



Town Hall
December 17, 2014



Background

The Algonquin College (AC) December Town Hall was an open forum held for employees in the Algonquin College Centre for Construction Excellence (ACCE) on December 17, 2014 from 1:30 - 3:00 p.m. The meeting was open to all Algonquin employees from Woodroffe, Perth, Pembroke and campuses abroad. Town Hall meetings are held in response to the 2012 Employee Engagement Survey. The meetings are part of a larger initiative to engage Algonquin employees in conversation about College initiatives and concerns.

Employees could participate in-person or virtually via live stream. There were approximately 175 employees in attendance, with 136 online viewers, and 132 requests to view after the event.

Questions were fielded by the AC Executive team who were in full attendance as follows:

- Cheryl Jensen, 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, Vice President International and Strategic Priorities
- Eric Hollebhone, Acting Executive Director Advancement

The event was facilitated by Elizabeth Costello from echo marcom services.

This document provides a summary of the Algonquin College December Town Hall discussions. The meeting may also be viewed from the archive available at www.algonquincollege.com/live.

Follow up from March 2014 Town Hall

President Jensen started the meeting by providing a short follow-up on items brought forward at the March Town Hall:

- *Here to Help (H2H) signs:*
 - o Have been placed in the ACCE building and are now part of every new building fit-up at the College.
- *Student Surveys:*
 - o Confirmed students are surveyed regarding Students Services through the Ontario-wide Key Performance Indicator (KPI) process and the College's First Year Student Survey.
 - o Student Services is committed to launching a full-scale student survey in 2015-2016.
- *Orientation:*

An orientation committee was created as part of the AC strategic enrolment mandate efforts and the President noted the results are impressive. Student participation in AC fall orientation increased by 12 per cent and student satisfaction climbed to 82 per cent. There was also a tremendous employee turnout to help support orientation information booths and since September students helping at AC portable orientation desks responded to 15,742 inquiries in total.

President's Listening Tour 2014

The President shared news emerging from the Listening Tour that recently had come to a close. The Tour involved over 300 employees and students across 22 one-hour sessions in total. Through the Listening Tour, attendees were each asked the same three questions:

- What are the opportunities here at Algonquin College?
- What are the challenges and why are we facing those challenges? and,
- If you were President of Algonquin College, what would you be focusing on?

The President noted that the themes of the discussions started emerging soon after the sessions began and that she gathered four clear takeaways from the sessions. They were:

- Everyone loves working and studying at the College; employee and student pride was loud and clear.
- People appreciated that the President asked them how to improve the College.
- There are a number of big issues that are worthy of more study and more discussion.
- There are a couple of big issues that need to be acted on right away.

The President added that there will be announcements in response to these issues early in the New Year.

One of these big issues put forth by employees during the Listening Tour sessions is "credential creep". Algonquin College offers a broad range of credentials from apprenticeship certificates to degrees and

also there are questions on what credentials are needed for jobs at the College. Other big issues included the treatment of part-time employees and the request for adopting more automated processes to streamline work and better serve students.

The President stated these issues were being taken very seriously, adding it's important to exercise careful consideration of solutions to these issues. Some are big ticket items that will need more discussion, while other issues will be dealt with immediately. College employees could expect there to be announcements on select issues early in the New Year.

One issue that especially resonated with the President was the need to improve communications. While she said that some issues are, indeed, being acted on, people often don't know, or perhaps there is too much information, which makes it difficult for employees to sift out what's important. The President added that there will be a focus to continuously improve communications.

The President thanked those that participated in the sessions and those that contributed online for providing feedback through the Listening Tour and asked the audience to “stay tuned” to hear from her and her team early in the New Year.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Employee Engagement Survey

Q. *A question was posed to provide an update on the Employment Engagement initiatives that followed the 2012 employee engagement survey results.*

A. Vice President of Human Resources (HR), Gerry Barker, re-emphasized the importance of communications. Like many organizations, he explained, Algonquin College will continue to work on creating better lines of communication like the AC coffee breaks and the town halls.

Doug Wotherspoon, Vice President International and Strategic Priorities, added that his department had two of the seven responsibilities identified by the Tiger Team (that was formed in response to the employee engagement survey results). Allowing College awards nominations to take place throughout the entire year was the first one. The launch of a single, virtual portal launched as a pilot with 400 employees last October was the second. As a result, eighty-three per cent of the employees participating in the pilot noted the portal provided improvement and a higher percentage wanted to roll it out across the College. VP Wotherspoon said he was especially excited about the online functionality to create groups online; the pilot included a number of groups that worked together, virtually. Through the pilot, more than 80 groups in all were formed (40 initiated by the users themselves). VP Wotherspoon said he expects that, subject to funding approval, the portal will roll out to the entire College in the New Year.

VP Barker acknowledged hearing concerns about *low performers* highlighted in the employee engagement survey. In response, the College successfully launched the AC Management Academy last

September run and managed by AC HR with a number of optional and compulsory workshops for College administrators.

Claude Brulé, Vice President Academic, said that from the employee engagement survey many people wondered why the student grading process was still being done manually. VP Brulé explained a team was currently working on automating the process and that there was a pilot project last fall. The work, he said, will continue to be refined, but that the plan is to have a fully operational, automated grading system by the fall of 2015.

VP Brulé further noted that nearly one year ago, he re-commissioned a working group (led by Robyn Heaton and Pat Lychak) to look at how to improve the student response rate and to create an accountability framework to issues emerging from course evaluation surveys. He explained that as a result of the working group efforts, and employees who encouraged students to participate in the survey, response rates increased significantly from 18-to-20 per cent to 34.5 per cent this fall. VP Brulé explained there is an accountability process to monitor and implement improvements based on survey answers and expressed his thanks to all employees who contributed to these results.

VP Barker also shared that the College has added efforts to recognize the contributions of AC part-time employees in a similar way to full-time employees at Algonquin College, including letters of appreciation after one year of service and pins for service after 5 years.

Credential Creep

Q. *The moderator acknowledged receipt of a question in advance: “In a number of the Listening Tour meetings, “credential creep” has been raised. This refers to the disconnect between the job requirements and the excessive academic qualifications being sought, whether it be for a full-time academic or support staff position. This has been to the consternation of part-time staff who find themselves out of the running for the very work they have been performing, in some cases for years. What steps will the College be taking to ensure our part-time staff members are able to compete for positions in the future that does not see them disqualified for excessive academic qualifications?”*

A. The moderator acknowledged that President Jensen had addressed the question in her opening remarks, and re-iterated that added announcements on issues emerging from the Listening Tour would be made in early 2015.

Union Representation

Q. *Sent in advance: “Up until five years ago, there were union reps on all full-time hiring committees for full-time academic, support staff, and academic manager positions. Their involvement provided consistency and transparency to the hiring process. Is the College contemplating having union reps back on committees, a practice that had been in place at the college for over 25 years before it was discontinued?”*

A. President Jensen responded explaining that she has recently met with Pat Kennedy on this, adding they meet monthly. As a result of the Listening Tour, discussion of union involvement with AC hiring committees has begun and together they are working to make progress here.

Kemptville College

Q. *An audience member inquired if, in the wake of the closing of Kemptville College, Algonquin College - along with, possibly, St. Lawrence College – would consider taking it over?*

A. VP Brulé said the College responded to the Ministry's call-for-proposals in the wake of the closing of Kemptville College. The Ministry appointed Lyle Vanclief to facilitate the process. Algonquin College chose to respond independently from St. Lawrence College. The Ministry is reviewing public and private sector proposals received. VP Brulé dismissed rumours and speculation from media, confirming no decision has been made.

Update on Saudi Arabia Campus

Q. *An audience member asked for a financial status update of Algonquin College's campus in Saudi Arabia after its first year of existence.*

A. VP Wotherspoon paid tribute to Algonquin employee Sam Gauvreau's work over in Saudi Arabia as Academic Chair and Acting Principal for the campus. In a period of about 14 months ending August 31, 2014, the Saudi campus generated a profit of \$197,000 (Canadian). The VP dismissed rumours that the campus had lost money in the first year of operations. He explained the group reports quarterly to the Board of Governors in open meetings that may be attended or reviewed in minutes made available publicly online. However, the VP added that the College did struggle, adding that is not easy to start-up overseas.

Funding in Saudi Arabia, he said, is based on the performance across four measures. VP Wotherspoon offered 80% per cent of funding is affected by one measure: attendance. He added students on this campus do not pay to attend classes; it is free of charge for Saudi students. Algonquin College receives funding only for each student that attends 80 per cent of their classes or higher - a challenging metric. There are three other metrics: quality (ranked yearly), satisfaction (bonus may be achieved if "above satisfactory" is achieved), and graduation to employment rate. VP Wotherspoon said he was confident they would meet a funding target for 18 graduating students, indicating 17 graduates have secured employment. With 100% graduate employment, the College would yield \$1 million (Canadian).

The VP acknowledged some early struggles in the first year of the Saudi campus, conceding that the campus is expecting a loss this coming year. His group will continue striving to turn a profit in 2015, with projections that depend upon the timing and adaptations achieved prior to each report. For example, enrollment has been impacted by a change to a trimester system from a semester system.

The VP indicated real numbers are provided, and available, in the performance updates to the Board of Governors quarterly.

Open Dialogue with Students

Q. *One audience member thanked the President for her efforts to listen to employees face-to-face and inquired if the President had plans to open dialogue with students to increase understanding and dispel misinformation (particularly about academic programs). As an employee, a former student and a recent graduate, this was important to her.*

A. President Jensen discussed how impressive the students were when she met with them during the Listening Tour. The President mentioned how much she enjoyed speaking with them and how much they each enjoyed the exchange of information.

As a result of the Listening Tour discussions, the President revealed comments she received of an unapproachable 5th floor executive team in an “ivory tower” separated from employees and students day-to-day. Some, she said, wondered if the executive offices could be relocated to the 1st floor - a move she strongly considered until the expense and repercussions of the move for others at the College became prohibitive and forced her to reconsider. President Jensen did vow to be more available, explaining she can accomplish this in many ways like informal visits on campuses in the lounge or meeting with the Students’ Association representatives in their classrooms. The President reminded the audience she welcomes involvement with students as she is still a teacher at heart.

VP Brulé added a description of the programming strategy underway at Algonquin College. The VP referenced past town halls and recent consultations to define the Algonquin College ten areas of program strength and four areas of future growth for programming to meet the requirements of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) call for the College’s Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA). In theory, the signed document allows the College to speed up program approval; the academic area has tested this with a few programs that have been approved at the College and turned around with ministerial approval fairly quickly. The VP added that the Ministry will be expected to ask further information regarding student and employer demand for programs proposed outside the SMA commitments. The VP added the programming strategy builds on the strength of Algonquin College and looks to the future for growth. As an example, the VP explained one area of growth is health and wellness programming. The College has a strong commitment to the *Healthy Living Education (HLE) initiative*; a committee has put together shovel-ready proposals together to respond to a call for infrastructure funding proposals.

Polytechnic

Q. *An audience member asked how the College is fulfilling its role as a polytechnic and how it could better promote itself as a world-class polytechnic institute.*

A. President Jensen explained that one of the reasons she was inspired to come to Algonquin College is its designation as a polytechnic. She added a polytechnic supports the essence of what “we do” at Algonquin College with programming from apprenticeship to degrees and a research focus.

The President pointed out, Algonquin College suffers from a Canadian-like disposition of not promoting itself enough. Repeating what she told her colleagues at a Foundation Board meeting, President Jensen explained she wants to be the College's "chief story-teller." When she hears news that promotes Algonquin, she shares it at formal meetings with politicians, in casual conversations with peers at conferences, or on Twitter. The President assured the audience that the College is a strong polytechnic and the public will hear more as the College raises its stature and establishes its stake in Ottawa, the province and the country.

Doug Wotherspoon noted that China, recognizing that it possibly has too many university graduates, is converting 600 universities to polytechnic institutes. He added that many students may not be familiar with what a polytechnic is and what makes it unique, noting that the College has some brand-building to do locally, in Canada and internationally.

Professional Development

Q. *An audience member asked if the College would continue to offer the SFX Masters of Education program, and also wanted to know what funds would be available for ongoing professional development (PD).*

A. VP Barker said he was in discussions with SFX University about financing a second cohort this fall and reflecting on any cost increases that may be incurred. He also expressed that Algonquin is working with SFX to recognize relevant experience of College employees as worthy candidates who may not currently be eligible for the Master's degree program because they do not possess all the necessary credentials. They are working diligently with the current SFX President Kent MacDonald to work through these details and to consider feedback being collected from the first cohort celebrating the completion of year one of their studies.

Regarding funds for PD, VP Barker noted the College has spent on average \$2,000 per employee on professional development with all factors in. This is about \$1,600 more than the Canadian average in business. He added that Algonquin is proud of the PD it offers including the Algonquin Leadership in Education Institute (ALEI), the Algonquin Management Academy, the Centre for Organizational Learning (COL), PD dollars spent, sabbaticals, etc., and new initiatives like the new faculty orientation. The VP assured the audience that he will always push for more.

VP Brulé added that it's important that Algonquin College recognize its own talent and should take advantage of the experience of colleagues when it comes to PD. He emphasized not only are we a teaching institution, the College is also a learning organization. He challenged employees to seek out opportunities for PD among colleagues.

VP Wotherspoon reported that his department received some great in-house PD on email protocol from an Algonquin employee (“How to tame the email beast”), adding it wasn’t based upon a fee, but relied on arranging time in everyone's schedule.

Q. *An audience member expressed concern with what she believes is a lack of PD and training for her department, and a high need for credentials to advance. She said that this equates to fewer opportunities for promotion despite high levels of experience in her department.*

A. VP Barker responded, noting that, at new employee orientation, employees are reminded to take charge of their career. He added this could mean attending school in the evenings or putting in extra time, and it can be difficult. As Chair of the Employer/Employee Relations Committee (EERC) for the province, VP Barker explained there is a lot of discussion about experience and education qualifications for employment; as an academic institution, education is an important qualification. He further added the College does offer opportunities for employees to obtain the skills required to the best of their abilities, so that they may fill job positions. He offered to make himself personally available should she want career path advice and provided the audience his direct office phone line.

Applied Research

Q. *A part-time math professor in the audience said he was impressed with Applied Research and Innovation (ARI) and how ARI has been able to encourage students to create their own jobs and start their own companies. He wanted to know what other benefits the College was reaping from ARI.*

A. President Jensen pointed out that both students and faculty must be involved in ARI to make it successful. Research findings, she explained, go back into the classroom so that other students can learn from these applied research experiences. This is a huge benefit for the College as a whole.

VP Brulé also noted that applied research has grown significantly across the College. The value ARI returns to its industry base is in the millions of dollars. The commercialization of products, services and processes has been accelerated by years, getting to market more quickly. He added that the College has received numerous testimonials from a variety of companies that have worked with ARI.

In return, the VP explained, through ARI, the College is able to provide Work-Integrated-Learning (WIL) opportunities in the classroom for students. VP Brulé pointed out these work-like experiences often lead to full-time work with an industry sponsor. Faculty also benefit by working with the industry partner and are able to bring back the experiences and knowledge into the classroom. VP Brulé did note that the intellectual property typically is retained by the industry sponsor. He explained Infosource rated Algonquin College the top college in Canada for the amount of students involved and the number of projects undertaken in ARI.

Budget Officer Training

Q. *An apprenticeship trainer from Mechanical Technology Trades in the audience explained that his department has seen four different budget officers in recent years. He acknowledged the uniqueness of the apprenticeship program - with its varied lengths of apprenticeships - and the challenges that poses to a budget officer. He added that essential budget-related tasks for his department required for January had yet to be executed. He wanted to know what could be done - in terms of training, for example - to stem what he believes is high turnover for this budget officer position.*

A. VP Barker mentioned that all support staff have access to training via COL.

Duane McNair, Vice President Finance and Administration, further explained there is support available to budget officers from the corporate finance department to guide how to use College systems and adopt College financial management practices. Budget officers, he added, are typically support staff; the qualifications required are a two- or three-year business diploma. Business administrators are required to have the CPA designation. The College is a \$320 million organization with the new budget under development; the College is cognizant of the need for the College to have qualified people managing those budgets.

President Jensen reinforced her respect for, and commitment to, Technology and Trades, by stating the country's need for skilled trades-people. Filling that skills gap, she said, particularly through apprenticeship, is critical to the provincial and national economy. These students need to be valued, recognizing the importance of apprenticeship among all credentials in the post-secondary system.

VP Wotherspoon added that part of the solution is automation and process review; automation will continue to have a stronger presence to hopefully ease “paper-pushing” and workload across College operations.

Service Standards

Q. *The audience member followed up, asking once a question is posed what time should be allotted to provide the response, raising the issue of service standards.*

A. VP Student Services, Laura Stanbra explained that response time depends on the question. She added we want to ensure students get the answer they need. Some questions are highly transactional and we want to consider if students could be served in another way, for example online.

The moderator added the College recommends client service level standards, requesting response within 48 hours (clarified by VP Brulé).

Eric Hollebhone, Acting Executive Director Advancement, indicated that the College is ramping up communications with audiences interested in college prior to admission. Each year, College Marketing and Recruitment are reaching approximately 27,000 prospects (direct from high school and non-direct

audiences) prior to their admission to the College. These individuals are contacted via phone calls, in-person events and email. He further explained Advancement sent more than 1.4 million individual, personalized messages to prospects this year. These messages were specific to the recipient's program, their age group and their area of interest. Massive automation projects, he said, have made this reach possible, specifically the Marketo platform.

Article 2

Q. *As a result of the last union agreement (regarding Article 2), an audience member asked the panel if there was, indeed, a hiring freeze - officially or unofficially – for new, full-time faculty.*

A. Gerry Barker, VP of Human Resources said that was absolutely not the case, explaining that the College's current budget includes provisions for approximately 11 new full-time faculty positions (not including retirements or replacing faculty, etc.). Algonquin College is a growing community college and the moratorium on article 2 will have no impact on the hiring for faculty positions.

Q. *An audience member referenced these new positions mentioned and the Article 2 moratorium, adding that new grievances can't be filed but existing grievances can be arbitrated. He asked the VP HR for clarification on how these two conditions are able to co-exist.*

A. VP Barker explained that the strategy continues as it has in the past few years. He added labour relations teams attempt to anticipate the outcomes of Article 2s in arbitration. Because of this strategy, he explained, with Article 2s outstanding, the College is unable to fill all new positions immediately.

Salesforce Automation

Q. *An online viewer explained that the Information Technology Services (ITS) department implemented Salesforce automation in its client care group this past summer. His asked if there are plans to do the same in other College departments, which he believed, ultimately, would break down barriers between departments and provide a higher level of service to students and customers.*

A. VP Wotherspoon praised the ITS group and the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) team that "knitted together" five help desk systems into one single help desk that provides ITS with new insights. He pointed out that the successful transition was more than just implementing technology and considered the strategy, discussing what processes were needed and ensuring the system was easy to use (example: considering when to use email, online, telephone, tracking). He concluded by saying that CRM is being introduced to a host of other departments at the College, including International, as part of the automation transformation. He welcomed those interested to come forward and contact the CRM team.

VP Stanbra indicated that Student Services, with its high number of help desks, was also very interested and looking seriously at similar transitions that would support system transformation through automation.

Succession Planning

Q. *An audience member asked a question about succession planning at the College. Specifically, she expressed frustration that retirees from the College often return shortly afterwards to fill open positions (“out the front door, in the back door”). She added that this is particularly frustrating as a parent of an Algonquin College graduate that has had difficulty finding a job.*

A. VP Barker said he shared her frustration. There will be a succession planning retreat scheduled for this spring through HR. He explained the College recognizes part of succession planning is the employee taking responsibility for their career. To assist, the College will be offering workshops in January and February (twenty individuals each) for employee career management and administrator coaching for employee career management. In tough economic times, he added, there is a need to evaluate positions left open after retirements prior to automatically posting them. Once evaluated, positions are posted. He expressed pride in the HR teams that support the process and acknowledged a need for a higher level of transparency that emerged with the Listening Tour. He said the College wants to fill positions with graduates and the right qualified people.

Final Question

Q. *The final question of the Town Hall was directed to President Jensen. Reading an online submission, the moderator asked President Jensen what her most memorable moment at the College was since joining Algonquin College.*

A. President Jensen first cited her participation in the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, which, she said, proved to be a great demonstration of team building, as well as a way for her and the executive team to express solidarity with students. Convocation, however, really stood out for her. She described her enthusiasm in watching Algonquin College graduates walk across the stage, some of whom had tears in their eyes and some with their children accompanying them. The Listening Tour sessions, she said, were also remarkable, particularly the session with students provided her with new insights into the goals, aspirations and personal lives that won't be forgotten.

Closing Remarks

The moderator reminded members of the audience that the Town Hall meeting would be available as a written report and that they would be offered a survey to share their satisfaction of the event. She thanked them for their open dialogue and wished everyone a happy holiday.

VP Barker thanked all participants and extended a personal invitation for all to join them at the President's Coffee Break following the event.

President Jensen echoed this sentiment, telling the audience she has long admired Algonquin College. The President asked audience members to be proud and to remind themselves that Algonquin College is admired in this city, provincially and nationally.