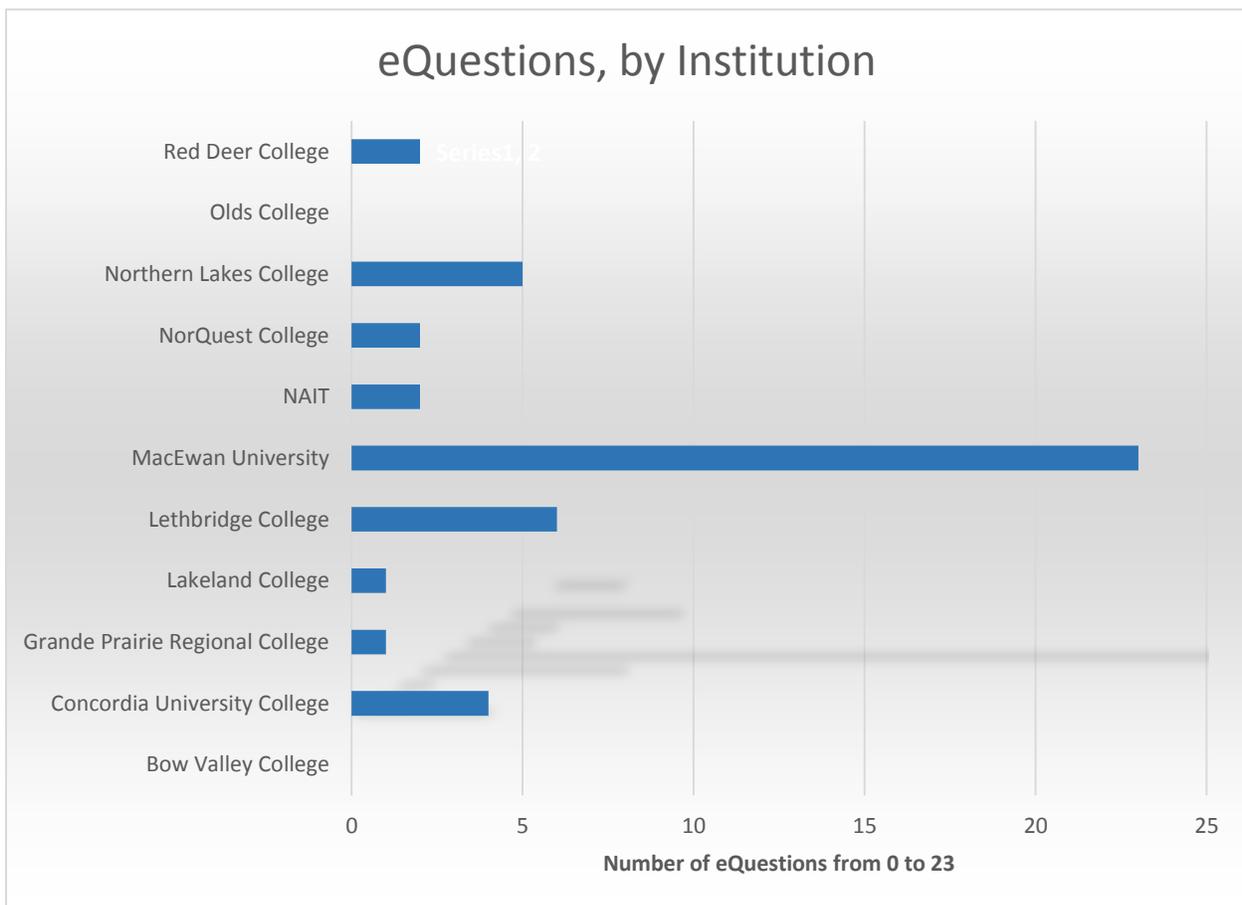| Institution	Number of eQuestions from 0 to 23
Red Deer College	2
Olds College	0
Northern Lakes College	5
NorQuest College	2
NAIT	2
MacEwan University	23
Lethbridge College	6
Lakeland College	1
Grande Prairie Regional College	1
Concordia University College	4
Bow Valley College	0

Figure 4: Total eQuestions, by Institution

Figures 3 and 4 show the breakdown of both the eWriting and eQuestion submissions by institution. As in Pilot 1 the size of the institution was not a predictor of use. Rather, it appears that student familiarity with writing centres and institutional promotion may be better predictors. The two highest use institutions, Lethbridge College and MacEwan University, both have very strong on-campus cultures surrounding writing centres. Lethbridge College students are also familiar with online assistance through their eLearning Café. One of the marketing strategies Lethbridge College used during Pilot 2 was to brand the eTutor Alberta materials with the eLearning Café logo to better visually show the institution's approval of the eTutor Alberta service.

It should be noted that online writing services were new to most institutions, and several of the participating institutions were brand new to tutoring services on campus. Building a culture around tutoring services will take time. It is recommended that eTutor Alberta and participating institutions continue to work together to create viable marketing strategies.
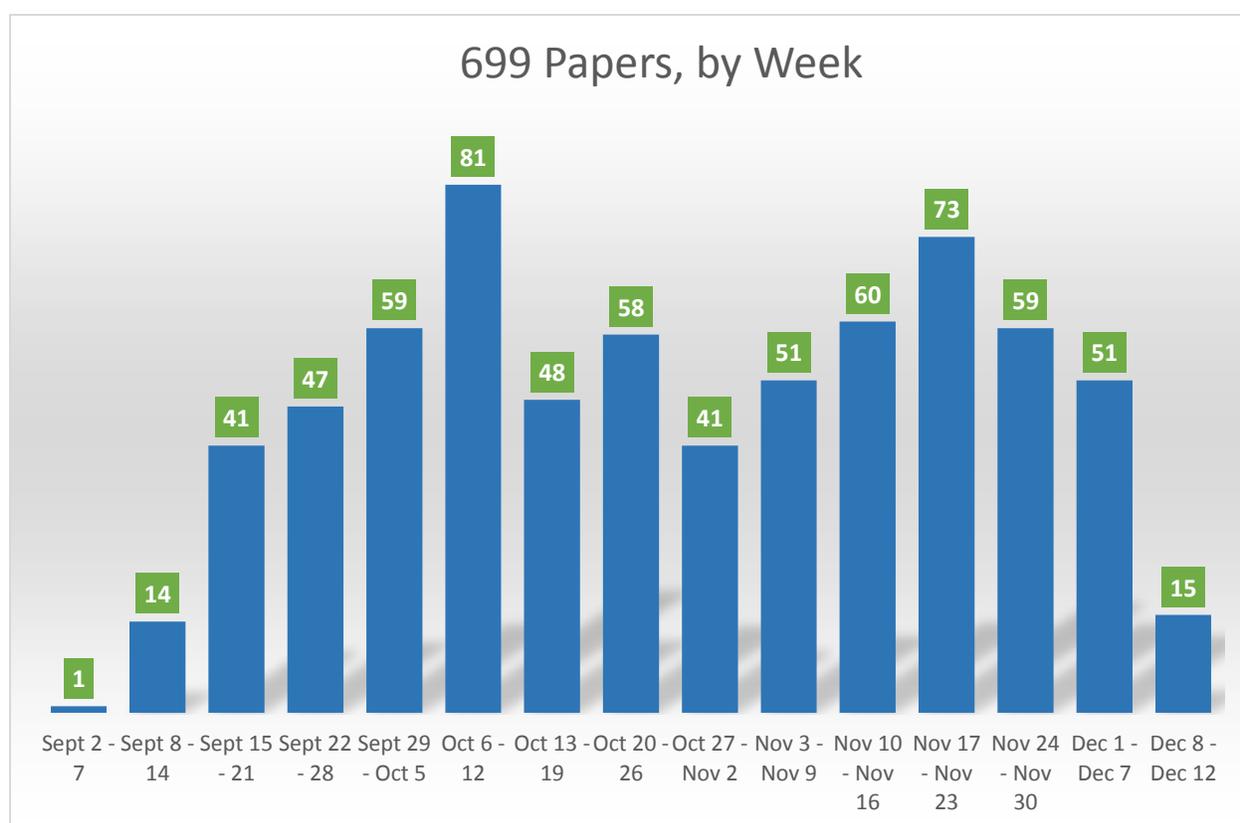

Figure 5: Total Paper Submissions by Week (all Institutions)

Figure 5 examines eWriting submissions by week. In August of 2014, participating institutions were asked to predict which weeks would be peak usage weeks. Six peak weeks were identified and each institution signed up to offer two extra hours of coverage for one of the six weeks. The eTutor Alberta coordinator also provided tutor time to one of the weeks. Each of the peak weeks had an extra 4 hours of tutor coverage.

This system worked well for most weeks but there were some notable exceptions. The week of October 6 to 12 was particularly busy, and the system was flooded by a number of submissions coming in at the same time. Similarly, between November 10 and 23, the submissions rose dramatically and quite suddenly. When the system is flooded like this, it is difficult to restore normal turn-around times. Ideally the eTutor Alberta service aims for a 24- to 48-hour turn-around time for students. These times were not achievable during the weeks in question. To alert students to this, each Institutional Coordinator placed a message on the school landing page to warn students that the service was experiencing higher than normal volume and to expect longer wait times. The eTutor Alberta platform also alerts students to the estimated wait time. These explanations helped students in managing their expectations of the service, as seen in the student satisfaction results. Overall, for Pilot 2, the average turn-around time was 32.6 hours, which is within our ideal range.
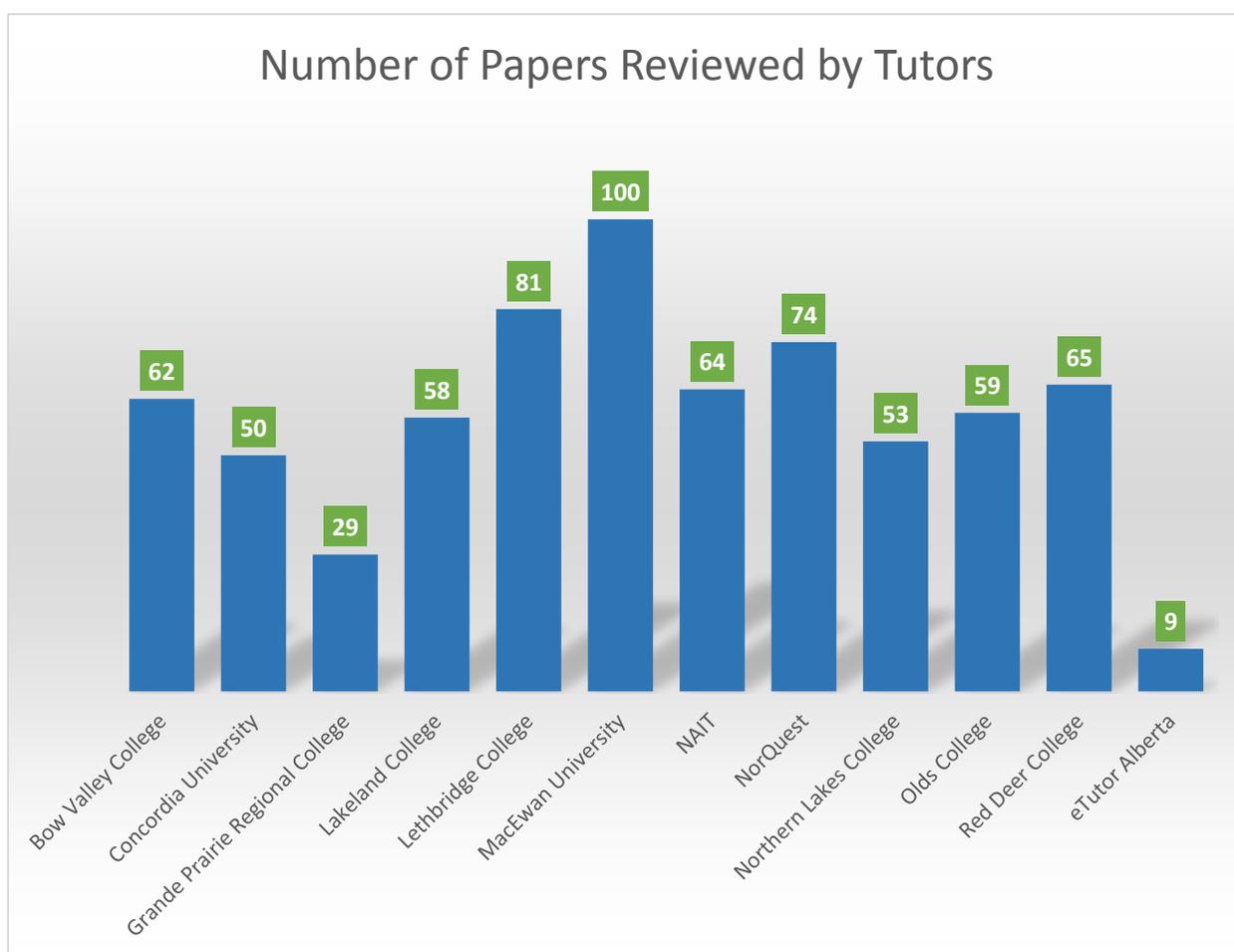

Figure 6: Number of Papers Reviewed by Each Institution

Figure 6 shows the number of papers reviewed by each institution and the eTutor Alberta Coordinator (listed as eTutor Alberta). The range, excluding the eTutor Alberta Coordinator, is 71, with 29 papers being the lowest and 100 the highest. The average number of papers reviewed was 63, and most institutions fall around this amount. It is interesting to note that Lethbridge College and MacEwan University had the highest tutor numbers and the highest student submissions. Both institutions offered

more tutor hours as the term progressed to compensate for their high institutional usage. This system seems to have worked well. The tutors at MacEwan chose to offer extra time to the service during peak usage whenever they had a cancelled onsite appointment or a spare block, rather than setting a schedule for coverage. This flexibility in the extra coverage benefited eTutor Alberta, as these tutors could provide support as needed rather than as scheduled.

The Advisory Committee has agreed to a principle of equitable coverage informed by usage. It is important to note that the Committee works to build consensus on all decisions informing eTutor Alberta.

While scheduled coverage is vital to the system, as it allows for coverage across the week, some flexibility is also important to cover unexpected spikes in service. The eTutor Alberta service had one floating tutor during Pilot 2. The Lakeland College tutor provided the required five to seven hours per week whenever possible during the week. This flexibility, paired with the structure of other PSIs, worked well, and it is recommended that a similar mix be incorporated in future scheduling of the eTutor Alberta tutors.

An interesting aspect of eTutor Alberta is the sharing of tutoring support to students across participating institutions. See Appendix 2: System Collaboration Table for an illustration of the cross-pollination of student support across institutions.
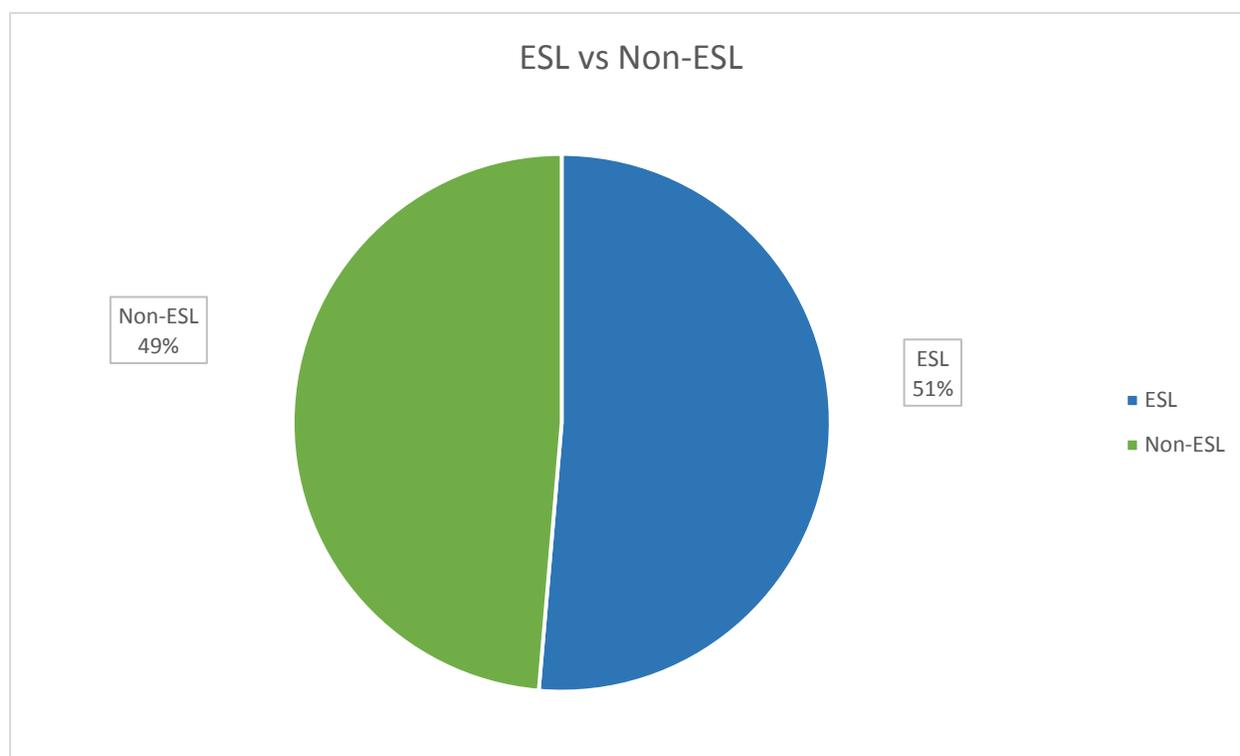

Figure 7: Percentage of ESL and Non-ESL Papers, by Institution

ESL students self-identify for the eTutor Alberta service. Figure 7 shows the numbers for the entire eTutor Alberta service. The split was fairly even, with 51% of students identifying as ESL. The lowest percentage of reported ESL students came from Concordia and Olds College, each with a 33% ESL report rate. The highest percentages were from Bow Valley College, at 100%, and NorQuest College, at 81%. The general split for the service overall indicates that it is a useful service to both students who identify as ESL and those who do not.
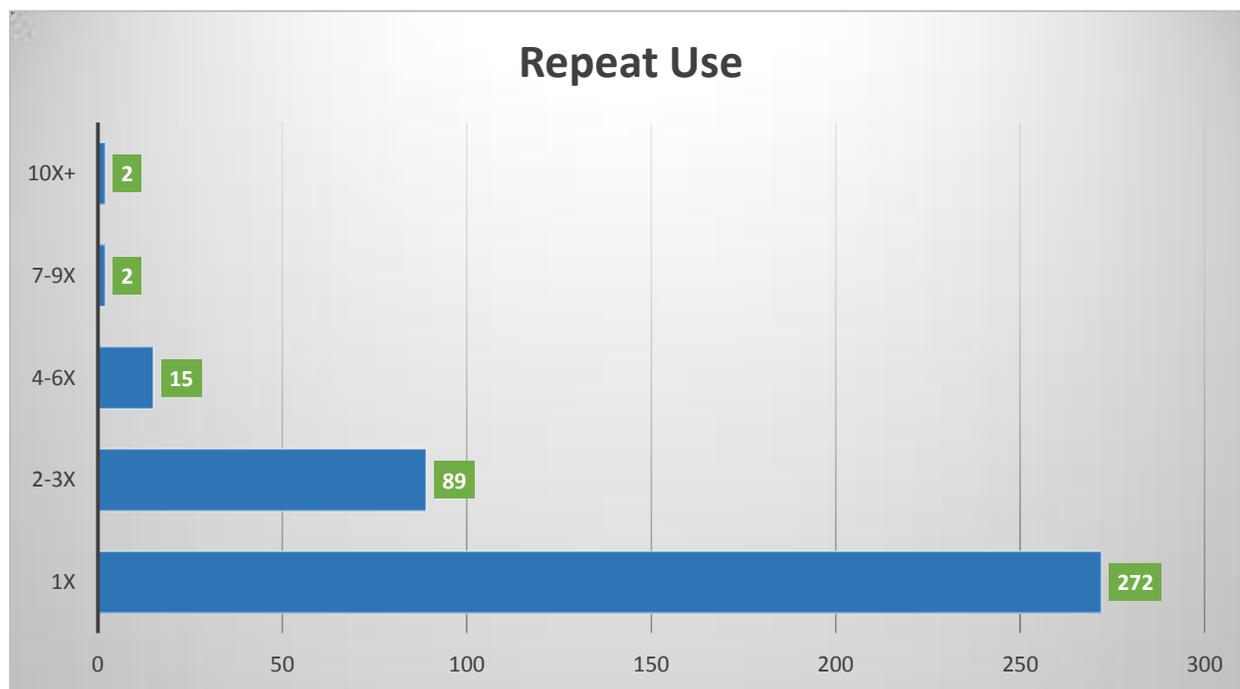

Figure 8: Number of Repeat Users, by Institution

Students varied in the amount of times they used eTutor Alberta; as the figure above demonstrates, the majority of students used the eTutor Alberta service once during the term. Pilot 2 showed some increases in the sheer number of times students used the service, with 2 students using eTutor Alberta more than 10 times in the term.
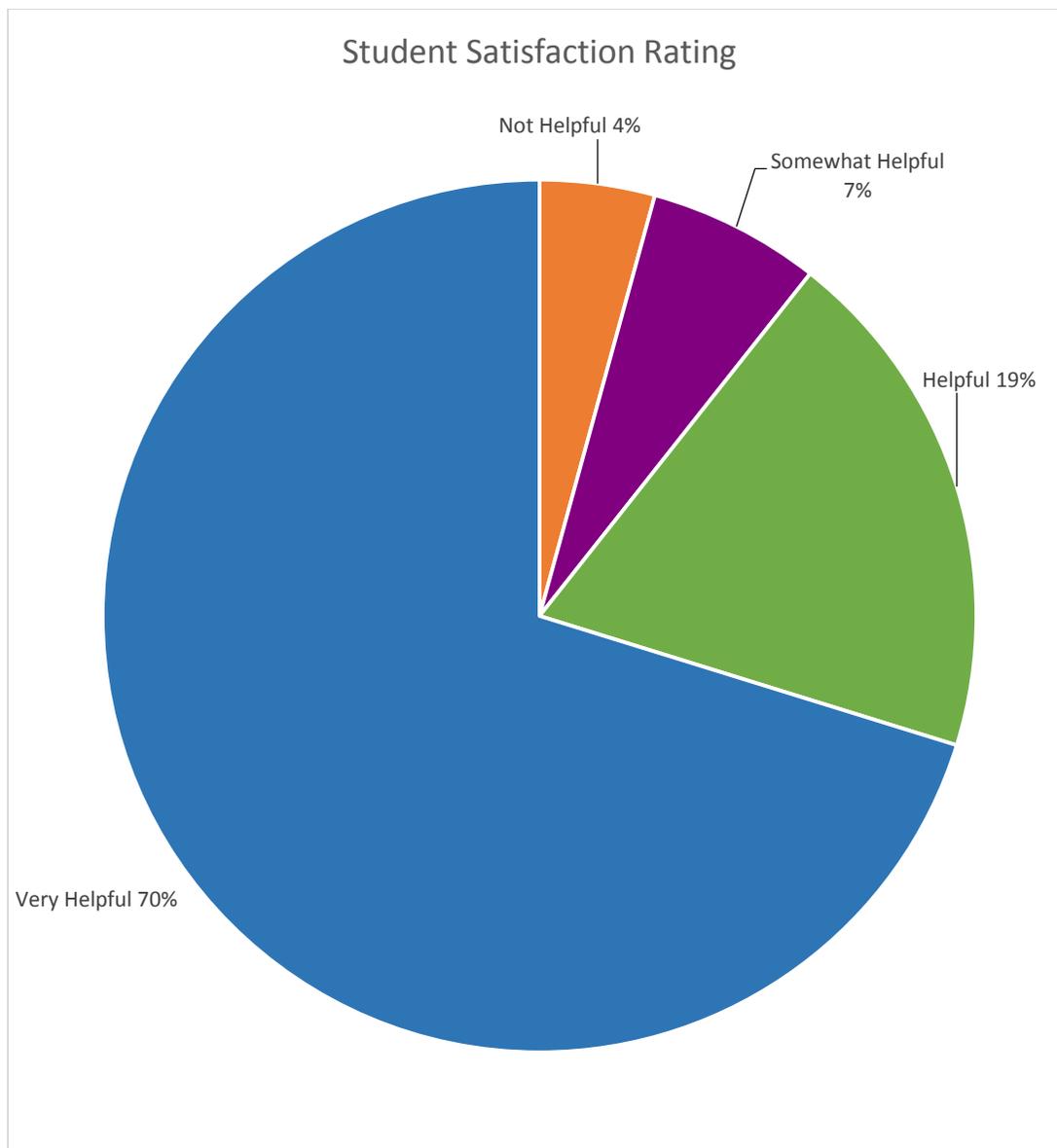
Figure 9: Student Satisfaction Ratings

Every student who used the eTutor Alberta service was sent a survey to provide feedback on the experience. Out of the 699 submissions, eTutor Alberta received 94 responses (a 13.4% response rate). Each respondent was asked to rate the level of helpfulness on a scale of 1 (not helpful) to 4 (very helpful). As displayed in Figure 9, 89 percent of the students rated the eTutor Alberta service as being either very helpful or helpful. This indicates that, from the student perspective, eTutor Alberta is a valued and useful service.

The satisfaction levels were echoed in the written responses from students. The majority of students had excellent things to say about the eTutor Alberta service. Many of the students discussed the helpfulness of the service or specific tutor, the support they felt from the service and tutor, or how the

service helped them build on their writing skills. This is excellent feedback, as it demonstrates that our service is helping students and, more specifically, helping them build their existing skills.

Students also frequently spoke about turn-around times. The split between students who spoke negatively about turn-around times to those who spoke positively about them was fairly even. Some students were pleased with the promptness of the service, while some were disappointed in the timeliness.

Editing and proofreading were again mentioned as areas students would like more help with. Although it was a small number of students who requested more help with editing, these repeated requests may warrant an exploration of editing services for students. It should be noted that an initial discussion about editing drew concerns related to the originality of the student's work. As such, any consideration of expansion of such services would require due consideration. Grammar help was also identified as an area where students would like more support. Work still needs to be done in helping students to understand what the eTutor Alberta service offers. It may also be an indication that the eQuestion service needs to be clarified to students. The eQuestion service is used with much less frequency and could be used to ask specific questions about grammar.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Pilot 2 was another successful term for eTutor Alberta. Several lessons were learned, and recommendations can be made.

1. In future terms, reporting numbers from the eTutor Alberta platform should be used to plan for peak weeks.
2. eTutor Alberta should continue to work with faculty and students at partner institutions to manage expectations regarding turnaround times, especially during peak weeks.
3. Some peak weeks should be staffed at a higher level based on the predicted number of submissions.
4. The eTA Coordinator should aim for a mix of scheduled tutor hours and floating tutor hours to ensure maximum coverage, especially for peak week coverage.
5. The use of eQuestions should be better clarified and communicated to students and institutions.
6. Institutions with more experience or higher usage should be paired with newer institutions or institutions with lower usage to share ideas on marketing the eTutor Alberta service.

As evidenced in this report, eTutor Alberta has been very well received by participating members and students.

eTutor Alberta launched on January 5, 2015 with all 11 of the institutions from Pilot 2 plus two new institutions, the University of Lethbridge and SAIT. During Pilot 2, the number of partner institutions, students using the service, and available tutors increased. The turnaround time continues to fall within our ideal window of 24 to 48 hours, and student satisfaction levels are still very high despite the increase in usage. eCampusAlberta initially agreed to fund the pilot phase of the eTutor Alberta project; however, institutions were cautioned that they may have to fund future offerings of the service. In October of 2014, it was announced that eCampusAlberta would open funding for all 26 public PSIs in Alberta for January to December of 2015.

Given the growth and support for eTutor Alberta's pilot phases, further recommendations can be made:

7. eTutor Alberta should seek a recommendation from the SSSO and SAO groups of Alberta on the issue of sponsorship. In order to best meet the diverse infrastructures and needs of institutions, a sponsorship committee made up of members of both groups may be preferred.
8. eTutor Alberta should look to expanding services beyond asynchronous writing.
9. eTutor Alberta should seek a means of sustainable funding for the future.

The first two pilots of eTutor Alberta were successful. This success is due to the wonderful collaborative spirit demonstrated by all partner institutions, the support of eCampus Alberta and the SSSO and SAO groups of Alberta, and the guidance of the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium and BCcampus. The eTutor Alberta service is proof that students benefit from institutional collaboration.

Appendix 1: eTutor Alberta Structure and Roles
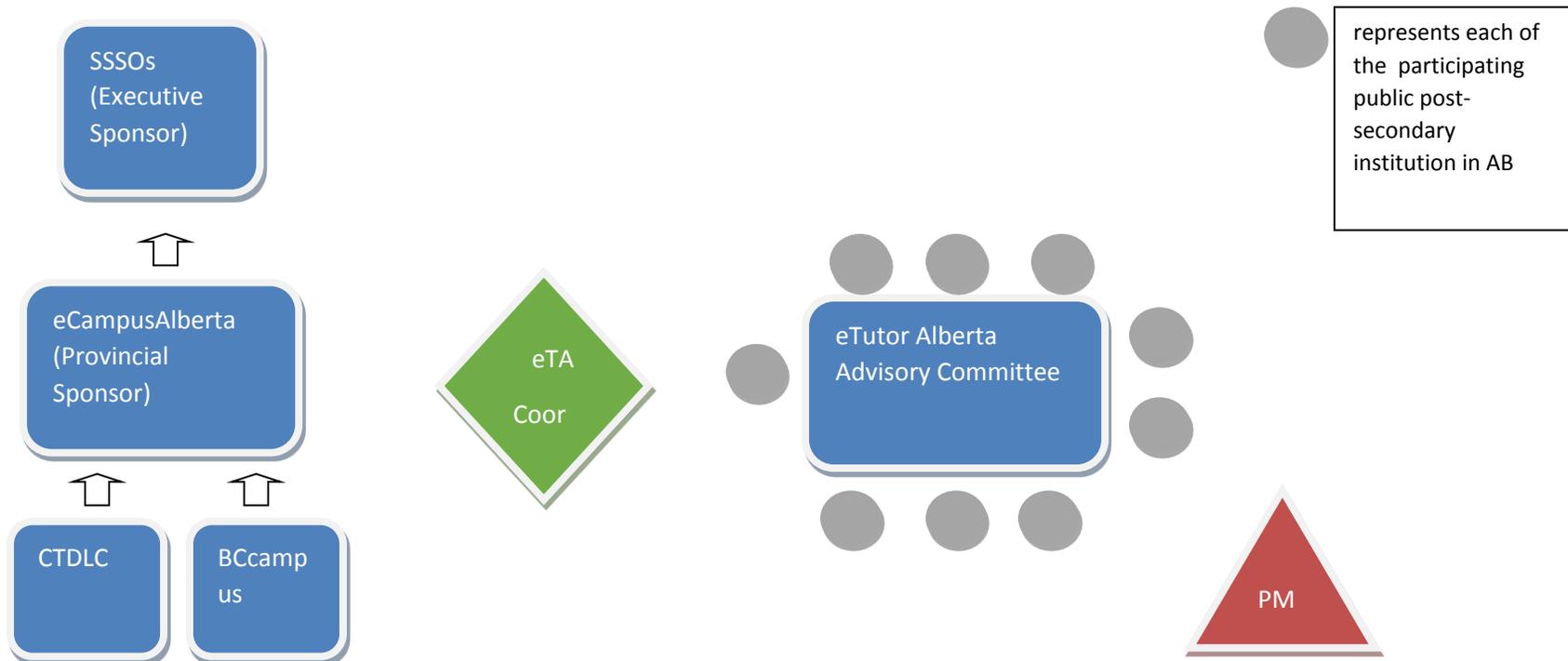
SSSOs (Senior Student Services Officers) – executive sponsor of the project and official liaison between eCampusAlberta and the project

eCampusAlberta – the provincial sponsor of the project and the major organizer behind this first-year initiative; eCA is also funding the first year initiative

CTDLC (Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium) – providers of the eTutoring.org platform, the tutoring platform being used. Also provide expertise in the eTutoring.org model and overall support

BCcampus – providers of the hosting environment for the platform in Canada and support for the shared service operations, plus operational/technical support

eTA Coordinator – the eTutor Alberta Coordinator is a position that is responsible for all administration of the program and is responsible to liaise with each institutional member, the CTDLC, BCcampus, and eCampusAlberta

eTutor Alberta Advisory Committee – the operational decision making body, which reports back through SSSOs. Individual members are accountable back to their SSSO and their own supervisors

PM (Project Manager) – project support, providing operational support to the advisory committee and communicating to all

Appendix 2: System Collaboration Table

eTutor Alberta

System Collaboration Activity

Sept 2 to Dec 12, 2014

- 568 student accounts
- 699 papers reviewed

Students / **Tutors**

	Bow Valley College	Concordia University	Grande Prairie Regional College	Lakeland College	Lethbridge College	MacEwan University	NAIT	NorQuest College	Northern Lakes College	Olds College	Red Deer College	eTutor Alberta
Bow Valley College	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	2	2	0
Concordia University	6	4	7	3	4	10	4	5	4	4	6	0
Grande Prairie Regional College	5	5	1	2	6	4	5	7	4	8	5	1
Lakeland College	0	0	0	0	1	3	1	3	1	0	3	0
Lethbridge College	17	17	9	16	24	24	21	24	15	19	15	1
MacEwan University	13	9	7	20	17	28	7	9	9	9	19	2
NAIT	3	2	0	6	9	7	5	2	7	5	5	1
NorQuest College	2	2	1	2	4	1	5	4	1	4	0	1
Northern Lakes College	5	5	1	4	3	8	4	12	6	1	4	0
Olds College	5	3	0	1	4	6	5	4	3	5	2	1
Red Deer College	5	2	3	3	9	6	5	4	3	2	3	1