

# Interprofessional Education

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*Algonquin College Academic White Paper*

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- Academic Technologies
- Accommodating Increased Enrolment
- Applied Research
- Apprenticeship
- College Programming Strategy
- Community and Business Integration
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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

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## **CONTENTS**

Preface

Executive Summary .....1

The Issue .....1

Background and Considerations.....2

Opportunities .....4

Recommendations .....7

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Interprofessional education (IPE), or learning together to promote collaboration, has emerged as an approach well-suited to developing the competencies required for collaborative practice in the workplace. Graduates of IPE-enhanced programs enter the workplace with an understanding and respect for the contributions of various disciplines to shared goals, and employers have indicated that this should be a key outcome of any college program. Algonquin College has articulated a vision of IPE and flexible, shared teaching and learning spaces in proposals for new training facilities for health and community programs and for construction trades and building sciences programs. However, IPE can be introduced across the College even without moving to new facilities. Through curriculum revision based on consultation with employers and modifications to some current delivery practices, students could begin to learn with one another and about one another's professions. While implementing such changes would require significant effort, changes to a number of current business practices, and some financial investment, it would be a disservice to our students and their future employers not to pursue IPE.

The work of a task force and the results of pilot projects will help to guide Algonquin's movement towards the introduction of IPE.

## THE ISSUE

Algonquin College graduates are expected to work effectively in interprofessional/multi-disciplinary team environments. The logical place to learn the complexities of collaborative practice is at college. Currently, academic programs are developed and delivered mainly in isolation from other disciplines with minimal sharing of different practice/work perspectives.

Graduates are less effective as entry-level employees until they learn how to interact with other professionals whose work is linked to their own. As the workforce shrinks in the wake of baby boomer retirements, employees will be called upon to multi-task and the scope and definitions of professions may stretch to meet client needs. Understanding the roles and responsibilities of co-workers within their vocational cluster will enable Algonquin graduates to meet the demands of the future workplace.

Interprofessional education has emerged as a response to these realities in the health care field; the success of this movement suggests that it should be explored for other professional clusters.

## BACKGROUND AND CONSIDERATIONS

A collaborative, team-based approach to work is common in many fields and is supported by most employers. For example, construction projects require clear communication between architects, project managers, and different trades to reduce delays, re-working, and building deficiencies. Multiple health care providers must work collaboratively across a variety of settings to provide quality care for patients. In a movement labeled “convergence,” media teams comprising animators, writers, programmers, and designers contribute to the production of complex products such as games, television programs, and online newspapers. Accountants can be more effective if they know how and when to interact with sales and human resource professionals in their companies. Education plays a pivotal role in achieving this goal of effective inter-professional practice. Government policy makers are supporting educational programming that facilitates students coming together in classrooms, laboratories and the field to learn interprofessional competencies.

D’Amour, Beaulieu, San Martin-Rodrigues, and Ferada-Videla (2004) identified a number of key determinants for collaborative practice: knowledge of each other’s roles; good communication including negotiation skills; willingness to work together; trust related to self-competence and confidences in other’s abilities; and mutual respect implying knowing other professionals and their contributions.

In order to assist educators to begin a dialogue about interprofessional education, it is helpful to explore what outcomes or competencies can be expected upon graduation.

Barr (2002) defines collaborative competencies as those necessary to work effectively with others including:

- Cooperating and communicating between professions and between agencies/industry;
- Providing assessment of needs on which other professions may act;
- Coping with conflict;
- Contributing to joint service planning, implementation, monitoring and review;
- Describing roles and responsibilities clearly to other professions;
- Recognizing and respecting the roles, responsibilities and competence of other professions in relation to one’s own
- Knowing when, where and how to involve others through agreed upon channels;
- Working with other professions to review services, effect change, improve standards, solve problems and resolve conflict.

Achieving effective implementation of IPE requires a comprehensive action plan that identifies generic knowledge foundational to program clusters. For example, in community and family studies there are philosophical, sociological and psychological learning that underpins professional practice. Rather than develop programming and curriculum in isolation, Early Childhood Education students, Developmental Service Worker students, and Child and Youth Worker students would choose from a suite of foundation courses (such as developmental psychology) and develop IPE competencies together in upper level courses, once they had developed a good understanding of their own disciplines. Students learning basic web-program-

ming languages, whether in business, technology, or design programs, could learn in the same classroom; their interactions would help them to recognize the different applications of their shared curriculum.

Algonquin is fortunate in having laboratory environments that simulate practice realities. Students in health programs have the opportunity to learn both technical and non-technical skills through carefully planned patient scenarios. Nursing, Respiratory Therapy and Paramedic students learn to collaborate to achieve positive patient outcomes. Essential to these scenarios are facilitated debriefing sessions which allow students to recognize the complexities of effective communication, and to respect each other's roles and responsibilities. College facilities and learning activities provide a safe environment in which to make mistakes and learn from them. The vision for the new Environmental Demonstration Centre for Construction Trades and Building Sciences provides for the development of comparable facilities for the programs to be housed there—with labs and projects shared by students training for a variety of professions.

Learning interprofessional practice requires institutional support to break down academic silos and unlock the scheduling and financial constraints that currently prevent students from learning what it is to engage in complex ever changing work environments.

Clearly students must learn vocationally specific competencies that licensure and/or the workplace demands. College educators embed these competencies in their curriculum design and are well versed in outcomes-based curriculum. The next steps are to broaden the scope of curriculum design, implementation and evaluation to encompass interprofessional competencies.

## Considerations

Although the health domain has embraced IPE as a key priority supported by federal and provincial governments, the educational concepts and outcomes foundational to IPE translate to all college programming.

IPE is loosely defined by Health Canada as learning together to promote collaboration and it involves the following elements, of relevance to any group of inter-related professionals:

- “Socializing health [and community] care providers in working together, in shared problem solving and decision making, towards enhancing the benefit for patients, and other recipients of services [sic];
- Developing mutual understanding of, and respect for, the contributions of various disciplines; and
- Instilling the requisite competencies for collaborative practice.<sup>1</sup>

Identification of interprofessional education as an important college initiative is aligned with other ‘white paper’ discussions and recommendations, including the need to increase, through curriculum and program redesign, the relevancy of programs to the industries they serve, as well as, applied research and contract training opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> Health Canada. 2007. Interprofessional Education for Collaborative Patient-Centered Practice. Health Canada web site. Information retrieved March 24, 2008 from [http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hcs-sss/hhr-rhs/strateg/interprof/index\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hcs-sss/hhr-rhs/strateg/interprof/index_e.html)

## OPPORTUNITIES

Algonquin College has an opportunity to demonstrate leadership and innovation with the introduction of IPE in program clusters across the college. While other organizations have already introduced IPE in specific clusters, usually health care, this approach to college program development and delivery has not been applied to other sectors. The new Centre for Construction Trades and Building Sciences (CCTBS) will provide a new cross-disciplinary integrated learning experience and the proposed design for a Centre for Health Care and Family Support will support delivery of IPE programs. But the initiative can be launched even before those new facilities are completed.

IPE provides an opportunity to rethink current standalone programs and take a step beyond current models. As professions merge (e.g. Graphic Design and Web Design), College programming should follow suit.

IPE will support student retention initiatives by providing laddering and transfer of credit opportunities; it will expose students to programs and professions that might better suit them than the ones in which they are registered.

Graduates of IPE-enhanced programs will have an edge in the workplace – they will be team-ready, knowledgeable about how their workplace role fits into a larger organizational framework, and able to define their own vocations clearly to others. Employers have asked for such graduates – entry-level employees who know how their work contributes to overall goals, and who know how other professionals support their work to better serve client and project goals.

These are the employees who, because of strong communication and leadership skills taught across the curriculum, can be quickly promoted to more responsible positions. Graduates who return to Algonquin to take a related program will be able to receive advanced standing in a program in the same cluster.

Participating in programs which include IPE components will increase student satisfaction, as learners feel connected to college life beyond their own programs of study and develop a rich understanding of the workplaces in which they will be employed. Designed appropriately, IPE provides breadth through the kinds of active and experiential learning opportunities that characterize the best of college programming.

The introduction of IPE will challenge college staff and faculty to move out of their own program isolation and make changes to their curricula and course delivery practices. It will promote professional growth and enhance multidisciplinary teamwork at the College.

IPE can become one of Algonquin's unique selling propositions to attract faculty, staff, students, and employers.

## Options

Shifting Algonquin's academic culture to an IPE-based approach would require a significant investment. Moving in this direction would require:

- Extensive release and/or development time for faculty, Registrar's staff (particularly scheduling and curriculum officers), Learning and Teaching Services staff, and GeneSIS developers;
- Remapping of programs against outcomes and consequent changes to associated processes (from COMMS through PQR);
- Extensive consultation with advisory committees and other representatives from the workplace;
- In some cases, submission of curriculum revision proposals to the Credential Validation Services (CVS) and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU);
- Increased pressure on the Curriculum Review Committee to respond to program changes;
- A commitment to change on the part of program delivery teams who may be reluctant to move away from current practice/protective of their vocational turf;
- A shift away from targeted, highly relevant vocational programming for portions of programs of study; and
- A communications strategy positioning Algonquin as a leader in introducing this approach to programming.

The costs of not moving to an IPE approach are harder to quantify. They would result from:

- Lost applications, from students who choose other colleges where IPE has been introduced (e.g. George Brown College for health care programs);
- Duplication of costs for professors, curriculum development, and facilities to deliver the same material to different programs;
- Reduced confidence in Algonquin graduates and programs as result of hiring individuals who are ill-equipped for today's workplace
- Reduced relevance and quality in Algonquin programs, and resulting drops in KPIs, applications, and student satisfaction; and
- Reduced employee satisfaction resulting from maintaining the current silos.

Not introducing IPE is not a viable option for the College; the challenge in the next two years will be determining how extensive and how deep the IPE experience will be for Algonquin students.

The goals of IPE could be addressed in a variety of ways, some more disruptive to current business practices than others. All new curriculum elements would require consultation with and input from employers and practitioners within the interprofessional clusters.

- Extra-curricular learning activities could help to develop awareness of interprofessional relationships, for example, speakers' series or field trips;
- Programs with similar outcomes could deliver individual courses to mixed groups of students drawn from a variety of programs;
- Faculty could collaborate on the development of cross-program projects simulating workplace projects and collaboration requirements;
- Field placement and co-op learning goals could be adjusted to include development of competence in the areas of inter-professional practice;
- Program clusters could develop modules addressing the interprofessional relationships which will be experienced in the workplace, and the modules could be integrated across programs;
- Program clusters could develop a common semester in which students heading to different career outcomes would learn together and develop an understanding of one another's roles. This could be either a foundational semester or, perhaps more useful in preparing graduates for the workplace, a final semester with a shared culminating performance.

Introducing these changes would not be simple. They would require a major shift in how we register, schedule, and teach students. Something as simple as having students in different programs attend a common class is a challenge with our current space challenges and scheduling procedures. Program progression maps and program standards would have to be adjusted to accommodate the changes. The Curriculum Review Committee would need to develop a protocol for dealing with IPE proposals that introduced substantial change to a program of study. Some programs which produce graduates who work together are housed in different departments and faculties, and the silos tend to keep them from working together. Budgets are organized by program-based cost centres, and our program costing measurement system would not fit well with a shared, cross-program delivery model. This particular challenge may be the most difficult to overcome; it has prevented departments from sharing full-time faculty members in the past and it would require extensive changes to current data-gathering and program analysis tools and systems.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The College should establish a task force to develop a framework and guiding principles for Algonquin's approach to IPE and provide a variety of realistic implementation models for achieving the goals of IPE. The task force would comprise representatives from faculty, the CCTBS Academic Working Group, Learning and Teaching Services, academic administration, the Students Association, ITS, Human Resources and the Registrar's Office. This work should be complete by September 2009 and would result in a detailed cost-benefit analysis.
2. As part of the task force work, or prior to the task force work, an inventory of current IPE practices should be compiled to determine the current status of IPE at Algonquin College and to develop models for future IPE delivery.
3. LTS should develop a training program to ready faculty to develop and implement IPE and to prepare the Curriculum Review Committee to expedite the required curriculum changes.
4. The College is committed to introducing IPE in the launch of the CCTBS. In preparation for that launch, IPE should be introduced in pilot program areas before the building opens (2011). Faculty teams can begin making curriculum change proposals and implementing them. While problematic, planning for this project would have to run concurrently with the work of the task force.
5. The College is committed to introducing IPE in the new Health and Family Support Centre. In preparation for that launch, IPE should be introduced in pilot program areas before the building opens. Faculty teams can begin making curriculum change proposals and implementing them by 2011.
6. Depending upon the results of the task force and the pilots, every department should identify a group of programs where IPE would be relevant and develop models of IPE that would work in their areas. Where it makes sense to do so, these models should reach across departments and faculties.
7. The College approach to space planning should be informed by a focus on the development of flexible spaces and simulated working environments to accommodate IPE.
8. All IPE projects should include consultation with advisory committees and other external stakeholders.
9. The College should market itself as a destination for the enriched educational experience IPE can provide.