

2013

Algonquin College Town Hall

ALGONQUIN
COLLEGE

Report presented by:



**FACILITATING
RESULTS**

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Facilitating Results

12/4/2013

Town Hall Meeting Background

In response to the Employee Engagement Survey, a town hall meeting was held December 4, 2013 in the Algonquin Centre for Construction Excellence building. This meeting is part of an initiative to engage Algonquin College (AC) staff and faculty in conversation about college initiatives and concerns. As part of this ongoing initiative, the next town hall is planned for March 19, 2014.

Approximately 250 staff and faculty were in attendance at the December 4 town hall meeting. After opening comments from the President, Kent MacDonald, the one and a half hour meeting allowed for ten questions to be answered (eight from within the room and another two questions posed through the on-line facility). Questions were fielded by the AC Executive team who were in full attendance as follows:

- Dr. Kent MacDonald – President
- Claude Brulé – Vice President Academic
- Duane McNair – Vice President Finance and Administration
- Gerry Barker – Vice President Human Resources
- Laura Stanbra – Vice President Student Services
- Doug Wotherspoon – Executive Director Advancement

Sheri Hord, from Facilitating Results, acted as moderator of the event.

This document acts as a summary of the town hall discussions. The entire meeting continues to be available for viewing at www.algonquincollege.com/live.

A theme throughout the meeting was a desire on the part of the Executive to encourage a culture of collaboration and information sharing to better engage staff and faculty with a result of better informing decisions. This meeting showed a commitment to making that happen.

Ontario's Differential Policy Framework

Q. *A document has recently been released by the Ontario provincial government named Ontario's Differentiation Policy Framework for Postsecondary Education. A concern was voiced from the audience of the impact of this policy on the College's ability to allocate funds to program expansions and budget cuts. The audience member articulated that in the past the Strategic Program and Services Planning (SPSP) Committee had collaborated effectively to make program realignment decisions with no loss of full time jobs. His concern was that this policy, mandated at a provincial level, would keep staff and faculty from being involved in decisions of areas the College would specialize, as well as areas that would be rationalized to avoid duplication.*

A. President, Dr. Kent MacDonald, echoed the support of the SPSP program and its ability to identify programs to be cut without a loss of jobs, demonstrating that the best source of new resources is the reallocation of existing resources. His response was that, pending anything unforeseen in the upcoming technical briefings, there is little reason for concern in AC's ability to adhere to this policy. The work has been done through the SPSP Committee and AC currently meets its obligations as a comprehensive college serving Eastern Ontario. The SPSP Committee was held as an example of successful collaboration and leveraging expertise within the college.

The president concluded that, in his opinion, the Ontario's Differentiation Policy was more targeted at universities and specifically those in Toronto where there were a number of post-secondary institutions in close proximity. He reassured the audience that he felt that there would not be any labour implications as a result of this policy, and that faculty and support staff leadership would be involved if this were to be the case. Should additional information come from the upcoming technical briefings, this will be shared.

Kent MacDonald furthered his point to say that the provincial government estimates that enrollment will level out because their definition of the affected demographics is narrowed to the 18-24 age group; whereas, AC looks to this group as only one target area when attracting students.

VP Academic, Claude Brulé, added that the document recently released is requesting a more institutional response. AC was the only college in the region that had previously offered a system-level solution to productivity and innovation. Therefore, with small changes to existing documentation AC is very well positioned to address the six components of the Policy. The updates will represent more form than substance.

In a later follow-up Executive Director, Advancement, Doug Wotherspoon was asked to clarify whether he had said that the college had suspended program development. He clarified that this was not the case; the province has suspended the approvals of new programs until April 2014 as part of the differentiation report.

Algonquin College Symbolism & Pride

Q. *A participant in the audience commented that suit ties displaying the AC logo had been created and made available at the College. These are targeted at the male population. She questioned when there would be an equivalent symbol for women to show their pride in the college.*

A. A representative from the Book Store confirmed that green scarves with the AC logo have just arrived and are in store now.

Executive Director of Advancement, Doug Wotherspoon, explained the significance of these items. The College had gone through a branding exercise approximately a year and a half ago that took place over 12 months. He explained the concept the ties and scarves embody is one of pride in association with the values and identity of the organization. Doug mentioned that students had embraced this identity by wearing clothing that displayed the AC logo. There has also been an effort through banners and upgrading the esthetics of the buildings on the various campuses to build a consistent AC brand.

Funding Allocations to Support Infrastructure

Q. *An audience member voiced his concern that revenues (particularly those generated through offshore tuitions) were not being directed to rebuild the infrastructure that was being strained in order to generate those revenues. His specific example involved an increase in the use of the robotics lab as a result of an influx of international students. The equipment in these labs has been used to the point of questionable functionality and obsolescence and technicians are having difficulty maintaining them. There did not seem to be a direct and transparent link to funding the areas that generated the international student revenues.*

A. Vice President Finance and Administration, Duane McNair, stated that having high quality facilities for the students is a priority of the College. Duane agreed that there is not enough funding to address all needs. There is a Central Budget Committee that is chaired by a representative from the academic area and the members are tasked with addressing the many needs across the college. Going forward AC is exploring a new budgeting model called Responsibility Center Management that will more closely match the academic responsibility with resource allocations. A Lunch and Learn session will be held on December 16 describing this new approach. Claude Brulé added that funds were allocated to each school within the College to set priorities, rather than all funds being allocated centrally.

Kent MacDonald added that international students revenues net \$4M annually from a budget of over \$15 million; therefore, the issue of lack of funds is not exclusive to the international revenue streams. VP Student Services, Laura Stanbra, described a new fundraising planning process to address facility's needs. Working with Deans, the program is proposal-based (proposal deadline January 31, 2014) and designed to help schools identify capital equipment needs suitable for fundraising support.

Kent MacDonald noted that Ontario continues to be the lowest funded province per student in the country, which is disappointing in a time where there is a focus on investing in post-secondary education. He stated his preference to have more full time faculty and acknowledged that there is also a need for more full time counsellors, as well as resources towards IT security and deferred maintenance. Collaborative discussions like these allow for an exploration of where best to place available funds when AC funds cannot cover all needs.

Doug Wotherspoon ended by saying that there has been a period of fifteen years where the college's target demographic has been growing and that is projected to decline for the next twelve years. This coupled with the suspension of program development and matching user needs will create even greater challenges than experienced in a growing market. Conversations such as this one are going to become a necessity.

Strategy for E-learning

Q. *There were multiple questions revolving around the use of technology in learning. The first comment voiced concern that faculty in the classroom were falling behind because of a lack of long-term strategy to prepare them for the e-text and mobile learning environment.*

A. Claude Brulé, Vice President Academic, agreed that the College does lack a long-term strategy and that efforts are underway to resolve that situation. VP Brulé noted that there is considerable emphasis on leveraging technology in recent AC strategic plans that sets the foundation. The focus is on giving students access and opportunities to learn 100% of the time and allowing students to introduce technology in the classroom to enhance their learning experience, rather than be a distracter. There is a need to continue in this area. Consultations of a formal digital strategy for the College will begin in February. The strategy will include the learning and professional development needs of faculty. Claude welcomes suggestions on improvements in this area including educating part-time instructors, who tend to be more transient. Doug Wotherspoon, Executive Director Advancement, added that the approach to developing the College's digital strategy will take a different approach, one that will spend more time listening to faculty and staff first, rather than deciding on a course of action and then soliciting feedback.

Claude Brulé also emphasized the importance of each faculty welcoming students and spending more time orienting their students at the program level.

An on-line query commented that there appears to have been a focus on the infrastructure to date with respect to e-learning. It was questioned whether there has been thought given to the overall pedagogy impact of e-text etc. and whether this will provide positive learning relative to the significant dollars being spent.

Claude Brulé commented that research will be done as part of the work to map out the digital strategy to ensure that the activities that are taken produce the desired outcomes of the College. Initiatives are piloted and feedback is gained to ensure that effective learning results. He admitted that more work could be done here along with a better sharing of documented evidence. It was clarified that the research was not only to support the operational decisions being made, but also to ensure that the

overall e-learning strategy makes sense. Kent MacDonald also commented that the College's own evidence and a decade of external research show both e-learning and hybrid learning to be effective.

Non-Direct Students

Q. *It was noted that the majority of AC's enrollment was "non-direct" students, representing students that have not attended the College directly from high school. Most of the focus on the college marketing has been towards recruiting "direct" students (i.e. in high schools). The request from the audience was to clarify how the college would market to non-direct students.*

A. Doug Wotherspoon, Executive Director Advancement, commented that 60% of AC applications are from high school (direct) and 40% are non-direct. This number is reversed upon registration, with 60% of students from non-direct sources. The high school group is easy to target and they have institutionalized support networks through guidance counsellors, etc. that make marketing efficient. The non-direct target group ranges in age from 19-70 and is not centralized. However, many non-direct students come from high school 1-2 years after graduation. Therefore, marketing at high schools still reaches this group. The next best place to reach non-direct applicants is through the internet where they search for post-secondary opportunities sometime after high school. AC has begun web-based marketing campaigns and has increased their internet presence through means such as Google Ad Words and the use of webinars. There has also been a focus on posting non-traditional events throughout the year, such as events in malls. This reaches a cross-section of the non-direct student population at times not restricted to the traditional recruitment period of direct students.

Student Orientation

Q. *A member of the audience made a statement that AC is failing students as they arrive on campus for orientation, not actively engaging parents to the extent that they would like to be engaged, and marginalizing international student experiences by failing to connect them to the larger student community. Unlike some of the expenditures that were discussed as being needed earlier in the town hall, he pointed out that the cost of orientations were relatively low. His question was whether AC is looking at orientation processes strategically across the campus and confirming they meet the Council for Standards of Higher Education guidelines.*

A. Laura Stanbra, Vice President Student Services, agreed with the audience member's comments that the orientation needed to be improved. Staff from the AC were actively attending conferences and finding best practices to orientation. As well, she was pleased to announce that there has been an agreement in principal that a Student Experience Fee be added to the Student Association fees. This would generate \$600k revenue to direct towards orientation activities. Pending Board of Governor approval, this would come into effect for fall 2014.

Presence in Saudi Arabia and Human Rights

Q. *An on-line query was made asking the president about the college's decision to have a presence in Saudi Arabia in light of their currently poor human rights record.*

A. President Kent MacDonald's response started by saying that AC had been in Saudi Arabia for a number of years before the opening of the most recent campus. However, he acknowledged that at this point in time Saudi Arabia is not where they need to be from a human rights perspective. In saying that, Dr. MacDonald believes that education is a prime motivator to change people's perceptions and attitudes. There is evidence of that happening in Saudi Arabia through unprecedented levels of investment in women's education. He drew on an analogy of the United Nations report on the poor treatment of Aboriginals in Canada. There remains a desire to be present to educate this group as it is the systemic issue of the political regime and government that has placed Aboriginal people in this situation.

AC bid on building both a male college and a female college in Saudi Arabia and would have liked to win both tenders; however, only the male college was granted. This is not an ideal situation but at this time AC believes that the work there is important and that education can make a difference by exposing students to different views. The president admitted that ideally there would have been a deeper level of engagement earlier on in the process. It is a theme from this meeting that deeper engagement must take place going forward.

Q. *This discussion was followed up by an audience member that further questioned the College's presence in Saudi Arabia and whether there was a benchmark that guided whether the college should be entering a country with human rights issues. The analogy was made as to whether the College would have opened a white school in South Africa during the times of apartheid. The speaker also questioned the College's presence in China and wondered where the College would not do business.*

A. The president commented that there was no easy answer regarding where the college would and would not do business and no defined threshold to make this decision. He emphasized again the question: As educators do we believe that education can change the way people view the world? He named countries that AC has declined doing business at this point in time. There is not an exact metric to address this issue and these decisions take place through discussion over many months. The Saudi Arabia contract is five years and will be re-assessed on an annual basis.

Communication

President, Dr. Kent MacDonald ended by saying that his wish is to find ways that Algonquin College can talk deeply and properly about these issues as a college community. This is a matter of changing the culture and finding ways to engage people in these types of conversations.