

AURORA COLLEGE ACADEMIC PLAN 2021 - 2024



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INTRODUCTION

FROM THE VP OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING



I am pleased to present the first ever *Aurora College Academic Plan 2021-2024* (Academic Plan). This Academic Plan was developed through a collaborative process and reflects the commitment across our

institution to strengthen programming and student supports. The publishing of this plan marks the completion of one of the 21 critical milestones in the transformation of Aurora College into a polytechnic university.

The development of the Academic Plan was itself a productive learning experience and will provide a foundation for continuous quality improvement at Aurora College. The Academic Plan is not intended as a listing of current and future programs, rather it will inform all aspects of planning moving forward. It is a visionary document that helps to ensure we remain on track for success.

The Academic Plan presents an academic future to which our entire institution can aspire. It is a bridge between Aurora College's overarching strategic goals and academic program management. It will help to shape decision making and guide the allocation of resources. The Academic Plan will be a touchstone for all academic and educational teams throughout the College to plan, prioritize and implement a wide range of projects and initiatives.

I am delighted to have been part of this process and I am excited to take the next steps.

Dr. Glenda Vardy Dell
Vice President
Education and Training

BACKGROUND

Following the *Government Response to the Findings and Recommendations of the Aurora College Foundational Review* (Government Response), Aurora College established a set of internal working groups to provide faculty and staff with the opportunity to participate directly in the transformation process. The role of working groups has been to address the commitments in the Government Response, as well as to identify and address any additional gaps on the journey toward becoming an effective, efficient and sustainable polytechnic university.

One such commitment is the development of the *Aurora College 3-Year Academic Plan 2021-2024* (Academic Plan). An academic plan is a central planning tool for most post-secondary education institutions in Canada. However, Aurora College has never employed this approach to its own academic planning in the past. As such, the process of developing an academic plan is itself seen as progress in the transformation journey. Through the development of this first Academic Plan, Aurora College will continue

to develop the expertise and capacity to meet national standards and best practice in this area.

The Academic Program Management Working Group (Working Group) was established in September 2020 to carry out transformation work in this area. The Working Group developed a terms of reference for an Academic Plan Committee (Committee) and identified a cross section of members from the institution to examine relevant background material, engage stakeholders and draft the Academic Plan. The Committee was led by two co-chairs and received ongoing guidance from the Aurora College Executive Leadership Team through the Vice President of Education and Training.

The Academic Plan is grounded in the *Strengthening the Foundation and Planning for Change Aurora College 3-Year Strategic Plan 2020-2023* (Strategic Plan). This ensures alignment with the overarching goals of the institution and coherence with other subsequent planning documents.

As Aurora College transforms into a polytechnic university the Aurora College Transformation Implementation Plan is the key planning document that ensures changes occur in the right order and at the right time – including the timely creation of the Academic Plan. We are currently in Phase 1 of the transformation process, focused on strengthening the foundation of Aurora College and planning for change.

The Strategic Plan provides an approach to strengthening the foundation in Phase 1 and sets the context for key transformational changes that will be implemented in Phase 2. In this context, the process of developing an Academic Plan is intended primarily to contribute to strengthening the foundation of Aurora College. As an additional critical milestone in the transformation journey, a *Polytechnic University 5-Year Academic Plan* will be developed for implementation at the start of the 2024-25 academic year, prior to the formal launch of the polytechnic university in May 2025.

PLANNING PROCESS

The Committee began its work by gathering information from various contemporary sources to gain an overall understanding of academic planning, its purpose and importance. An environmental scan of current published academic plans from other universities and colleges across the country was used to lay the groundwork for Aurora College's academic planning process.

Going into the development process, Aurora College was limited by the fact there was no previous Academic Plan to serve as a starting point. As such, potential goals with areas of focus were developed to provide an initial framework to support engagement with staff, faculty, students and alumni. The proposed goals and areas of focus were developed based on the Strategic Plan, findings of the

environmental scan and a review of additional planning documents developed by the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT). Relevant GNWT planning documents included:

- *Initial Areas of Teaching and Research Specialization for the Polytechnic University;*
- *NWT Post-Secondary Education Strategic Framework 2019-2029; and*
- *Skills4Success NWT Jobs in Demand 15-Year Forecast.*

A digital survey tool and focus groups were tasked with the goal of drawing out a more comprehensive understanding of the potential goals and initial areas of focus identified by the Committee. By May 2021, there were 85

respondents to the survey and 63 participants enlisted in 15 focus groups. Survey and focus group participants included Aurora College faculty, staff, students and alumni.

The input provided during the engagements was rich, helpful in goal development and guided the continued refinement and focusing of priority actions under each goal. The Academic Plan was then drafted by the Committee and submitted to the Aurora College Executive Leadership Team.

GOALS

Cultivate an innovative and adaptive teaching environment to facilitate student learning

Aurora College is a learning-centred organization that recognizes and responds to diverse needs. We will cultivate innovative instructional methods of high quality to meet the needs of all students. In doing so, we will endeavor to maintain an adaptive teaching environment that respects and embeds different worldviews. Our teaching environment will incorporate flexible learning options for our students, provide adequate physical space for classroom and land-based learning, and enhance creative and critical thinking.

Community learning centres will continue to be a key feature of our institution. We will focus on increased understanding of the needs of community learners and work to find innovative ways of meeting those needs and increasing their access to post-secondary education opportunities.

To achieve this goal, we will:

- Continue to develop Aurora College's Centre for Teaching and Learning;
- Seek to take advantage of improving Internet connectivity and learning technology;
- Continue the incremental review of all diploma and degree programs;
- Complete an assessment of the education, training and professional development needs of faculty and staff;
- Continue to implement an *Equity, Diversity and Inclusiveness Plan*;
- Develop and implement a *Strategic Enrolment Management Plan*;
- Better integrate technology to support program delivery; and
- Identify resource needs that correspond to recent innovations in teaching and learning.

Beyond the term of the current Academic Plan, work may also be done to:

- Identify operational changes in academic program management to support a more arm's length relationship with the GNWT;
- Consider improvements to the organizational design that will help to continuously innovate and adapt to changing teaching environments; and
- Examine the facilities and classroom technology needs of anticipated academic programming.

Strengthen a culture of growth, empowerment and support for students to reach their potential

Aurora College provides both academic and wellness support for learners. To best serve our learners, we need to continue to expand and enhance these supports. For these supports to be meaningful and culturally appropriate, we also need to continuously examine and respond to change – we must not be static in our understanding of what constitutes quality student supports.

Additionally, learning opportunities and program delivery methods should always support students in reaching their academic and career goals. This will lay the foundations for clear and accessible student pathways from community learning centres to campuses and beyond.

To achieve this goal, we will:

- Seek to better understand, through narrative and data-driven analysis, what impacts student success;
- Implement the Aurora College Strategic Enrolment Management Plan;
- Seek continuous quality improvement of supports throughout the student life cycle;
- Continue implementation of a balanced scorecard that corresponds with opportunities for continuous quality improvement of student supports;
- Develop a comprehensive set of service standards that will help to guide and coordinate the ongoing delivery of student supports;
- Enhance our wrap-around supports in a manner that maintains the holistic wellbeing of our students;
- Better integrate library research skills as a component of academic programing;
- Take steps to enrich campus life; and
- Take steps to ensure community learning centres meet students where they are in their academic journey.

Beyond the term of the current Academic Plan, work may also be done to:

- Explore the potential for student recruitment ambassadors; and
- Identify new roles/positions within the institution that may better support a culture of growth, empowerment and support for students.

Foster a culture of equity and inclusion in all learning environments that responds to Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing

We will succeed in creating an effective, efficient and sustainable institution for all Northerners by ensuring their educational needs are met and that we are culturally responsive. As many students enrolled at Aurora College are Indigenous, recognizing and responding to the needs of Indigenous learners is particularly important to the long-term success of the institution.

To achieve this goal, we will:

- Continue to implement an Equity, Diversity and Inclusiveness Plan, including updates to the Aurora College Traditional Knowledge Policy;
- Continue to incorporate local Indigenous voices in curriculum and program development;
- Continue to utilize and explore new opportunities for land-based learning;
- Identify opportunities for student supports tailored to the needs of Indigenous students;
- Seek to further understand how the legacy of residential schools impacts learning at Aurora College; and
- Ensure reconciliation is appropriately embedded in approaches to student support and program delivery.

Beyond the term of the current Academic Plan, work may also be done to:

- Identify new roles/positions within the institution that may better support a culture of equity, diversity and inclusion in all learning environments; and
- Explore the potential benefits and feasibility of an Elder-in-residence program at Aurora College.

Build bridges between teaching and research within Aurora College

Currently, those involved in the delivery of academic programs engage in various levels of research and scholarship. As we transform into a polytechnic university, both research and research-informed teaching will become a key component of our success – making this a key area for capacity building.

To achieve this goal, we will:

- Strengthen connections between the Aurora Research Institute and other divisions of Aurora College;
- Pilot a Research Services Team under the Aurora Research Institute;
- Continue to develop Aurora College's Centre for Teaching and Learning;
- Promote and expand the utilization of library research resources and services by faculty, staff and students; and
- Celebrate the contributions of faculty, staff and students to research and scholarship.

Beyond the term of the current Academic Plan, work may also be done to:

- Explore the development of research mentorship programs; and
- Explore changes to faculty work schedules in order to give an appropriate proportion of time to research and contributions to service.

MOVING FORWARD

The Academic Plan is a bridge between Aurora College's overarching strategic goals and academic program management. It will help to shape decision making and guide the allocation of resources. It should inform and empower decision-making across all areas of Aurora College and at all levels of the institution.

The strategic focus and capacity building that is gained through implementation of the Academic Plan will support the development of new academic programs as part of the polytechnic university launch. However, at this stage of the transformation process, our focus will remain on strengthening the foundation and planning for change.

Growth over the next three years will occur primarily through the expansion of existing programs, increased enrolment and lower attrition rates – each a marker of success in the implementation of this Academic Plan. At that same time, we are reviewing all diploma and degree programs on a pre-determined schedule. These reviews will provide a basis for continuous quality improvement – ensuring that all programs are current, meet the needs of our learners, and contribute to the economic and social development of the NWT. They will also reveal the potential to expand into new certificate, diploma and degree programs under the next academic plan.

Learning from the experience of developing this Academic Plan, the Committee will now develop policies and procedures to guide its renewal. This Academic Plan will serve as a starting point for development of the *Polytechnic University Academic Plan* that is due for release in 2024.



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