

Community and Business Integration

Algonquin College Academic White Paper

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Community and Business Integration is one in a series of Academic Area white papers that includes:

- Academic Technologies
- Accommodating Increased Enrolment
- Applied Research
- Apprenticeship
- College Programming Strategy
- Enrolment
- Internationalization
- Interprofessional Education
- Sustainability

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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

Karen Davies
Barbara Foulds
Vertha Coligan
Joe Ranieri
Denyce Diakun
Tammy Thornton
Mark Hoddenbagh

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Algonquin College has played an important role in the economic and social success of the communities it serves for the past 40 years. It is a vital and essential institution in Eastern Ontario. Technological developments, globalization and demographic shifts have accelerated the pace of change, however, and there is a need for the College to adapt and to develop new initiatives to maintain and improve its service to the many communities and industries that it serves. This paper suggests a number of short- and long-term steps that the College could take to help learners, businesses and the community improve their success in a fast-changing world.

THE ISSUE

The President's Executive Committee has identified a need for Algonquin to become more strategically aligned with the broader communities and employment partners served by the College.

BACKGROUND AND CONSIDERATIONS

New initiatives to improve the College's integration with industries and the broader community should build on a substantial base of existing resources and practices.

- There are more than 100,000 Algonquin alumni living and working in the communities served by the College.
- The College's Board of Governors is made up of successful people from a wide range of industries who are committed both to the success of the College and their own industries.
- Although the quality of Program Advisory Committees varies, most attract people with deep knowledge who donate their time to provide excellent advice on keeping programs up to date.
- Many recent initiatives, such as the Academic Health Council and the College's Business Innovation Centre, demonstrate a creative spirit, and desire to improve the College's service to its communities.
- Algonquin has proven successes in pilot integration projects, e.g., district school board partnerships; access program initiatives. Adopting best practices from these pilot projects and a more integrated approach is crucial.

The federal and provincial governments are also taking steps to deal with economic and social changes. Existing skills shortages with declining job pools (particularly in critical sectors such as trades and hospitality), coupled with global competition for employees to fill these needs will necessitate employers and businesses to engage with Algonquin's initiatives in this area. Algonquin is ideally positioned as an excellent source both as a talent pool and to assist in the recruitment and retention of staff. Major initiatives taken by the College must be aligned with government programs if they are to attract sufficient financial support to be successful.

OPPORTUNITIES

Improved integration with communities and businesses would achieve the following objectives:

- increase relevancy of programs to the industries they serve;
- increase the job preparedness and employment prospects of graduates;
- attract more applicants to programs because of enhanced employment prospects;
- increase the College's revenues through increased enrolment and industry support for more relevant programs; and
- Increase opportunities for the College to participate in applied research projects that will enhance its reputation and provide benefits to students, staff, faculty and partners.

Options

The current physical space limitations of the College are a serious impediment to starting new programs and expanding existing programs to improve business and community integration. The College should consider options to expand academic space including alternative delivery, portable classrooms, and leasing space off-campus.

Alternative and responsive delivery is critical to maintaining and expanding partnerships.

Vision

Algonquin College and its programs are recognized as an interactive extension of the workplace in all related industries in eastern Ontario.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Process

1. Use a final vision to drive improved integration with businesses and the community.
2. Prepare an inventory of all business and community integration initiatives and partnerships that are currently in place at the College. This should result in the development of a “partnership map” for the entire College and a gap analysis to assist in the development of new initiatives and to assess the success and continuing relevance of existing initiatives.
3. Break down internal silos that complicate relationships with businesses. Identify a single, well-known point of contact for all new needs for any active or potential external clients seeking to strengthen and/or develop a relationship with the College. This approach would be a triage approach to identify and refer clients to the appropriate areas. Once a relationship has been developed, individual areas would maintain and nurture these clients’ needs.

Personnel

1. Identify internal champions. Improved integration will need champions. Leadership commitment is required with a view to maximizing resources. The champions should support reallocation of resources to support investments in partnerships. All aspects from faculty to advisory committees would become more externally oriented.
2. Increase student engagement by establishing a goal of having mandatory work experiences in all full-time postsecondary Ontario Credential programs. The type of work experience should be dependent on ease of access with specific programs for both students and employers and may include community work or volunteerism.
3. Redefine roles of senior staff of the College so that they can invest more of their time being involved in the community. The College should develop streamlined operational procedures to encourage this.
4. Invest in faculty linkages with the community to spawn development projects, increase professional development and maintain more open, fluid relationships with sectors.
5. Hire new staff and faculty with community integration skills a key requirement.
6. Target alumni to assist in linkages with the community.

Partnerships

1. Revitalize Program Advisory Committees. The committees should be encouraged to be pro-active and to bring industry employment and skills problems and business and technology challenges to the College to be solved. Expanded and strategic membership should be considered.
2. While other postsecondary education institutions may often be competitors for students and resources, the College needs to be increasingly open to cooperating with them to achieve goals in increased community integration.