ACADEMIC OPERATING PLAN

2023-2025

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INTRODUCTION

The Academic Operating Plan of Confederation College is crafted to align with our institution's five-year strategic plan, Kaa-anokaatekin. It acts as a vital component within the broader strategic framework, concentrating specifically on the academic facets of our college. It is within this context that our overall strategic goals and objectives find their reflection and focus. By aligning its strategies, goals, and tactics with those outlined in Kaa-anokaatekin, we foster a cohesive and coordinated effort towards achieving institutional success.

The Academic Operational Plan starts by drawing connections between the core documents that drive the direction and planning of the College including the Kaa-anokaatekin (see the figure below) and the College's Strategic Enrolment Management Plan, both of which are pivotal in our forward movement. Following this, the report offers a summary of activities and developments since the 2022-23 Academic Plan, providing a reflective glance at our progress and growth.

Further, this plan presents an overview of the current landscape at Confederation College, spotlighting emerging data trends and identifying opportunities that lie ahead. This analysis is crucial in understanding our position and the path we must navigate to continue our journey towards excellence. Lastly, the plan outlines goals across seven strategic areas: new program development, skilled trades, international enrolment, regional delivery, student retention and graduation, partnerships and relationships, and the exploration of artificial intelligence. Each area is selected with the intention of enhancing our academic offerings, expanding our reach, and enriching the educational experience of our students.

In summary, the Academic Operating Plan is a testament to our commitment to academic excellence and institutional success. It is a plan that not only aligns with our strategic vision but also actively contributes to the realization of our collective aspirations. Through careful planning, strategic alignment, and a focus on our goals, we continue to pave the way for a brighter, more innovative future at Confederation College.

Strategic Plan

Kaa-anokaatekin Strategic Plan 2020-2025

Pillars

Access and Success	Indigenous Learning	Institutional Excellence	Community Prosperity

Goal and Target Setting

Goals

Access and Success	Indigenous Learning	Institutional Excellence	Community Prosperity
Goal 1: Offer multiple pathways for student success through flexible programming. **Goal 2**: Create a learning environment to support the unique needs of a changing student body.	**Goal 3**: Implement and support the knowledge and cultural traditions of Indigenous peoples as part of our commitment to reconciliation. **Goal 4**: Engage in meaningful relationship building with Indigenous communities and organizations.	**Goal 5**: Operate and communicate efficiently, effectively and transparently **Goal 6**: Embody and nurture the wisdom, skills and holistic practices needed to foster sustainability* in our community and beyond.	**Goal 7**: Partner with communities to meet the evolving training and development needs of communities (employers, industries) **Goal 8**: Strengthen relationships with and celebrate Confederation College alumni.

Academic Operational Plan

Academic Focus

Access and Success	Indigenous Learning	Institutional Excellence	Community Prosperity
• New program development • Develop regional strategy • Develop new partnerships • Opportunities for laddering • New pathways • Expand experiential learning • Enrolment, retention & graduation strategy • Micro Credentials, DE and CE expansion	• Negahneewin Vision • ILO implementation • Indigenous recruitment strategies • Indigenous degree	• Enhanced student support through technology • New marketing campaigns/social media • New website • Sustainability within programs	• Applied research opportunities • Align workforce development activities with employers needs • Expand regional opportunities • Work with healthcare partners to develop long term strategy for health human resource needs

Figure 1: Alignment of the Academic Operating Plan with the Strategic Plan.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE STRATEGIC ENROLMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN

The link between the Academic Operating Plan and the Strategic Enrolment Management Plan lies in their shared focus on student recruitment and success, and academic quality. While the Academic Operating Plan primarily focuses on the academic operations and programs of Confederation College, the Strategic Enrolment Management Plan specifically addresses the institution's goals and strategies related to student enrolment and engagement.

Figure 2: Relationships between the Strategic Plan, Strategic Enrolment Management Plan and Academic Operational Plan

The Academic Operating Plan and the Strategic Enrolment Management Plan are interdependent and complementary. Here is how they are connected:

1. **Program Development and Alignment**: The Academic Operating Plan identifies existing academic programs and potential new program offerings based on market demands and student needs. The Strategic Enrolment Management Plan considers these program offerings when developing strategies for attracting and recruiting prospective students.
2. **Targeted Recruitment Strategies**: The Strategic Enrolment Management Plan outlines specific strategies for reaching and attracting a diverse pool of prospective students. The Academic Operating Plan provides insights into the unique strengths and qualities of the academic programs, which are then incorporated into the recruitment strategies to effectively target and engage potential students.
3. **Student Success and Retention Initiatives**: Both plans share a common objective of promoting student success and retention. The Academic Operating Plan focuses on enhancing academic support services, faculty development, and student engagement activities. The Strategic Enrolment Management Plan incorporates initiatives to support students throughout their academic journey, such as orientation programs, mentoring, and student support services.
4. **Data-Informed Decision Making**: Both plans rely on data and analytics to inform decision-making processes. The Academic Operating Plan considers program-specific data, such as enrolment trends, program outcomes, and student achievement, to guide program development and improvement. The Strategic Enrolment Management Plan utilizes data on student demographics, market research, and enrolment projections to make informed decisions regarding recruitment strategies, student outreach, and resource allocation.

5. **Continuous Evaluation and Improvement**: The Academic Operating Plan and the Strategic Enrolment Management Plan both emphasize the importance of ongoing evaluation and improvement. They establish mechanisms for monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of their respective strategies and initiatives.

UPDATE ON THE 2022-23 ACADEMIC PLAN

Since the 2022-23 Academic Plan, Confederation College has achieved significant progress in several key areas, as outlined below:

- International Enrolment Strategy: The college is expanding its presence in international markets through targeted digital marketing efforts tailored to specific regions, resulting in a more diverse student body.
- Indigenous Student Initiatives: Prioritizing the recruitment of Indigenous students, the College has taken concrete steps such as the appointment of an Indigenous Recruitment Officer, fostering relationships with Indigenous communities, and hosting an annual Indigenous Open House event.
- Online Learning Expansion: Asynchronous online programs in areas like Office Administration are being developed and are in the recruitment phase for Winter 2024.
- Healthcare Programs: Confederation College continues to address regional healthcare needs through initiatives in Personal Support Worker, Nursing, and Medical Laboratory Assistant programs. Specifically, additional seats have been added to programs like Paramedic and Practical Nursing, with a January intake in Practical Nursing and increased intakes for Personal Support Worker.
- Strategic Enrolment Management Plan: The College is set to launch a Strategic Enrolment Management Plan aimed at aligning efforts to enhance enrolment, retention, graduation, and experiential learning opportunities.
- Quality Assurance: The College has successfully completed another cycle of Annual Program Review (APR) and the Comprehensive Program Review (CPR). Ongoing efforts include enhancing the APR reporting process and introducing a mid-year report to establish year-to-year connections in APRs (Annual Program Review). Notable program developments include the introduction of a Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Pharmacy Technician, and Office Administration programs. Furthermore, the College is actively implementing recommendations and affirmations from the 2021-22 audit, which will be presented in its 18-month follow-up report.

Additional details on action plans from the 2022/23 Academic Plan are outlined in Appendix A.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE

The current program mix at Confederation College encompasses approximately 70 programs spread across 13 areas of study and housed within 4 academic schools: Business, Hospitality and Media Arts; Engineering, Technology, Trades and Aviation; Health, Negahneewin and Community Services; and Workforce Development (including Regional Campuses, Integrated Plan and Academic Upgrading). This diverse range of offerings is tailored to meet the education and training needs of Northwestern Ontario and its diverse communities.

In response to the evolving landscape, the College has expanded its offerings to include certificates, diplomas, advanced diplomas, and graduate certificates, and its first bachelor's degree in nursing.

While overall enrolment has remained steady over the past decade, there has been a notable 34% decrease in domestic student numbers. This decline is partly attributed to the aging and shrinking population in the region. Furthermore, the market share of domestic enrolment for non-direct students in Thunder Bay has decreased by 5% since its peak in 2012, aligning with trends observed across most other Ontario Colleges. Additionally, the domestic market share for both direct and non-direct students at regional campuses has steadily decreased by 12% and 14% respectively since 2012. These figures underscore the shifting dynamics of student enrolment.
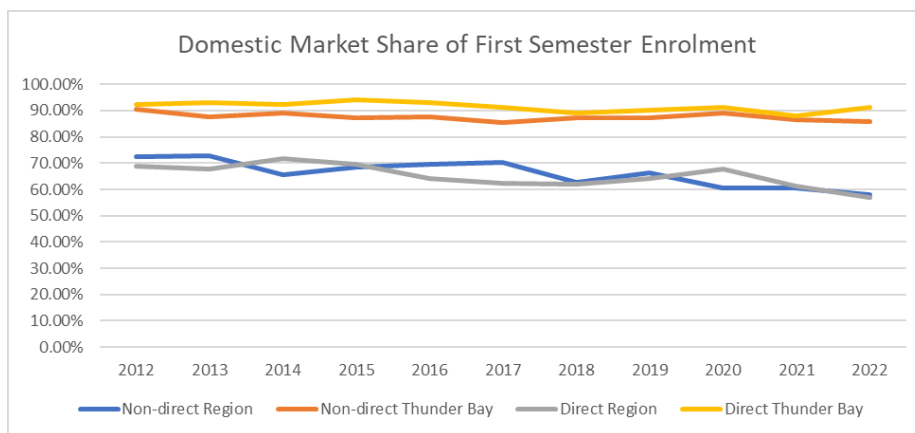
Figure 3: Domestic market share of first semester enrolment by campus and direct and non-direct status

Confederation College faces competition from other institutions in the province, occasionally losing potential students from our catchment area to both offerings from other colleges and those not offered by the College. This trend is further influenced by the ongoing preference among domestic students to pursue university education over college. Several factors, such as geographical proximity (e.g., residing within the Thunder Bay district but closer to Sault Ste. Marie) or program capacity, also play a role in this dynamic.

Additionally, the emergence of Indigenous institutes, which specifically attract Indigenous students, adds another layer of competition to the landscape. In Ontario, there are nine Indigenous institutes, including two within Confederation College's catchment area: Oshki-Wenjack and Seven Generations Education Institute (SGEI). Lakehead University, situated within the College's catchment area, also presents competition, although it offers numerous pathway agreements and credit transfer opportunities, fostering collaboration between the institutions.

Indigenous students also make up 17% of the student population and are registered in more than 60 programs. There is potential for further recruitment efforts to increase the enrolment of the Indigenous population. Indigenous enrolment remained consistent, although the proportion of Indigenous students has decreased by 20% since 2014/15. Here there is an opportunity for the College to improve its recruitment of Indigenous students to improve its market share of enrolment the Indigenous population. Particularly important is targeting the college-aged demographic, which is

experiencing growth within the region. This presents a strategic opportunity for the College to foster diversity and inclusivity while meeting the evolving educational needs of the local Indigenous population.

The College has successfully diversified its student body by attracting international students, experiencing a notable 93% increase from 2012 to 2019, constituting over a third of the total enrolment. The international student population represents over 46 nationalities, with the majority coming from India (70%). Furthermore, international students are enrolled in more than half of the programs across the College, with 17 programs having high international student enrolment (one third or more of total enrolment).
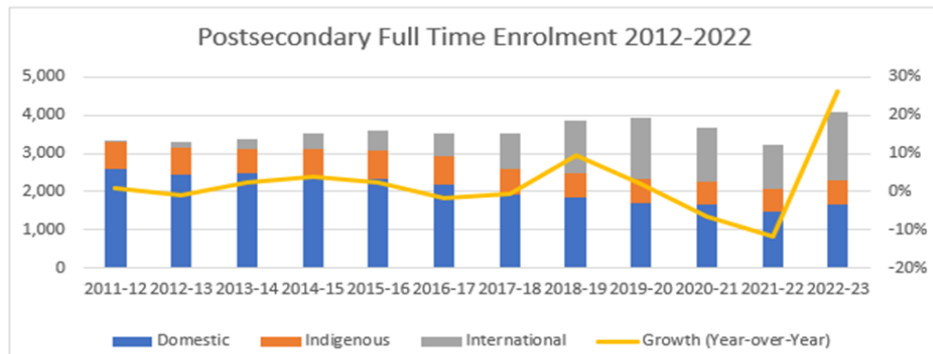
Figure 4: Enrolment trends by student group from 2011/12- 2022/23

Confederation College is currently addressing challenges related to attrition, with an average of 17% attrition occurring from the first to the second semester and escalating to 28% from program start to completion. Additionally, the College's graduation rate has only reached or surpassed the provincial average in two of the past ten years. These rates are crucial indicators of student success, closely monitored by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU (Ministry of Colleges and Universities)). The total graduation rate plays a significant role in the College's Performance Funding, as it is one of the 10 performance metrics. For a detailed overview of the trends in graduation rate over the past 5 years and other key performance indicators monitored by the MCU, refer to the figure below.

Confederation College KPI 5 Year Trend

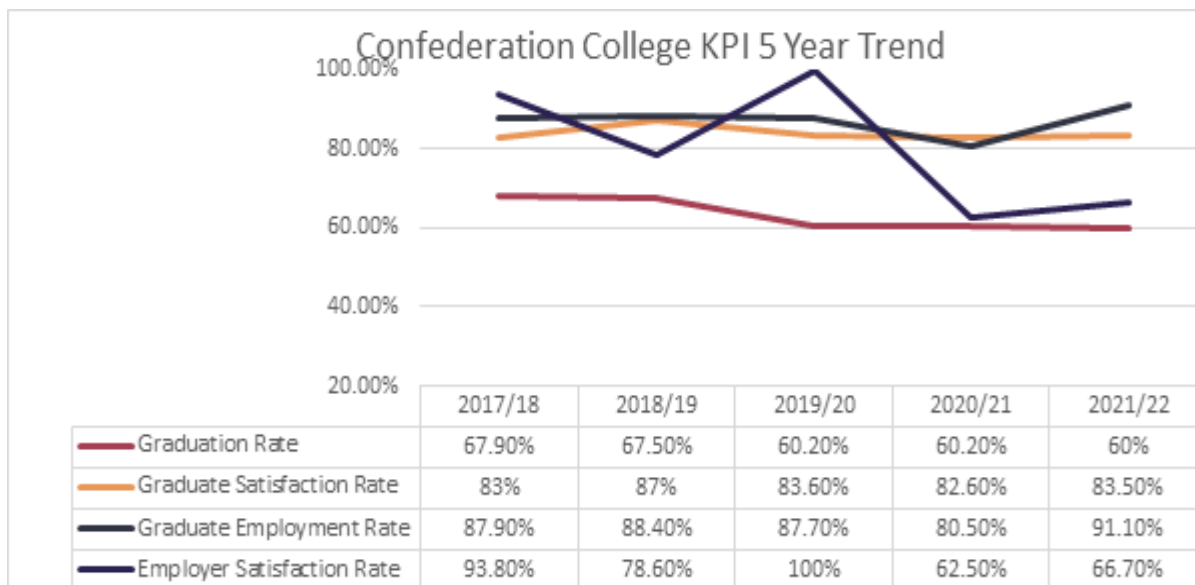|	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Graduation Rate	67.90%	67.50%	60.20%	60.20%	60%
Graduate Satisfaction Rate	83%	87%	83.60%	82.60%	83.50%
Graduate Employment Rate	87.90%	88.40%	87.70%	80.50%	91.10%
Employer Satisfaction Rate	93.80%	78.60%	100%	62.50%	66.70%

Figure 5: MCU Key Performance Indicators for Confederation College.

Externally, the college plays a vital role in the local economy and the regional workforce, contributing significantly, where one in 13 jobs in the area is associated with Confederation College, adding 700.6 million to northwestern Ontario's economy. Further, labour market trends indicate a growing demand for workers in the fields of health, community services, food services, transportation, natural resources and education across Thunder Bay and

Northwestern Ontario. Additionally, employers within the region have expressed a demand for graduates in the skilled trades, specifically, which is a notable trend across the country.

Looking ahead, Ontario colleges can now develop new three-year applied degree programs. This presents an exciting opportunity for the College to review its programming and meet the needs of industries across the region and beyond. Alongside this, the development of micro credentials is a growing trend across the sector, as this type of credential is an effective way for people to upgrade their skills in a rapidly changing labour environment.

It is a critical time for the College to be responsive to these training needs and program development opportunities. The domestic tuition reduction and tuition freeze implemented in 2019 by the Ontario government continues to affect the College. Additionally, the implementation of SMA3 has shifted funding away from a corridor model towards performance-based metrics, which will benefit the College due to our domestic enrolment decline. Many of these metrics relate to academic programming, including enrolment into program areas of strength, experiential learning, apprenticeship-related programs, and skills and competencies.

Lastly, in the context of program development, it is important to highlight emerging technologies and their impact on program delivery. Most recently, the postsecondary landscape has seen the advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, which is already influencing classroom delivery. The College needs to be responsive and proactive in the use of AI, starting with a need for policy development and capacity building.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Developing new programs, articulation agreements, and pathways is vital for Confederation College to stay competitive and meet the diverse needs of students and employers. Thorough market research is essential when creating new programs, as it allows us to understand the demand for specific skills and knowledge in the industry. Collaborating with local businesses, industry associations, and community leaders provides valuable insights into the skills gaps that need to be addressed. It is also crucial to stay updated on technological advancements, industry trends, and changes in the job market to design programs that remain relevant and meet the evolving needs of students and employers.

Additionally, micro-credentials offer a flexible and targeted way for students and industry professionals to acquire specific skills and knowledge relevant to their career goals. However, articulation agreements, while beneficial, can be complex and not always user-friendly. Therefore, streamlining and improving the clarity of these agreements, especially at the onset of new program development, can enhance their effectiveness. The goals, strategies, and tactics outlined below aim to drive planning around opportunities for new program development.

Goals
- Develop and revitalize programs that are relevant to the current and future needs of our students and industry.
- Obtain accreditation and approval for the new program(s) in the next two years.
- Attract enough qualified students to enroll in programs to ensure financial viability or other funding to offset delivery cost.
- Establish articulation agreements and pathways with other colleges and universities that are mutually beneficial and meet the needs of all stakeholders.

Metrics
- # of new programs developed and enrolment
- # of programs updated/revitalized through Comprehensive Program Review (CPR)
- Ministry KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) for new program (student satisfaction, graduate rate, etc.)
- # of articulation agreements and pathways established

Strategies	Tactics
Engage in research and consultation with students, faculty, and institutions to identify the needs and opportunities for new program development, applied degrees, articulation agreements and pathways.	- Conduct focus groups with students, faculty, and employment partners to identify current and future needs. - Engage with industry partners and/or Program Advisory Committees (PACs) to validate the need for the new program. - Develop survey instruments to assess program relevance. - Analyze labour market data and employment forecasts. - Seek grant opportunities and collaborate with industry partners for financial support or in-kind contributions.
Develop comprehensive curriculum that aligns with industry standards, best practices, new program standards and includes experiential learning	- Assignment of appropriate resources for curriculum development. - Market the benefits of the articulation agreements with universities (low cost first 2 years, more "hands-on" training etc.).

SKILLED TRADES STRATEGY

The rising demand for skilled trades in Canada, particularly in Ontario, is creating significant pressure for Confederation College to expand its capacity for trades programs. However, this effort is hindered by the Ministry of Labour's allocation of limited seats and heightened competition from both unions and private providers. Integrating apprenticeship levels into college diploma and certificate programs is a crucial strategy to improve access, but it necessitates substantial investment in curriculum development and coordination.
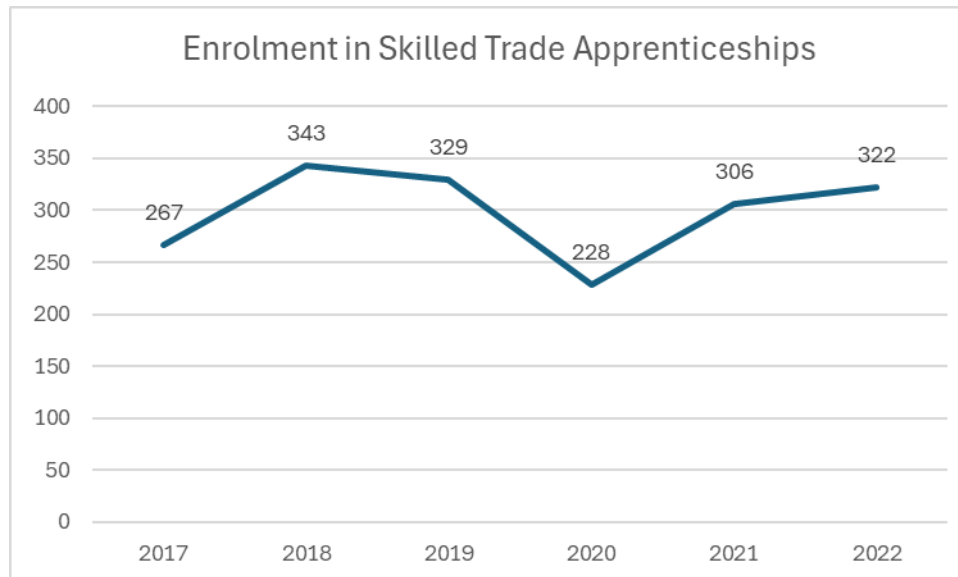
Figure 6: Summary of Enrolment in Skilled Trades Apprenticeships from 2017-2022

The college needs to establish strategic approaches to optimize resource utilization for integrating apprenticeship levels into college diploma and certificate programs. The following goals, strategies, and tactics are designed to empower the college to overcome these challenges and maintain competitiveness against other Ontario colleges and private providers.

Goals
- Increase Confederation College's capacity to deliver high-quality trades training by obtaining additional TDA (Training Delivery Agent) status for high-demand trades.
- Integrate apprenticeship levels into college diploma and certificate programs, offering students greater access to skilled trades.
- Establish clear pathways for pre-trades/apprenticeship students to transition into trades training or pursue further postsecondary education through workforce development initiatives.

Metrics
- # of secured apprenticeship positions
- # of diploma and certificate programs integrating apprenticeship levels
- Student enrolment and graduation rates in trades programs and programs with embedded trade levels

Strategies	Tactics
Maintain competitiveness in the market by optimizing our existing programming.	- Conduct market research to identify specialized or unique trades programs in demand within our region. - Collaborate with the Ministry of Labour to acquire extra seats for trades programs and advocate for increased funding for trades training. - Update webpages, resources, and communication to guidance counselors on trades programming at the College - Collaborate with contract training to offer pre-apprenticeship programs and meet industry needs, such as AZ/DZ, Heavy Equipment

	Operator, Welding, Carpentry, Mining essentials, Introduction to diamond drilling, etc.
	• Enhance the delivery of trades programs through increased utilization of technology.
Integrate apprenticeship levels into college diploma and certificate programs to establish more seamless pathways for students.	• Revamp current diploma and certificate programs to incorporate apprenticeship levels, emphasizing the creation of smoother pathways for students. • Integrate apprenticeship level(s) into one-year certificates, such as Carpentry and Reno Techniques, and Motive Power.
Strengthen partnerships with local businesses and organizations to expand the availability of apprenticeship positions and co-op placements for college students.	• Reach out to local businesses and organizations to raise awareness of apprenticeship opportunities and forge partnerships for apprenticeship positions. • Embrace apprenticeship opportunities across Northwestern Ontario. • Form partnerships and collaborations with unions, school boards, and private providers to exchange resources and best practices in delivering trades training. • Utilize established SCWI and PAC partnerships effectively. • Schedule meetings with union business managers to strategize and identify opportunities for shared resourcing, including instructor/mentor training.

INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY

Over the past decade, the enrolment of international students at Confederation College has increased, contributing to the stability of the College's overall enrolment, and enhancing the diversity of its student body. Currently, approximately 70% of international students at the College are from India, a statistic that highlights a potential vulnerability to shifts in political policies in Canada or abroad, which could impact the College's enrolment stability. In comparison to colleges in the southern region of Ontario, Confederation College has lower enrolment figures, partly due to Confederation's lack of engagement in Public College Private Partnerships (PCPPs).

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
India	1170	1516	1253	934	1320
Philippines	4	14	23	64	129
Nepal	11	16	19	50	100
Viet Nam	25	36	43	54	42
Nigeria	10	11	15	28	37
Ghana	1	5	11	12	23
China	44	37	21	12	17
South Korea	14	21	30	27	14
Colombia	1	3	4	7	13
Mexico	6	5	4	8	8

Table 1: List of top countries of origin for international student enrolment.

To ensure sustained viability, the College is focused on diversifying its sources of international students to mitigate the risks associated with relying heavily on a single population of prospective students. Additionally, the College aims to differentiate itself from other institutions, thereby enhancing its appeal and attracting a more diverse and expansive student body. This strategic shift is intended to bolster enrolment and strengthen the College's position in a constantly evolving educational landscape.

It is important to the recognize dynamic shifts in the international educational landscape that took place as the College developed its original international strategy. Specifically, since its development in 2023, significant and unanticipated national policy changes, including a cap on international student permits, were introduced. This policy particularly impacts Ontario, which predicted a 50% reduction in international student numbers compared to the previous year. Furthermore, the requirement for a provincial attestation letter for international students adds complexity to the admissions process and students can no longer receive a work permit for families which will decrease the diversity of our student pool. Positively, the College has secured permission to maintain its 2023 application levels for international students. However, a new moratorium on enrolling international students into one-year business management programs presents another hurdle, affecting future enrolment figures. Additionally, a decline in the perception of Canada as a prime educational destination requires close monitoring. These elements highlight the need for continuous adaptations in our strategy going forward to effectively navigate and thrive in this changing global educational sphere.

For a visual representation of how international student enrolment has contributed to maintaining the College's overall enrolment in recent years, please refer to Figure 4. Furthermore, for an overview of the goals, strategies, and tactics pertaining to international enrolment, please see the table below.

Goals
- Enhance the diversity of our international student body, including geographic origins of our students and expanding the range of programs they enroll in. This initiative includes promoting enrollment in regional campuses.
- To differentiate Confederation College from other colleges in southern Ontario.

Metrics
- Number of international students from targeted countries.
- Percentage of international students from India compared to other countries.
- Comparison of growth in international student enrolment to other colleges in southern Ontario.

Strategies	Tactics
Develop target marketing and recruitment plans for specific regions or countries.	• Market research and targeting for countries with high potential for student recruitment (with focus on declining domestic programs) • Focus International Recruitment Manager on new and emerging markets. • Identify trends and changes in student program demand in each target country. • Conduct market research to identify the most promising countries to target. • Create customized marketing materials and events for targeted countries, including translated materials in appropriate languages. • Work with the college's financial aid office to identify and promote scholarship opportunities for international students. • Create family housing options for students.
Establish new partnerships with agents and consultants and strengthen existing partnerships while maintaining the highest international quality standards.	• Participate in education fairs, conferences, and international recruitment events. • Attend education fairs and other events in targeted countries to increase visibility and establish relationships with agents and representatives. • Promote programming that is successful at other colleges and where international enrolment is underrepresented in the same programming at our college.
Partner with local businesses and organizations to offer work-integrated learning opportunities to international students, which may make Confederation College a more attractive option.	• Identify and cultivate relationships with local businesses and organizations to establish work-integrated learning opportunities for international students. • Develop relationships with Canadian embassies and consulates in targeted countries to increase visibility and support for Confederation College.
Further develop online presence and leverage digital marketing strategies.	• Leverage social media platforms to increase brand awareness and engagement with potential international students.
Partner with other colleges to offer overseas programming.	• Work with other college partners to establish in country programming for students.
Lobby for work permits for family members of College students in order to diversify our student body.	• Meet with local MP and MPPs and advocate for a change to policy re: post-graduate work permit for spouses.

REGIONAL STRATEGY

2016 census, there has been a slight decline in the population specifically classified as "college-aged" (15-29) across all three census divisions: Thunder Bay (-1.4%), Kenora (-6%), and Rainy River (-6%). For a detailed breakdown of population counts by regional campus community for ages 15-64, refer to Figure 7, which shows that five out of seven communities have seen a decrease since the 2016 census.
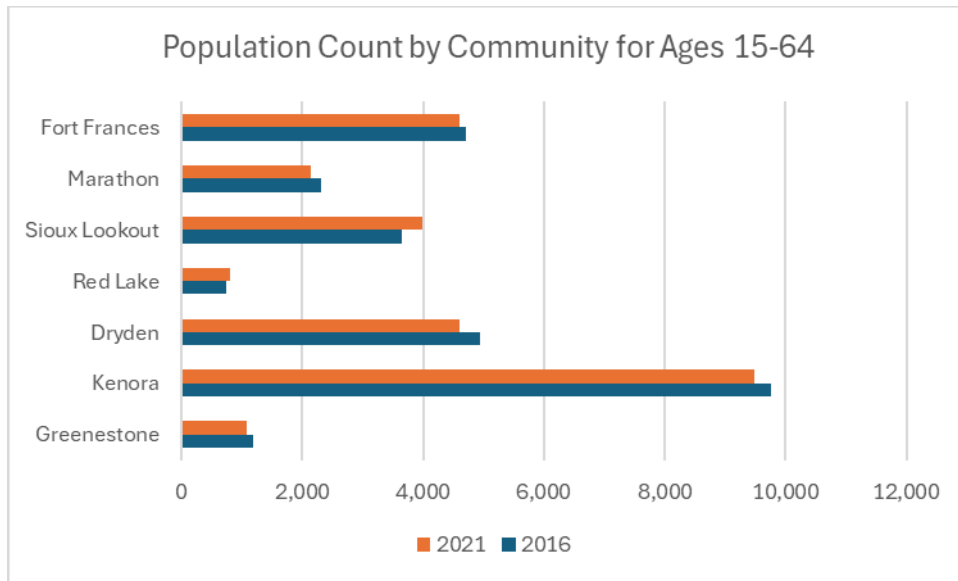

Figure 7: Population counts for the typical college or employment age (15-64) for regional campus communities.
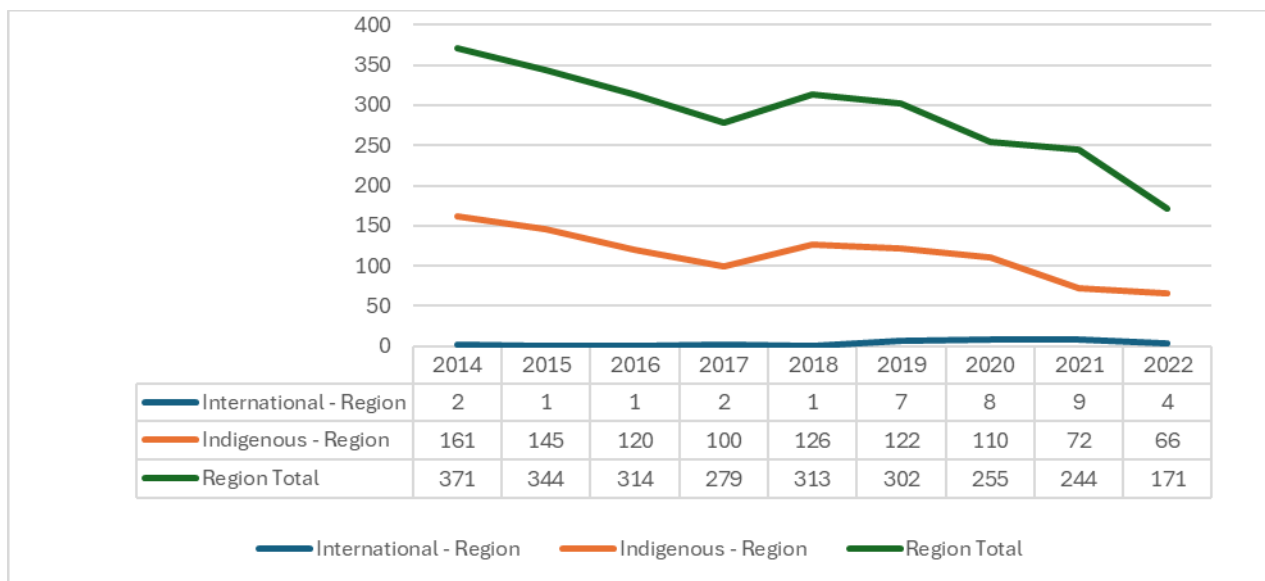
Figure 8: Enrolment at regional campuses by student group and total

A fundamental aspect of the Regional Strategy is to enhance enrolment across the regional campuses by increasing the participation of Indigenous and international students, acknowledging the significance of promoting diversity and inclusivity. Moreover, a key objective involves expanding contract training opportunities throughout the region to meet the evolving demands of the workforce and position the college as a vital contributor to regional economic development.

When establishing goals and strategies, the College must consider potential risks and challenges, such as housing and transportation, particularly for international students in Kenora, Dryden, and Fort Frances. Additionally, policy changes and immigration regulations could impact post-graduate work permit programs. Furthermore, there is growing competition from Indigenous Institutes in the region. These risks underscore the importance of innovative solutions to address accessibility, regulatory, and competitive barriers. The following outlines the highlighted goals, strategies, and tactics.

Goals
- Increase the number of Indigenous students studying at regional campuses.
- Increase the number of international students studying at regional campuses, especially in the western part of our region.
- Increase the number of contract training initiatives at regional campuses, especially in the western part of the region.

Metrics
- Overall number of students studying in each campus by student group.
- Number of industry specific contract training initiatives delivered in each campus/community.

Strategies	Tactics
Increase partnerships with community organizations and employers to raise awareness of community needs and how the College can help meet those needs	• Work with community partners and employers on joint advertising initiatives for programming and positions. • Connecting employers with career services through initiatives such as job fairs and open houses. • Raise awareness of Campus and Community programming by co-hosting events on campus. • Identify contract training opportunities within each community and working with Workforce Development on delivery modes.
Develop cross-functional teams to ensure Workforce Development, Employment Services and Regional Campus priorities are identified and actioned	• Establish regular connection meetings between Workforce Development, Employment Services & Regional campus staff. • Establish regular connection meetings between the International Education Centre and Regional Campus staff to ensure international student needs are considered. • Increase workforce development activities in the West.
Enhance the regional profile of each campus to targeted markets including regional, Indigenous, and international communities	• Develop a Regional Profile for each community that would include general information about the community and area, including nearby Indigenous communities, international profile, and prominent industry. • Work with Indigenous Communities and organizations to promote events and activities in the community and surrounding area. • Include Marketing & Communications and the IEC in creating the Regional Community Profiles to ensure consistent messaging and branding. • Ensure the regional campuses Managers are partners in advertising and promotional plans to support an increase in recruitment and enrolment • Regional Student Success Advisors work more intensely with Indigenous Student Navigators, APIWIN staff and Elders to support Indigenous students at each campus.

STUDENT RETENTION AND GRADUATION PLAN

Our current retention and graduation rates are crucial components of student success at Confederation College. The college typically experiences an average attrition rate of 17% from the first to the second semester and 28% from program start to the final semester. Notably, certain programs consistently face high attrition rates, particularly diploma and advanced diploma programs, which significantly impact the overall graduation rate. Graduation rates are a key indicator of student success and are closely monitored by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. The total graduation rate is one of the 10 performance metrics that determine the College's Performance Funding. Over the past decade, the college has only met or surpassed the provincial average in two instances. Furthermore, the College's diploma programs, which constitute a sizable portion of our academic offerings, currently have the lowest graduation rate among all Ontario colleges.
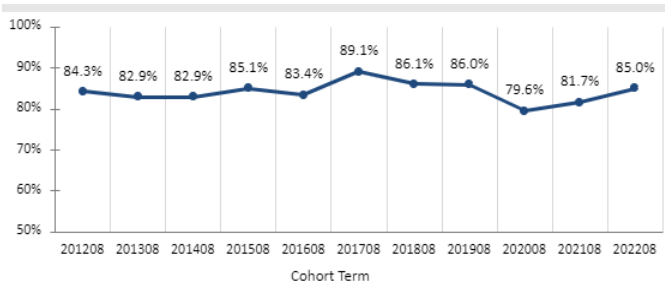

Figure 9: First semester to second semester retention for postsecondary programs at the Thunder Bay campus. The slight spike seen in 201708 is an impact of the strike and the initiatives put in place to mitigate impact. The dip seen in 201908 to 202008 is an impact Covid-19.
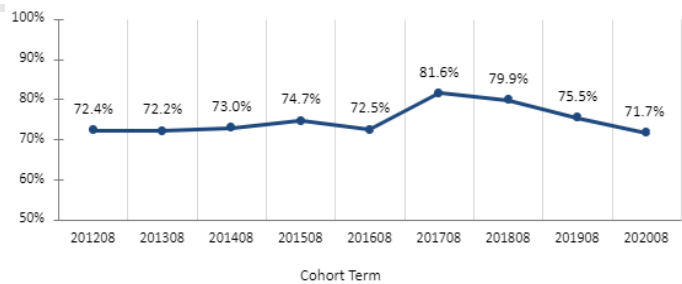

Figure 10: First semester to final semester (of the program) retention for all postsecondary programs at the Thunder Bay campus
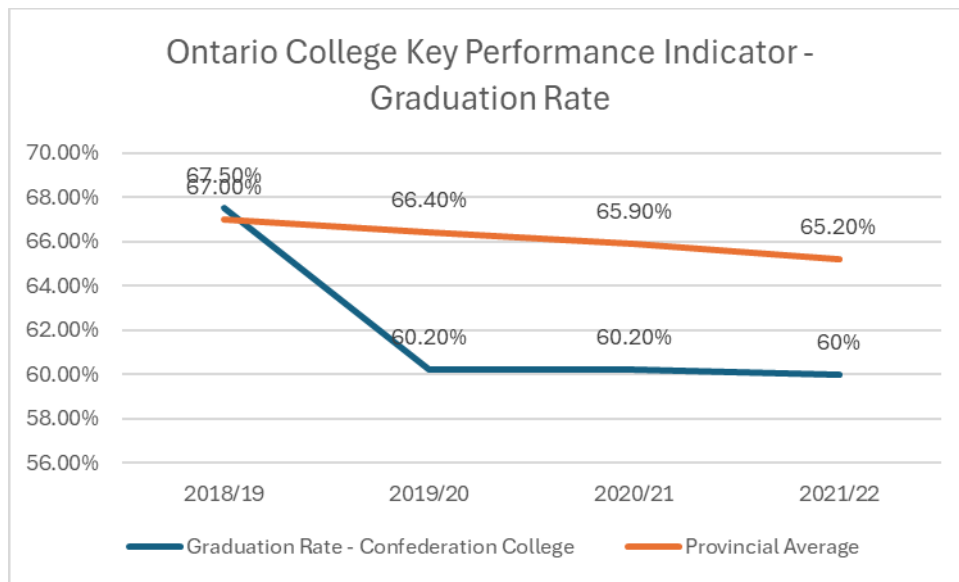

Figure 11: Historical graduation rates for the College and province 2017-2022

The College is presented with opportunities to improve student retention and graduation rates. By implementing effective strategies to identify and support at-risk students, the College can create an environment that fosters success and reduces attrition. Strengthening collaboration among stakeholders provides a chance to develop comprehensive retention strategies. Additionally, improving internal communication channels allows the College to ensure students are well-informed about available resources throughout their academic pathways.

Recognizing the need for improvement in student persistence and a deeper understanding of the root causes of attrition, the college has established specific goals to enhance retention and graduation rates. The specific strategies and tactics developed to achieve these goals are outlined in the table below.

Goals
- Increase retention from Semester 1 to Semester 2 by 2%
- Increase overall domestic student graduation rates by 5% (to Confederation average) for the 2025 cohort (with natural graduation year of 2027).

Metrics
- Semester to semester retention rates.
- Graduation rate.

Strategies	Tactics
Improve Early Intervention and support for at-risk students	- Increase use of the Early Alert system. - Enhance the comprehensive orientation program. - Improve proactive advising.
Enhance understanding academic pathways.	- Develop a cross-college vision for student academic success. - Cultivate relationships and collaborate across departments and with the community. - Update website and maintain it. - Ensure consistent and clear messaging related to existing pathways.
Foster collaboration between stakeholders.	- Conduct regular graduation audit reviews. - Create opportunities to transfer pathways (e.g., GAS). - Increase college wide collaborative practice.
Strengthen internal communication strategies.	- Collaborate with Annual Program Review process. - Collaborate with the Strategic Enrolment Management plan. - Understand and share regular student feedback. - Collaborate with Human Resources and SUCCI to ensure updated distribution lists and orientations. - Collaborate with Schools to ensure communication is consistent and timely.
Promote a sense of community and belonging.	- Enhance opportunities for community building. - Increase student engagement opportunities for extra-curricular activities. (SUCCI), leadership programs, and community involvement. - Develop relationships with potential students prior to arrival with check in points before and after they arrive. - Implement tools to streamline the student support process (i.e., CRM).

PARTNERSHIPS AND RELATIONSHIPS STRATEGY

Confederation College plays a crucial role in providing skilled employees to meet the needs of employers throughout Northwestern Ontario. There are significant shortages in various sectors, including healthcare, skilled trades, mining, and forestry, as indicated by labor market trends and industry partners. Collaborations with these partners offer opportunities to collectively address training needs in these specific areas. They also serve as channels for meaningful research and project collaborations focused on community and industry needs. Internally, effective communication and collaboration among staff and faculty are essential for identifying gaps and opportunities through established partnerships. Through its partnerships, the College has increased the number of training sessions and improved services for communities and students.
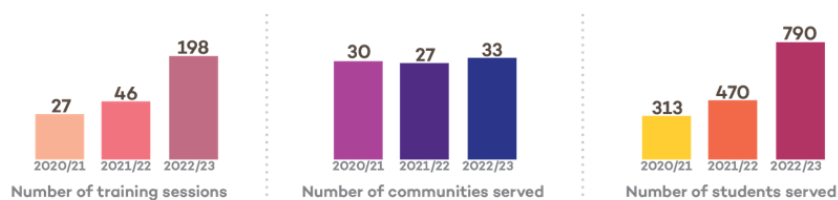

Figure 12: Summary of Contract Training Activity and Partnerships 2020-2023

The College's commitment is to continue this work and develop a diverse and inclusive network that responds to the unique challenges of the region. Through the outlined goals, strategies, and tactics, the College aims to strengthen its role in meeting the training needs of communities, thereby contributing positively to the economic and social advancement of Northwestern Ontario.

Goals
- Increase the response to the need of industry partners through ongoing customized training, project development, and experiential learning opportunities.
- Seek opportunities for new partnerships in areas where the college has limited involvement, for example, the western region, Red Lake, and Sioux Lookout.

Metrics
- # of partnerships and projects created.
- # of training sessions delivered to communities/ organizations.

Strategies	Tactics
Develop and implement an outreach strategy to increase partnerships and relationships with other colleges, universities, Indigenous communities, and industry partners.	• Create new opportunities for research collaborations. • Continue to engage faculty and staff with industry and community-relevant research projects. • Work with community partners and employers on joint advertising initiatives for programming and positions.
Build on existing partnerships currently in place with indigenous organizations, communities, and industry.	• Support indigenous communities, organizations economic development corporations, limited partnerships and ISET holders to access training grants and training strategies. • Develop cross-functional teams to ensure Workforce Development, Regional Campuses, and the Post Secondary Schools work to identify partner priorities and industry needs are identified and actioned.
Increase partnerships with community organizations and	• Work with companies to host industry specific events and activities to promote training, post-secondary, co-operative education, and career opportunities.

employers to determine how the College can best meet needs.	

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) STRATEGY

AI is rapidly becoming a significant presence in postsecondary environments, with the potential to enhance learning experiences while also presenting challenges to academic integrity. Despite this, Confederation College currently lacks a comprehensive strategy for integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into the classroom, thereby limiting its ability to fully leverage the benefits of this technology.

The integration of AI involves the handling of sensitive data, necessitating robust security measures and compliance with privacy regulations. Additionally, AI systems are susceptible to bias, which could exacerbate existing inequalities. Therefore, it is crucial to address bias and ensure equitable treatment for all individuals. AI technology may also have limitations, such as accuracy issues, which could affect the reliability of implemented solutions. Without a dedicated lead department or center, the College's AI strategy risks being directionless, potentially leading to inconsistent knowledge dissemination and compromised outcomes. Faculty and staff may also be hesitant to adopt AI technologies due to a lack of awareness, concerns about job displacement, or perceived implementation challenges. To address these issues and capitalize on the opportunities presented by AI, the College needs a clear set of goals, strategies, and tactics. These should encompass the challenges and opportunities associated with AI integration in postsecondary education.

Goals
- Establish ethical guidelines and policies for AI implementation to protect data privacy, prevent bias, and promote transparency and accountability.
- Implement AI technologies to personalize and optimize learning experiences for students, catering to their individual needs and promoting better academic outcomes.
- Encourage the development and adoption of innovative AI solutions to facilitate research, project collaborations, and knowledge sharing among students, faculty, and staff.

Metrics
- Participation rate in AI training sessions and feedback and satisfaction rates.
- Investment in AI-enabled infrastructure (Financial investment, # of tools).

Strategies	Tactics
Conduct training programs and awareness campaigns to educate faculty, staff, and students about the benefits, possibilities, and ethical considerations of AI in education and administration.	- Train faculty and staff on AI tools through workshops and seminars. - Develop new assessment practices to demonstrate understanding and compliance with academic integrity. - Establish clear policies and guidelines for data privacy, security, ethics, and responsible AI use to ensure transparency, fairness, and compliance. - Develop a standard of practice for use of AI within a program.
Foster partnerships with AI solution providers, industry experts, and other educational institutions to leverage expertise, share best practices, and access innovative AI technologies.	- Establish cross-functional teams, regular meetings, and clear action items and tracking mechanism. - the college's external collaborations.
Initiate small-scale pilot projects to demonstrate the potential benefits of AI in specific areas, such as personalized learning, administrative automation, and data analysis.	- Encourage faculty and staff to engage in research and development activities related to AI in education and administration through grants and incentives. - Develop use cases for automating administrative tasks, including program or course outlines, preparation, and assessments. - Develop chatbots to provide 24/7 support for students.

	• Invest in the necessary infrastructure, such as AI-enabled software platforms and data analytics tools, and allocate resources for ongoing maintenance, training, and support.

NEXT STEPS

The Academic Operating Plan is designed to seamlessly integrate ongoing assessment and evaluation processes established in the 5-year Strategic Plan. By aligning with the 5-year strategic plan, it ensures that Confederation College's academic operations are in harmony with the institution's overarching strategic direction. It provides a cohesive framework that guides decision-making, resource allocation, and performance evaluation, enabling the college to effectively meet its long-term goals while simultaneously addressing the specific needs and priorities of its academic programs and services.

Throughout the lifespan of this plan, goals, strategies, and tactics will be continuously monitored using data on academic program outcomes, student learning outcomes, and institutional effectiveness. Additionally, these elements will be reviewed annually to ensure they are responsive to emerging trends, growing needs, and changing policies.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Opportunities and Next Steps local, regional, and international trends	
2022/23 Academic Plan	**Update**
Continue International Enrolment Strategy initiatives (e.g., Invest and expand our digital marketing efforts in international markets, with customized content and focus by specific geographic area)	*Expanded markets and the number of countries students are coming from.* *The International Regional Strategy identified opportunities for Dryden, Fort Frances and Kenora (set targets by campus), and targeted Personal Support Worker, Practical Nursing and Early Childhood Education, with international applicants now at 2 of 3 campuses*
Expand Indigenous student enrolment initiatives • Explore recruitment on large First Nations communities by employing someone on reserve to recruit for the College	*Hired an Indigenous Recruitment Officer* *Recruitment and relationship building is taking place with Indigenous Communities, and particularly with new Campus Managers (Kenora, Sioux Lookout) and Regional Indigenous Liaison.* *Launched an Indigenous Open House event, that will become an annual event*
Expand Online Learning (asynchronous) programming • Office Administration (2 year) - Legal, Health, Executive – approval stage • Personal Support Worker (developed and offered in 2022) • Options – Bookkeeping, Food Services Worker, Educational Support and Cyber Security through Ontario Learn.	*Office Administration – Legal, Health, Executive approved. Recruiting students for Winter 2024* *Increased intakes for Personal Support Worker in Thunder Bay and Across the Regions* *Exploring options for new programming annually*
Build partnerships to support the expansion and accessibility of college programming (e.g. with Oshki-Wenjack, Seven Generations Education Institute)	
Continue to meet the regional demand in health care through ongoing PSW (Personal Support Worker) initiatives, SAO/HCI project, Nursing, Medical Laboratory Assistant.	*Practical Nursing is running in Marathon, Nipigon, and Atikokan.* *MLA (Medical Lab Assistant) running in the region* *Investigating opportunities to develop Medical Laboratory Technologist* *Developing Pharmacy Technician*
Explore opportunities for attracting and retaining students and program development based on waitlisting, lost catchment, and regional labour market data • Police Foundations outmigration (move program to 22/23 CPR)	*Seat Expansion has occurred in several programs including:* • *Paramedic (expanded seats by 10) and Practical Nursing (expanded seats by 15).*

	• _Created a 22 seat January intake in Practical Nursing_ • _Expanded intakes for Personal Support Worker._ • _Added a section to EBSM (two-year program with three intakes and now a double intake for January 2023 intake)._ • _Received MCU approval to offer the Health Leadership program to Domestic students (previously only international students could take the program)_ • _Expanded offerings in DE and regional campuses, including the Social Service Worker program and Onajigawin annually._ • _Increased seats in CP_

Opportunities and next steps College Policies and Decision making	
2022/23 Academic Plan	**Update**
Establish a plan to support and/or mitigate adverse impacts to SMA3 metrics that are connected to programming such as improving	_Launching a Strategic Enrolment Management Plan and Annual Operational Plan_
Establish strategies for improving KPIs such as graduation rate and tracking experiential learning across programs	_Launched a Graduation and Retention action plan as a part of the Academic Operation Plan that will address graduation and retention rates._ _Experiential learning activities are monitored through the APR PIP (Program Improvement Plans) process._
Implement recommendations and affirmations from 2020/21 Audit report	_In progress – completing the 18 month follow up report._

Opportunities and Next Steps Program review policies and procedures	
2022/23 Academic Plan	**Update**
Implement mechanism for connecting Program Improvement Plans year-to-year	_Transferred APR documents to SharePoint so that all programs and schools have a centralized repository for APRs. The Program Improvement Plan was reorganized to support clearer goal setting and action planning based on data trends and reflection. A PIP Status Report was also developed to monitor action plans mid-year and to connect APRs year to year._
Implement the affirmations and recommendations from the 2021/22 CQQAAP Audit	_In progress – completing the 18 month follow up report._
Communicating processes and timelines connected to QA Policies/ Processes, Program Mix	_Launching Academic Plan, SEM (Strategic Enrollment Management) plan, Academic Cycle_
Establish processes for engaging faculty in discussions and/or investigations of opportunities for growth and expansion of programming/ fields of study based on program data, regional and labour market trends	_Prompt faculty in for feedback in the Annual Program Review_ _New program development strategy will be incorporated into_ _See seat expansion updates_

Opportunities and Next Steps program review, development and decision making	
2022/23 Academic Plan	**Update**
Evaluate programs with low program health scores and/or low financial contributions and move them through processes for improving (program health improvement planning for financial viability review) or begin the process for program suspension. • Review financial data for programs to ensure accuracy	*Created a financial viability model for scenario planning for programs that are at risk. Template has been used for all programs identified in last year's Academic Plan. Meetings are held to review scenarios and develop specific action plans for the programs.*
Continue to research and investigate opportunities for new program development for domestic and international students based on the business case (see Table 14)	*Launched Bachelor of Science in Nursing* *Pharmacy Technician - PFAAM Application submitted. Anticipated launch Fall 2024.* *Office Administration – Executive, Legal and Medical through Ontario Learn - Final stages of PFAAM process. Anticipated launch Winter 2024.* *Micro credentials in Energy Management being developed course by course. Goal is a new Energy Management / Net Zero PG certificate suitable for Integrated Plan.* *Embark – currently being rolled into SETTA as an Indigenous Pre-Tech stream.* *Indigenous Leadership and Community Development – In review.*
Resource and execute the 2021/22 CPRs and new program development plan through the alignment of Institutional Research and Quality Assurance areas within the Registrar's Office	*See updates on CPR and APR completion rates.*
Roll out a retention and graduation strategy to improve graduation rates across the College in the fall of 2022	*Graduation and Retention Action Plan launch was held September 25th, 2023*
Complete the 2021/22 Audit Process (Submit report March 7th, 2022; Prepare for site visit May 2022)	*Complete. In progress of completing 18-month report, implementing affirmations and recommendations.*

A P P E N D I X   B

What is AI

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, especially computer systems. These processes include learning (the acquisition of information and rules for using the information), reasoning (using rules to reach approximate or definite conclusions), and self-correction. A key aspect of AI includes machine learning, where machines are programmed to learn from experience and improve their performance without explicit programming. AI can involve concepts like neural networks, natural language processing, and expert systems.

In the context of higher education, AI can be used in a variety of ways:

1. Adaptive Learning: AI can create personalized learning experiences for students. By understanding a student's strengths and weaknesses, an AI can adjust the material to provide tailored instruction that targets areas of weakness and reinforces areas of strength.

2. Intelligent Tutoring Systems: AI can simulate one-on-one human tutoring, providing personalized coursework and immediate feedback to students. Such systems can adapt the pace and level of instruction based on individual students' needs.

3. Automated Grading: AI systems can automate the grading process for multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank testing. More advanced systems can even grade essays and written responses, although this is still a developing field.

4. Chatbots: AI-powered chatbots can provide 24/7 support to students, answering frequently asked questions about course material, assignments, deadlines, etc. This allows educators to focus on more complex student queries and tasks.

5. Predictive Analytics: AI can be used to analyze patterns in student behavior and performance to predict future outcomes. This can be used to identify students at risk of failing a course or dropping out, allowing timely intervention.

6. Research: In research-heavy environments, AI can be used to gather and analyze data, speeding up the research process. It can also be used to identify patterns and insights in large datasets that might not be easily noticeable to human researchers.

7. Administration: AI can also help in administrative tasks, automating routine tasks such as scheduling, tracking student attendance, and so on. It can also provide insights to help in decision-making regarding course offerings, budget allocations, and other administrative decisions.

8. Recruitment and Admissions: AI can help in streamlining the recruitment and admissions process, from identifying potential applicants based on certain criteria to helping in sorting through applications and shortlisting candidates.

While the use of AI in higher education presents numerous opportunities for enhancing student learning and administrative efficiency, it also raises issues related to privacy, data security, and the need for human oversight and interpretive judgment.

While AI has the potential to revolutionize the field of higher education, it is also important to consider some potential negative impacts, including:

1. Job Displacement: With AI automating administrative tasks and some aspects of teaching (e.g., grading), there could be concerns about job displacement for administrative staff and educators.

2. Data Privacy and Security: AI systems typically require access to a large amount of data to function effectively. This might raise issues about student data privacy and security, particularly given the sensitive nature of some of this data.

3. Ethical Concerns: There are also ethical issues associated with the use of AI. For example, AI systems might be used in ways that are discriminatory or unfair, such as by prioritizing the needs of certain groups of students over others.

4. Depersonalization: While AI can offer personalization in terms of content delivery, it could also lead to a lack of human interaction and mentorship in the educational process, potentially impacting the development of critical thinking and social skills.

5. Equity: There might be disparities in access to AI technologies due to socio-economic factors, leading to a digital divide in the educational experience.

6. Reliability: AI technologies, particularly those involved in grading and assessment, are not foolproof and can sometimes make errors or fail to recognize nuances in human language and behavior.

7. Over-reliance: A heavy reliance on AI could lead to a lack of critical thinking or problem-solving skills. If AI is always providing the answers, students might not learn to research, explore, and find solutions independently.

8. Cost: The initial cost of implementing AI technologies can be high, which might put strains on the budgets of educational institutions, potentially leading to increased tuition fees or cuts in other areas.

9. These potential negative impacts highlight the need for careful planning and implementation of AI technologies in higher education, with appropriate safeguards and consideration of ethical, privacy, and equity issues.

Some safeguards to mitigate potential negative impacts that should be considered are:
1. Clear Policies: Institutions should develop clear policies on the use of AI, addressing issues such as data privacy, security, and ethical considerations. These policies should be communicated clearly to all stakeholders, including students, faculty, and staff.

2. Data Privacy and Security Measures: Given the sensitive nature of student data, robust data privacy and security measures are crucial. This could include anonymization of data, encryption, and secure storage and transmission methods. Compliance with data protection laws and regulations, such as GDPR in the EU, is also essential.

3. Transparency: Institutions should be transparent about how they use AI, including the types of data collected, the purpose of data collection and usage, and how decisions are made using AI.

4. Oversight and Accountability: There should be clear lines of accountability for decisions made using AI. Institutions should also establish mechanisms for oversight of AI systems to ensure they are used appropriately and ethically.

5. Human Involvement: AI should augment, not replace, human decision-making. In areas like grading, teaching, and student support, there should still be human involvement to provide oversight, guidance, and a personal touch.

6. Training and Support: Faculty, staff, and students should be provided with adequate training and support in the use of AI tools. This can help to ensure that these tools are used effectively and appropriately, and that users understand their implications.

7. Accessibility and Inclusion: Institutions should work to ensure that AI tools are accessible to all students, including those with disabilities. Efforts should also be made to avoid exacerbating digital divides due to socio-economic, geographical, or other factors.

8. Regular Reviews and Updates: AI technologies are evolving rapidly, and so the policies, strategies, and safeguards related to their use should be regularly reviewed and updated. Feedback from students, faculty, and staff should also be actively sought and considered in these reviews.

These safeguards can help to ensure that AI technologies are used in ways that enhance the educational experience, while also protecting the rights, privacy, and interests of students and other stakeholders.

Preserving Academic Integrity in an AI World

When implementing an AI strategy in an academic setting, there are potential issues related to academic integrity that need to be addressed. Here are some key issues to consider:

1. Plagiarism: AI-powered tools and resources can inadvertently facilitate plagiarism if not properly monitored and regulated. Students may misuse AI-generated content or use AI algorithms to paraphrase or rephrase existing work. This can compromise the originality and authenticity of student submissions.
2. Cheating in Assessments: AI technology can enable new forms of cheating during assessments. Students may attempt to use AI-powered devices or software to gain an unfair advantage, such as accessing external information or receiving real-time assistance during exams.
3. Biased AI Algorithms: AI algorithms used in grading or evaluating student work may introduce bias. If the algorithms are trained on biased datasets or not properly validated, they can lead to unfair assessment outcomes or differential treatment based on factors such as gender, race, or socioeconomic background.
4. Unauthorized Access to AI Tools: Improper access or misuse of AI tools and systems can compromise academic integrity. Students or external individuals may attempt to gain unauthorized access to AI systems to manipulate grades, alter assessments, or access restricted resources.
5. Inappropriate Collaboration: Collaborative learning is encouraged, but there is a risk of crossing ethical boundaries.

AI tools and platforms should be used to facilitate productive collaboration while ensuring that individual student work is appropriately acknowledged and assessed.

To address these potential issues, it is crucial to implement the following measures:
- Clearly communicate academic integrity policies to students, emphasizing the responsible use of AI tools and resources.
- Regularly educate students about the ethical use of AI, plagiarism, and the importance of academic integrity.
- Develop and implement AI-powered plagiarism detection systems to identify instances of academic misconduct.
- Incorporate proactive monitoring and surveillance mechanisms during assessments to detect cheating attempts facilitated by AI technology.
- Regularly evaluate and validate the fairness and reliability of AI algorithms used for grading or evaluation to mitigate bias.
- Secure and restrict access to AI tools, platforms, and systems to authorized individuals only, implementing robust authentication and authorization mechanisms.
- Encourage a culture of ethical collaboration and provide guidelines on appropriate ways to engage in group work and utilize AI tools.

By addressing these potential issues and implementing appropriate measures, Confederation College can foster a culture of academic integrity while leveraging the benefits of AI technology in education.

Leveraging AI In Our Administrative Tasks

Faculty
Program Outlines:
AI can assist faculty in creating more comprehensive and tailored program outlines. By leveraging AI algorithms, faculty can analyze large volumes of data, including industry trends, job market demands, and student performance data, to inform curriculum development. AI can provide insights on relevant and up-to-date topics, skills, and competencies to include in program outlines. This ensures that programs are aligned with industry needs and prepares students for successful careers.

Preparation:
AI can support faculty in preparing course materials and instructional resources. AI-powered content generation tools can automate the creation of lecture notes, slide decks, and supplementary materials based on input provided by faculty. This saves time and effort, allowing faculty to focus on other aspects of course preparation, such as interactive activities, discussions, and practical demonstrations.
Additionally, AI can recommend relevant and engaging resources, such as articles, videos, and case studies, to enhance the learning experience. Faculty can leverage AI-powered recommendation systems within learning management systems (LMS) to provide students with personalized and targeted resources that align with their learning objectives and interests.

Assessment:
AI can streamline and enhance the assessment process for faculty. Automated grading systems powered by AI algorithms can efficiently assess objective assignments, such as multiple-choice questions or coding exercises, freeing up faculty time for more subjective assessments and providing prompt feedback to students. AI can also analyze patterns in student performance, identifying areas where students may be struggling or excelling, allowing faculty to intervene and provide targeted support accordingly. Furthermore, AI can assist in detecting potential instances of plagiarism or academic misconduct by comparing student submissions with vast databases of academic content. This helps maintain academic integrity and ensures fair evaluation of student work.

Overall, leveraging AI in program outlines, preparation, and assessment can save faculty time, enhance instructional materials, provide personalized learning experiences, and enable more effective and efficient assessment methods. This empowers faculty to focus on delivering high-quality education, supporting student learning, and fostering a dynamic and engaging academic environment.