

## Introduction

The McGuinty Government created Algoma University in 2008 with the intention of making it a unique part of the Ontario university system. As the only university in Canada located on the site of a former Indian residential school, Algoma has a "special mission" for cross-cultural education embedded in its Charter. Its Charter also declares it to be a university with a special mission to focus on teaching and learning, a declaration that is not present in the Charter of any other provincial university. Our Charter indicates as well that we are to be a primarily (but not exclusively) undergraduate institution, which makes us different from most universities in the province. In sum, we were not designed to be a large, research-intensive multiversity that covers the full gamut of academic activity; we are meant to be a student-centred institution that delivers programming in select areas that are critical for the economic and social well-being of our region. Our roster of degree programs currently includes the Bachelor of Arts, the Bachelor of Science, the Bachelor of Social Work, the Bachelor of Business Administration, the Bachelor of Fine Arts and the Bachelor of Computer Science.

As a regional university, Algoma will always be a small institution relative to provincial norms. We see our small scale as an academic advantage and a key piece of our identity, but there is consensus among all parties that we need to grow beyond our current size in order to be sustainable and in order to offer the quality of academic and non-academic programming that is expected of us.

### **Institutional Vision for Algoma University**

*Algoma has a remarkably clear and distinctive vision for itself, built on the following foundational principles.*

- 1. We are an institution that has been granted a Charter in order to serve the needs of the Algoma region and, to some extent, Northern Ontario more broadly. We recognize that in order to do so well, we must be an institution that welcomes students, staff and faculty from all parts of the province and all parts of the planet.*
- 2. Our Charter confers upon us a "special mission" to focus on teaching and learning and to be especially dedicated to the pursuit of excellence in undergraduate education.*
- 3. Because of our location on the site of a former Indian residential school, our Charter also confers upon us a special mission to engage in "cross-cultural learning" and to be a valuable resource for Anishinaabe people and peoples.*
- 4. Our aspiration is to be an institution of approximately 3,000 students of whom a significant and increasing proportion will be Anishinaabe or international. Though focused primarily on excellence in undergraduate education, we aspire to offer a small selection of Masters-level programs that are critical for the economic and social development of our region.*

## The Six Components of Differentiation

### 1. *Jobs, Innovation and Economic Development*

A part of the rationale for the creation of Algoma University was to assist the Algoma region in making the transition to a more diversified and sustainable economy. The local economy had traditionally been highly dependent on a single industrial employer (steel) and natural resources (wood). As those industries have downsized dramatically, there has been a strategic initiative to build more of a knowledge-based economy in Sault Ste. Marie.

Algoma University plays a critical part in this initiative in a number of ways. First, it is now the eighth largest employer in the region and a very high percentage of our employees are HQPs. Second, the region has traditionally had below-average rates of university attainment, which makes the development of a knowledge-based economy difficult. The presence of a university is leading to an improvement in those rates. Our core programming in arts and sciences is an excellent preparation for the knowledge economy. We also try to work with local employers to provide specific programming they require. For instance, our proposal to deliver engineering courses in collaboration with Carleton University is warmly supported both by traditional heavy industry (steel) and by the emerging alternative energy sector, which the City of Sault Ste. Marie has designated as a key component of its new economic strategy. Most significantly, Algoma University actually hosts in its biosciences building the *Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre*, a municipal agency tasked with developing the region's knowledge-based economy. The University and SSMIC collaborate closely to promote and support initiatives to create jobs in alternative energy, information technology, gaming, eco-tourism and other emerging sectors. We are also collaborating on a proposal for student business incubator.

### 2. *Student Population*

Algoma University's student population is quite distinctive. Approximately ten percent of our students are *Anishinaabe*, the term we use to refer to all Indigenous Peoples. Because of our historic site, our *Special Mission*, and our location in the North, there is both a desire to increase this number and the potential to do so.

As noted above, university attainment rates in this region have traditionally been low. It is therefore not surprising that a very high proportion of our students are first generation students. We welcome them, and we believe that we provide a particularly welcoming environment for them.

In this connection, it should be noted that Algoma quite consciously takes a relatively liberal approach to admission standards. Our policy is that admission requirements should be set at a point that welcomes students who have a good chance of benefitting from the education we offer and excludes only those who are unlikely to pass. We take pride in supporting our students through a transformative process that prepares them for our knowledge economy, for community leadership, and for further study in professional or graduate programs.

The other distinctive feature of our domestic student population is its provenance. By most standards, Sault Ste. Marie would be considered a small city. As a small university in a small city, we find that our natural market for students is in small-town Ontario (whether in the North or in the South) and our student body is likely the most "small-town" of any university in the province. It is this small-town character that makes us a natural choice for the delivery of extension programming in communities like Timmins and St. Thomas, as well as host of First Nations communities.

### *3. Teaching and Learning*

The distinctive character of our student body leads to a distinctive approach to teaching and learning.

At most of the province's universities, undergraduate classes can be quite large, especially in first-year. It is common to have graduate students run tutorials (and do a substantial amount of the evaluation). And most of our universities are quite advanced in terms of offering online options for instruction.

Algoma is quite different. Virtually all of our instruction is face-to-face. We have no large classes. All evaluation is done by instructors (and has to be; without graduate programs, we could not hire TAs even if we wanted to). This distinctive approach may be deemed old-fashioned by some, but we believe it is the right approach for our distinctive clientele: Anishinaabe students, first-generation students, and students from small towns who find larger institutions intimidating.

Our undergraduate focus also means that Algoma students have opportunities to participate in research that would typically be reserved for graduate students at other institutions. These opportunities are important both for their academic development and for their preparation for employment after graduation.

We would like to introduce more online learning, not as a means of enhancing productivity, but because we recognize that many of our graduates, in a knowledge-based economy, will need to be comfortable with this mode of learning. Because of our small scale, we have not had the resources to develop much online programming ourselves, but we believe that the creation of the Ontario Online Institute will provide a small institution like ours with access to the necessary expertise and infrastructure to do this kind of work properly.

### *4. Research and Graduate Studies*

Algoma University's Charter stipulates that our institution is to have a special focus on undergraduate teaching. This is our prime differentiator in the Ontario system and we are proud of it. But to say that we are to focus on undergraduate teaching does not mean that we ignore research. It's a question of how we see the balance between the two.

As the Ministry's materials indicate, research capacity is closely connected with graduate programming. Algoma University does not yet have any graduate programs and that impedes our research capacity. In the four years that we have been Tri-Council certified, however, we have made significant strides in a few key areas: environmental science, community-based research, and aboriginal issues, and health informatics.

External funding in these four areas has totalled almost \$9 million over the past five years. Our success in these niche areas has been driven by the creation of specialized research institutes and the appointment of research chairs (invasive species; natural products biochemistry, health informatics) or research directors (community development; Indian residential schools).

We believe that the University should be developing Masters-level programming in a very select number of areas where we have established research strengths and the potential for substantial growth. The most obvious of these is environmental science. Algoma now has excellent research facilities for biology/environmental science in the new *Essar Convergence Centre* and our biologists already supervise about ten graduate students per year for other universities. The Ontario Forest Research Institute and the federal Great Lakes Forest Research Centre are both located just down the street from us. These two agencies have enormous resources in terms of research infrastructure, research expertise and the capacity to supervise graduate students. Across the river in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, Lake Superior State University has excellent resources in aquatic environmental science, which complements perfectly our expertise in terrestrial environmental science. When one combines all of these resources, there is potential for a first-rate Masters program in environmental science.

#### 5. *Programming*

As a new, primarily undergraduate university, Algoma has a modest and well-defined program base. Our core strength is undergraduate arts (including fine arts/music) and science. We also deliver a select number of very common technical or professional undergraduate degrees (computer science, business, social work). There is potential to develop attractive new programming out of some of our established departments: for instance, environmental science/studies out of biology and geography; criminology out of psychology, sociology and law; trade and global economics out of our business and economics; and health care management out of business and social work/community development. As noted above, it is also a priority to begin delivery of some basic engineering programming in collaboration with Carleton University.

#### 6. *Institutional Collaboration to Support Student Mobility*

Algoma University has a strong record of institutional collaboration in support of student mobility.

The University was originally located on the campus of Sault College, and that early connection has remained a source of strength for us. We have an impressive set of articulation agreements with Sault College, and they have paid off: in some years, as many as a quarter of the students graduating from our university came to us from the College. We continue to develop new pathways and are now endeavouring to move the partnership to the next stage: the development of joint programming.

Algoma has also been working with Northern College in Timmins to deliver programming in Social Work and Community Development for graduates of Northern College's diploma programs in related fields, and delivers a degree-completion program in Business Administration for GTA-area students who possess a college diploma in a business program. We also have a block transfer credit policy for incoming transfer students with a B average from any Ontario college, as well as a special articulation agreements with a number of other colleges for specific programs, including Cambrian, Seneca and George Brown.

Our proposal to work with Carleton University to provide opportunities in engineering is an innovative example of university-to-university collaboration in support of student mobility.

## **Enrolment Forecast**

As part of the strategic mandate process, the Ministry has asked us to prepare enrolment projections for the next five years. Yet because of this process, the Ministry has also had a freeze on all new programming initiatives for at least a year and it appears that this freeze will continue. This freeze is particularly challenging for a new university that is in start-up mode and is supposed to be working to double its overall enrolment. We believe that the development of our enrolment depends to a substantial degree on initiatives such as feeder-sites in other communities for our BA program, or new programming in Sault Ste. Marie in fields such as engineering, global economics, Anishinaabe Studies, criminology and environmental science.

Much of Algoma's enrolment growth since 2010 has been a result of a large increase in the number of international students we take in. Those students are concentrated in a small number of programs and there is little appetite to add more international students in those programs. Our strategy for the future will be to recruit more students for other programs, and students from a wider range of countries, but we anticipate that overall growth of international enrolments in existing programs will be modest. On the other hand, we believe that some of the new programming we are proposing will be quite attractive to international students, especially engineering, environmental science and global economics

Domestic enrolment growth has come largely from offsite activities (approximately 100 FTE in Brampton, 32 in St. Thomas, and 30 in Timmins) and from new programs (BSW, Honours Biology). There is potential for continued growth from each of these offsites/new programs, but that growth will be modest.

Going forward, demographics in our primary market (the Algoma District) are negative. We know now that there will be fewer high school graduates with each passing year. We will be working to increase both university participation rates and our share of the PSE market in these declining cohorts, but even if we are successful, the most we can hope for is to avoid declining enrolments from this major market.

Algoma will continue to market itself in Southern Ontario, pushing its *Small University/Big Education* theme and focusing on small-town markets where that theme resonates well. Unfortunately, those markets are also in decline, so growth will not come easily from the South.

In sum, without distinctive new programming, or additional offsite feeders, it is likely that Algoma's enrolment rates will remain relatively flat. On the other hand, if Algoma has the latitude to develop new programming (as would be normal for any new institution), it is reasonable for us to make steady progress toward a more sustainable overall enrolment. For instance, we anticipate that a criminology program (with strong links into the *Police Foundations* programmes offered by the colleges) would add approximately 100 students to our total enrolment each year. (That's an increase of approximately 7% to our total FTE count.) The proposed engineering arrangement with Carleton would add another 3-5% to our total FTE count. Another feeder program like the one in St. Thomas could increase enrolments in our BA program by 10%. There is also significant demand in this region for health science programming that is not focused on nursing.

## Appendix A

### Baseline Full-Time Headcounts

	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19
Eligible Undergrad	1097	1096	1172	1179	1205	1220	1230	1240	1250
Ineligible Undergrad	78	169	336	379	390	390	390	390	390
Total	1175	1265	1508	1558	1595	1610	1620	1630	1640

### Projected Full-Time Headcounts

	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19
Eligible Undergrad					1205	1284	1365	1444	1523
Ineligible Undergrad					390	426	462	498	534
Total					1595	1710	1827	1942	2057

### Assumptions

1. We add two years of Engineering Foundations in 15-16, increasing enrolment by 20 FTE that year and by an additional twenty in each successive year.
2. An new offsite similar to the one in St. Thomas, also starting in 15-16, will increasing enrolment by 20 FTE that year, by an additional in each of the following three years.
3. A new program in Trade, Finance and Global Economics starting in 15-16 will add 10 eligible and 20 ineligible students each year.
4. A new criminology program starting in 15-16 will add 25 students (mainly eligible) per year.
5. New undergraduate programming in environmental science/environmental studies will add 20 students per year beginning in 15-16 (mainly eligible)
6. While not included in the tables above, we expect that an MSc. In Environmental science would attract cohorts of five, then seven, then ten in its first three years.

### Appendix B

Institutional Program Strengths (maximum 10)		
Program Area	Total Full-Time Headcount (Eligible) (2012-13)	Rationale
Liberal Arts (BA)	589	This is the university's core program.
Biology	65	Strongest research performance, growing enrolments
Computer Science	83	Good research performance, growing enrolments; draws students from abroad
Social Work	149	New program, growing rapidly
Business Administration and Economics	286	Largest single field of study

Programs for Growth or to be Established (maximum 5)				
Program Area	Total FT Heads(Eligible) (2016-17)	Target Total FT Heads (Eligible) as a proportion of institutional Total Eligible FT Heads (2016-17)	Planned New or Expanded Programs	Rationale
Business Admin. and Economics	20	20/1365 =1.4%	BA Trade, Finance and Global Economics	Our international students seek a more globally-oriented program
Biology/Geography	30	30/1365 = 2.1%	BSc in Environmental Science	Outstanding resources at the university, in the community, and just across the border
Biology/Geography	12	12/1365 = 1.0%	MSc Environmental Science	Our most productive research area; outstanding resources at the university, in the community and just across the border
Liberal Arts	44	44/1365 = 3.2%	BA Criminology	Large number of college students looking for a pathway into this degree
Engineering	24	24/1365 = 1.8%	Engineering Foundations (two years)	Critical to local economic development