

College Programming Strategy

Algonquin College Academic White Paper

March 2009

:

College Programming Strategy is one in a series of Academic Area white papers that includes:

- Academic Technologies
- Accommodating Increased Enrolment
- Applied Research
- Apprenticeship
- Community and Business Integration
- Enrolment
- Internationalization
- Interprofessional Education
- Sustainability

These papers can be found at:
www.algonquincollege.com/VPAcademic

PREFACE

In 2007, Algonquin College began a five-year strategic planning process to re-think its focus and set a direction in line with current trends and future needs. In the context of that strategic exercise, the Academic Area is exploring key questions about the ways the College may sustain its reputation, enhance its educational offering, and deliver that offering consistently across all programs. The following is one of ten papers addressing specific issues that demand forward-looking consideration.

Authors

Marguerite Donohue
Kim Tysick
Jo-Ann Aubut
Brian Burns
Vertha Coligan
Karen Davies
Jennifer Daly-Cyr
Denyce Diakun
Geoff Mace
Linda Rees

CONTENTS

Preface

Executive Summary1

The Issue1

Background and Considerations.....2

Opportunities7

Recommendations9

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An integrated College programming strategy is proposed in this document that builds on the successful processes that are currently in place. This strategy is fully integrated both within the College and with the external community and is responsive to the changing environment – our clients and the market within which we operate. It will help to guide us to meet the goals of the 2008-2013 strategic plan while at the same time recognizing the space challenges that the College is facing at all of its campuses.

THE ISSUE

Algonquin is a college offering a range of program types from certificates to degrees in many disciplines. The Ottawa campus programs are very comprehensive. The rural campuses in Pembroke and Perth have developed niche programming with other mainstream programs to support the needs of the community.

The College has succeeded in growing in recent years, however, this has occurred in the absence of a College programming strategy to guide decisions regarding which program areas to pursue development in, which of our current programs to grow, which ones to maintain, which ones to repackage for increased market penetration, and which ones to exit from.

In addition to the challenge of moving to planned growth, we must better meet the learning needs of our students and industry partners. Ways to increase flexibility in program delivery, to enhance the use of technology, and to expose the students to the workplace experience must be explored, and decisions made regarding which paths to take to accomplish this goal. We must also ensure that our programs, full-time, part-time and custom-delivered, meet the enhanced requirements for the knowledge-based economy. New curriculum directions also need to be explored to ensure that we can meet the learning needs of our students and attract both domestic and international students. The significant space challenges facing the College must be kept at the fore in all of these discussions and decisions.

BACKGROUND AND CONSIDERATIONS

BACKGROUND

This section provides some background information to be considered in the development of a College programming strategy.

Enrolment Growth

The College is projected to grow to 20,000 students by the year 2020. Growth in recent years has pushed us to capacity in all of our facilities.

From 2000/2001 to 2007/2008, semester enrolments in full-time postsecondary programs increased from 21,369 to 25,457, an increase of 19%. In addition, there has been a diversification of product lines through the addition of 1,681 semester enrolments in collaborative programs and 606 in bachelor's degrees in applied studies.

As well as the growth in the total number of students, there has been a shift in the type of students. There have been increases in the number of students from previously under-represented segments of the local population, an increased number of international students, and a higher percentage of students who are not direct from high school.

Generation of New Programming Areas

The process to support program development has matured over the past years. The Curriculum Review Committee was established in 2000 and the program development process has gradually become more refined. There have been significant efforts to make program development and approval as efficient and effective as possible and to ensure that programs are ready for promotion once approved.

The ad hoc nature of new program idea generation has resulted in several unintended consequences:

- New programs are developed based on their individual merits rather than on a broader perspective.
- Some new programs are competing with existing College programs for applicants.
- Maximizing the use of space and infrastructure has not always occurred.
- Traditional delivery modes have been primarily used.

Spring 2008 saw the first attempt to provide formal guidelines for program proposal submission to the academic area. The following message was distributed to Chairs with the invitation to the Initial Scoping meeting:

Given the current challenge that the College is facing with respect to space, in this round of consideration, new program proposals that meet one of the following criteria will be given priority when decisions are being made:

- programs that are planned for delivery in non-peak times, i.e. evening, weekends, and in the spring/summer semester;
- when the proposed program replaces a current program that will be suspended and phased out, and the new program is designed to use about the same type and amount of space as the phased-out program;
- programs that are delivered online; and,
- programs that use other creative solutions to address space challenges.

Note that program proposals will not be considered if new, dedicated space is required. Use of excess capacity in existing dedicated space is encouraged.

In that round of Initial Scoping, only three program proposals were submitted.

We have some experience testing ideas for new programs in the School of Part-time Studies (SPTS). This has been done successfully in several instances. Paralegal and Veterinary Assistant are but two examples of this. In addition, we have introduced a fully online diploma program through the SPTS, the Military Arts and Science diploma.

Establishing applicant and employer demand for programs is an area of importance for new programs, but is very challenging to demonstrate. The College recently undertook a project, over the period of 14 months, to conduct extensive surveys of employers and applicants. The conclusions drawn at the end of the project were, first, that a comprehensive labour market analysis provided solid information upon which to base employment demand decisions and, second, that mining existing *ontariocolleges.ca* statistical applicant data is as effective as extensive surveys of random populations to demonstrate applicant demand.

Program Suspension and Cancellation

The Program Mix Review process provides objective data for academic administrators to evaluate their programs. The decision to suspend/cancel a program is not one that is to be made lightly. The fixed costs of the Department, School, Faculty and VPAO still have to be covered by the College when a program is suspended/cancelled. Human resource considerations also factor heavily into the decision. Space dividends from program suspensions/cancellations are not realized immediately.

Despite this, the difficult decisions to suspend/cancel programs are made on an annual basis. It has been demonstrated that, in some cases, suspending/cancelling one program can result in increased enrolment in related programs and therefore no net loss of enrolment to the College.

Managing the suspension/cancellation process is an important consideration. Faculty, advisory committees and community engagement in the decision to suspend/cancel a program, even if they do not agree with it, play a significant role in the reaction to the news of the suspension/ cancellation.

Flexibility of Program Delivery

Delivery of courses in the 'hybrid' course instruction mode has been implemented across the College with varying degrees of success. It has been recognized that we have moved forward in order to improve the quality of the hybrid learning experience for students. A review of current practices is currently underway and professional development is being provided. This investment is important to successfully increasing the number of hybrid courses delivered in the long run.

Articulation agreements require ongoing maintenance if they are to remain valid and valuable. A contact person has been established at the College and an annual review is conducted of all current articulation agreements to ensure that they are accurate, relevant and accessible.

Laddering of programs within the College requires a greater focus. Laddering opportunities benefit our current students, as well as, graduates. Promoting these options would be a low investment for us while providing increased employment options for students when they graduate. There are a few examples where there are planned opportunities for students to move from one program to another, e.g. Paralegal and Law Clerk; Interior Design diploma to BAA (Interior Design).

Collaborative degrees, with students gaining both a college and university credential upon completion of their studies, are proving to be increasingly popular across the province. Algonquin has a couple of successes in the two Bachelor of Information Technology (BIT) programs. The Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BScN) program, also a collaborative degree although the students do not receive a diploma upon graduation, is another success. The administrative challenges of delivering these programs in partnership with our university colleagues cannot be understated. Despite this, the benefits and the attractiveness to students must be recognized.

CONSIDERATIONS

This section outlines the considerations related to the issues identified in the previous section. The implications for the College that follow from these considerations are also indicated.

Enrolment Growth

The College is projected to grow to 20,000 students by 2020 with 10% of those being international students. During this time frame, the high school population in this region will decrease. In order to achieve the target set in the strategic plan, we must increase our market share of the direct applicants from the high school population and increase the proportion of our student population coming in as mature students (non-direct applicants) to postsecondary programs. Other considerations are increasing the number of first choice applicants and determining the relationship to retention.

The population in the city of Ottawa and the counties of Lanark and Renfrew are projected to grow by 24%, 16% and 11%, respectively, between 2008 and 2031. In that same time frame, the population, aged 15 - 24 years, is projected to grow/decline by 3%, -11%, and -15%, respectively. This demonstrates the importance of both increasing our market share of the direct entry students and increasing our emphasis on non-direct entry students. The campuses in Pembroke and Perth draw a large proportion of their student populations from outside their local region, which has in the past and will continue in the future, to contribute to their enrolment base.

The demographics of our student population are changing. We are, and will continue, to serve increasing numbers of students from Aboriginal groups, first generation students, youth with Crown wardship status, international students, new Canadians, and students with disabilities, among others. As the student population changes, so too will the programming that will serve them best.

***Implications:** In planning for enrolment growth, it must be recognized that a large proportion of enrolment growth in recent years has been achieved through the introduction of new programs. Tapping different markets will also be necessary.*

The student population demographics are changing which will result in the need to recognize the unique needs of these learners and to provide the resources and supports necessary to ensure student success.

Generation of New Programming Directions

The generation of new program ideas is currently an ad hoc process at the College. New program ideas generally come from the academic area, generated from a variety of sources: advisory committees, linkages with business/industry, research or publications from a particular discipline, and creative faculty and academic administrators.

The Initial Scoping review, instituted in 2006, sees that new program proposals are vetted by the Vice-President, Academic's management team to ensure that there is direction provided regarding which programs are developed and which are not. The College's strategic direction and resource capacity have been used as criteria for program proposal approval for development. As a result of this scrutiny, not all programs proposed are approved. Initial scoping considers each program somewhat in isolation, on its own merits.

The timing of the launch of new programs has been identified as a concern. The time required to successfully take a program to market needs to be taken into consideration in program development planning.

The number of new programs proposed for development in 2008/2009 decreased from previous years due to the message that new dedicated space could not be accommodated (2006/2007: 16 programs proposed, 13 approved for development; 2007/2008: 21 programs proposed, 16 approved for development; 2008/2009 (Winter 2009 term): 3 programs proposed; 2 approved for development). However, when the message was changed to encourage development of programs for delivery in alternative formats in the Fall of 2008, the response from the academic area returned to previous levels: 14 programs proposed; 13 approved for development.

There has been a growing concern that, although the College's total enrolment is increasing, total program weights are not increasing at the same rate. This is of concern because growth in the system is funded on program weights and not on head count.

Implications: *Continuing to develop new program ideas on an ad hoc basis, combined with the message that "program proposals requiring dedicated space will not be entertained", may have an impact on the College's total program weights. This may or may not have larger implications. This message may also result in fewer new program proposals being put forward for consideration.*

Program Suspension and Cancellation

Suspension and cancellation of programs through the Program Mix Review is a challenging process. The Program Costing and Quality Index data generated to support Program Mix Review are relatively objective measures. Programs are generally considered for suspension on an individual basis based on the trend analysis of the data presented rather than within a broader analysis.

Implications: *Programs need to be viewed in a broader perspective rather than in isolation. An analysis of why program enrolment is not performing could be a beneficial addition to the process.*

Flexibility of Program Delivery

Algonquin leads the province in the delivery of compressed diploma programs (NSDP) and intensive programs. These programs enable students to complete their studies in a shorter time frame. We are also increasing the number of full-time programs that can be taken on a part-time basis through the SPTS. Some of these are available in a combination of in-class and online formats, while others are available fully online.

Ontario College credential programs, apprenticeship programs, and bachelor's degrees in applied studies programs have prescribed programs of study based on mandated provincial requirements. In order to increase the flexibility of these programs, a significant investment in curriculum redesign is required. Online delivery, increased PLAR opportunities, quality hybrid course delivery, effective and creative uses of technology to support learning, and laddering opportunities between programs, internal and external, will all be to the advantage of learners. Student success needs to be a primary consideration in all of these approaches.

Implications: *A significant effort is required to increase the flexibility of the programs currently offered at the College.*

As the student population at the College changes, a wider variety of programming and delivery options for students and clients are required. An in-depth analysis of incoming students could inform the directions that we take.

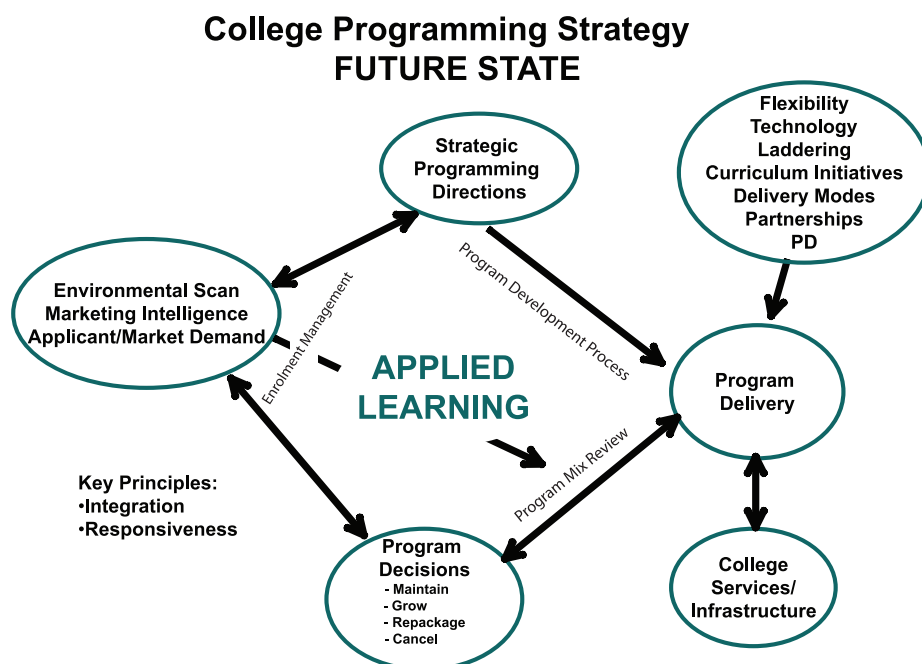
OPPORTUNITIES

The College has the opportunity to build on the successful practices currently in place and improve upon these by developing and adopting a College programming strategy that is fully integrated and responsive. Fundamental to the proposed College programming strategy is planned curriculum and program development. Programs must be grounded in applied learning, driven by the applicant/market, and flexible in delivery in order to meet the changing needs of the learner.

The College programming strategy will:

- Articulate the value of applied learning;
- Establish a process for the identification of new programming areas;
- Guide decisions related to Program Mix Review;
- Provide direction for flexible curriculum delivery and re-design;
- Guide new curriculum directions;
- Promote the development of new partnerships; and
- Confirm the integral role of the SPTS as a deliverer and test-ground for programs and courses.

A visual representation of the College programming strategy is included in Figure 1. The enhancements required to current practices are outlined under Recommendations.



Options

Option 1

Continue on the current path with an ad hoc approach to program development, restrict enrolment growth due to our space dilemma, provide minimal response to changing demographics, continue to view programs in isolation, and develop and deliver programs and curriculum with minimal flexibility.

Option 2

Adopt a College programming strategy that is completely integrated and responsive; is driven by applicant/market demand; allows for continued, planned growth; is flexible in delivery; is designed to meet the changing needs of the learner; and responds to the changing demographics. This College programming strategy will inform decision-making and be supported by professional development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to have an effective, integrated, responsive College programming strategy as articulated under Opportunities, the College must implement the following:

Strategic Direction for Programming

In order to better determine new programming areas, several gaps in our processes have been identified:

Process

- Develop ongoing environmental scanning and marketing intelligence gathering processes to aid in decision-making and to inform direction setting. Bi-annual reporting will consider input from both industry representatives and marketing;
- Determine the short-term and long-term applicant/market demand of programs;
- Determine impact/needs of new programs on all College services and infrastructure;
- Offer space neutral programming through effective use of technology (i.e., online, hybrid, etc.);
- Use the SPTS as a test ground for new programs whenever possible; and
- Based on data, decide on priority programming development directions.

Enrolment Management

- Identify programs competing for applicants across the College including international students (i.e., crossover in areas/sectors);
- Focus on increasing the number of indirect applications while growing the number of direct applications; and
- Identify a process to capture repeat enrolments of current students transitioning into other programs.

Marketing

- Develop a marketing plan for new programs during the program development process and initiate marketing immediately upon Board of Governors' approval; and
- Define and market *The Algonquin Experience* by focusing on the uniqueness of delivery modes (i.e. use of technology, simulation, inter-professional practice).

Program Mix Review

With respect to Program Mix Review, the College must:

- Develop a mechanism to align program mix with applicant/market demand;
- Determine the sustainability of each program over time;
- Modify programs/curriculum to make them attractive to students from the global market;

- Assess where programs are in relation to their life-cycle (i.e., which ones to maintain, which ones to grow, which ones to repackage, and which ones to suspend/cancel); and
- Delineate a clear process for re-vitalization or suspension/cancellation of programs.

Flexibility of Program Delivery

Flexibility of program delivery is a cornerstone of the College programming strategy. To achieve flexibility and achieve growth within our footprint the College must:

- Expand the delivery options for courses and programs:
- Develop common curriculum and combine sections of common courses across the College (e.g., Math, English);
- Develop modules for common elements in like courses;
- Develop academic bridges between courses and/or programs;
- Provide accelerated learning opportunities based on needs of industry/adult learners; and
- Combine off-site and on-site customized training to industry/adult learners;
- Repackage programs, especially those with multiple sections, to offer varied delivery offerings (i.e., traditional, evening/weekend, weekend, compressed summer, online, etc.) and to provide non-traditional scheduling or “off-cycle” programs (i.e. January intake, summer intake, alternate semester intake);
- Develop course recovery and “reach ahead” opportunities to facilitate retention;
- Recognize that international students have specific needs and develop appropriate curriculum to accommodate these needs;
- Identify and eliminate barriers that prevent entry and retention of International students;
- For programs that cannot sustain an annual intake, consider offering alternate cycles (i.e. every two years, every three years).
- Explore financial or other incentives to attract “off-cycle” students, particularly in oversubscribed programs (i.e. free parking, reduced book costs, residence fees, etc.);
- Provide professional development opportunities to enable faculty and staff to transition to these new realities; and
- Maintain the currency and relevancy of the vision established for the “Professor of the 21st Century”.

Curriculum Directions

In order to achieve the goals of the strategic plan, the following need to be implemented:

- Expand laddering opportunities:
 - between faculties/schools across the College (i.e., preparatory to certificate to diploma to degree); and
 - Identify a mechanism to decrease barriers in internal credit transfer and to permit seamless movement from part-time to full-time studies and in and out of programs;
- Integrate a mandatory work experience component in all possible programs (i.e., field placement, clinical placement, co-op placement, or work placement);
- Incorporate the three pillars of sustainability in all college curricula to include environmental sustainability, social development and economic development;
- Incorporate internationalization in all college curricula;
- Explore apprenticeship models for ‘suitability of fit’ with programs;
- Incorporate interprofessional design across college curricula;
- Promote the scholarship of teaching and learning through applied research initiatives;
- Expand classroom delivery to include in and out of classroom experiences with linkages to applied learning;
- Expand opportunities for degree completion:
 - Develop new collaborative degrees in partnership with local universities;
 - Continue to expand the number of bachelor’s degrees in applied studies to the 5% of programming allowable;
 - Establish new articulation agreements with a focus on universities close to home, especially our local universities; and
 - Decide whether or not to pursue ITAL status further;
- Explore new program ideas:
 - Gap Year program with laddering opportunities to other programs;
 - Rebranding of General Diploma through GAS;
 - Create a program to enable students to sample a variety of professions (i.e., courses selected from a number of program areas) with laddering opportunities to other programs;
- Augment bridge programming for the internationally trained professionals;
- Use technology effectively to the benefit of the learners:
 - Expand use of technology enhanced learning tools (e.g., podcasts, clickers) and provide the professional development necessary to faculty.

New Partnerships

The College must strengthen its current partnerships and establish new partnerships with:

External

- Educational institutions (i.e., school boards, universities, especially Carleton University and the University of Ottawa, la Cité collégiale, and private colleges)
- Business, industry and other private sector organizations
- Government agencies
- International institutions and organizations
- Community and non-profit agencies

Internal

- School of Part-time Studies
- Business Development (i.e., International Education Centre, Corporate Learning Services, etc.)
- Advisory Committees*

* Advisory Committees provide one source of marketing intelligence along with program direction. We need to ensure that the “right” people sit at our Advisory Committee tables.