



**Bridge from Bachelor of Arts in English from Algoma University to  
Public Relations and Event Management Graduate Certificate from  
Sault College**

**Final Report**

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## Executive Summary

Initially the purpose of this collaborative pathway project between Algoma University and Sault College was to provide an academic bridging pathway from a Bachelor of Arts in English into a Public Relations credential. The intention of the project was to engage students entering their third or fourth year of their degree program by offering a blended curriculum of English and Public Relations. As a result, students would receive a balance of theory and practical skills while making professional industry contacts. The intention was also that students would satisfy requirements for the Bachelor of Arts credential from Algoma University as well as the Public Relations and Event Management Graduate Certificate through Sault College. This option is highly desirable to students given the high rates of employment for Public Relations graduates combined with the less “job ready” Bachelor of Arts degree.

Through discussion by both parties, it was determined that one possible model for the pathway is a major/minor model. In other words, the student would obtain a Bachelor of Arts in English, with a Minor in Public Relations from Algoma University, in addition to a Graduate Certificate in Public Relations/Event Management from Sault College (with the minor identified on the student’s transcript). This would be possible by counting Sault College Public Relations courses as Algoma University electives. Pending completion of an academic planning process at Algoma University, this approach to the project has been temporarily put on hold as of the time of this report; however, there is an interim alternative solution to this bridging where students may take the PR program courses in the midst of their BA and receive 15 credits (one semester) of transfer credit toward their BA program and then will only have one additional semester to complete their BA requirements.

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this collaborative project between Algoma University and Sault College was to provide an academic bridging pathway from a Bachelor of Arts in English into a Public Relations credential. Given the geographical location of Sault Ste. Marie and the fact that students are often looking for transfer opportunities locally, a partnership between Algoma University and Sault College was a natural choice. Furthermore, the objective of this project was also to create a pathway that could be replicable in the future with other institutions.

The initial goal of this project was to engage students entering third or fourth year of their degree program by offering a blended curriculum of English and Public Relations during their final year of study. Graduating students would only require one additional college semester to satisfy the graduation requirements for the Sault College Ontario Graduate Certificate in Public Relations and Event Management. These students would qualify for entry into the Ontario Graduate Certificate program based on having completed the first three years of the Bachelor of Arts in English. In other words, they will be admissible as having the degree requirements for a three-year degree even though they are entering their fourth, honours year of the degree program.

This pathway is highly desirable given the high rates of employment for Public Relations graduates combined with the less “job ready” Bachelor of Arts in English. At the same time, this pathway recognizes the value of the four-year Bachelor of Arts in English in terms of future education or job prospects. Essentially, participants in this pathway would benefit from the high affinity of English and Public Relation skill-sets; reduced time in school for completion of credentials; cost-savings by at least one semester of study; and employer-desired blend of theoretical and applied education, while still attaining the four-year degree with additional, future education pathway options.

## **Background**

### **Sault College’s Public Relations/Event Management Graduate Certificate**

The Public Relations/Event Management Graduate Certificate Program accepts graduates from university degree programs as well as college diploma programs. Students learn public relations strategies, presentation skills, fundraising, sponsorship, community and stakeholder relations and event management. The program is unique in Ontario as it is the only program that combines both public relations and event management; skills that are used by every organization. The program was launched in September 2011 when it was determined that there was a need for a program locally. The program is now entering its fourth year and has strong key performance indicators (KPIs). Since the program’s inception, there have been 40 graduates, approximately half of which have come from Algoma University. As part of the program curriculum, students are required to take two writing courses – one that focusses on news releases, facts sheets, event plans and public relations strategy documents. The second writing course develops a student’s presentation and desktop publishing skills. Furthermore, there is a job placement component that provides students with the opportunity to put their skills into practice as well as make contacts in the industry.

## **Algoma University's Bachelor of Arts in English**

Algoma University offers traditional three and four year (honours) Bachelor of Arts in English degrees. The department offers literature courses in various genres such as drama, fiction, poetry and prose. The program also offers courses in creative writing as well as film studies.

## **Purpose of Project**

The purpose of this project is to create a pathway for Algoma University students to earn a BA in English and a Sault College Public Relations/Event Management graduate certificate within a reduced timeframe that enhances cost savings by at least one semester of study.

## **Goals of Project**

- To create a pathway in English and Public Relations/Event Management that would offer a blended curriculum for students
- To provide transfer opportunities for students locally (Sault Ste. Marie and area)
- To create a pathway that would be replicable with other post-secondary institutions in the future
- To create a pathway that would provide students the opportunity to gain theoretical knowledge while obtaining hands-on practical skills necessary for increasing employment opportunities (making students job ready)

## **Methodology**

To satisfy the goal of an academic pathway from English to Public Relations, it was determined the followings steps were required to complete the project:

- Initial meetings took place between Sault College and Algoma University project leads to determine a project work plan and discuss strategies to engage necessary stakeholders at both institutions.
- Assembled a group of subject-matter experts from the respective programs at each institution.
- The subject-matter experts worked on a detailed analysis of academic alignment and gaps between the English program and the Public Relations/Event Management Program. This step in the process required engaging with other subject-matter experts, as required.
- The academic leads on the project consulted with the advisory committee following gap analysis findings to seek input and considerations from prospective employers.
- The academic leads and administrative support began a careful review of the curriculum and scheduling between the programs to determine best fits and necessary adjustments to potential delivery.
- Completed curriculum mapping. This process involved meeting with stakeholders and engaging academic administrators at each institution.
- The end goal was to complete final pathway and receive final approvals from the Academic University Senate and College Executive Committee; this final curriculum mapping approach and proposal was not completed as of the time of this report; however, an interim solution has been

arranged whereby Algoma University students wishing to complete the PR program would do so as follows:

- o during 3rd year of study, students attend Sault College's PR program, students return in year 4 to the university and complete the fall, winter and, potentially, the spring/summer semester to qualify for graduation. In total, there is only an addition of 1 semester that students could complete either by taking spring/summer courses at Algoma University throughout their studies to complete 2 credentials by August of their 4<sup>th</sup> year or by returning for an additional semester of study in the Fall of their 5<sup>th</sup> year.

## **Project Outcomes**

At the initial team meeting between Algoma University and Sault College, it was established that there is a shared interest in growing enrolment for both institutions. A partnership between Algoma University and Sault College would be beneficial to both institutions and would also provide opportunities for students locally. Examples of collaborative programs between Universities and Colleges were examined by the group to determine the best strategy to establish the partnership. It was also determined that the next step would be to arrange a meeting for subject-matter experts from both institutions.

Subject-matter experts from Algoma University and Sault College met to determine the structure of the pathway that would enable Algoma University students to earn a BA in English and a Sault College Public Relations/Event Management graduate certificate in four years. The original purpose of the pathway was to provide an opportunity for third or fourth year students to take part in a blended curriculum. The final pathway would be open to either three or four year degree students.

The subject-matter experts agreed that one potential outcome for this partnership would be the creation of a major/minor model that included the possible exploration of the option of a dual registration at both institutions. Upon completion of the program, students would graduate with three credentials – a Bachelor of Arts in English from Algoma University, a minor in Public Relations from Algoma University, and a Graduate Certificate in Public Relations/Event Management from Algoma University. The “minor” credential would be identified on the graduating student's Algoma University diploma. Algoma subject-matter experts (faculty leads) also thought the minor option could be applied to other BA students (not just English minors), potentially. Upon finalization, the pathway would be a ground-breaking news story as it would be the first of its kind in the province. The Public Relations coordinator also suggested seeking a professional endorsement by the Public Relations Society – this would be an added feature of the pathway and could be used in marketing materials to promote the partnership.

Since students following this pathway would have acquired advanced writing and communications skills through their degree program, there would be few gaps in moving towards the public relations credential. Writing courses in the PR program do not need to be taken in sequence as one course focusses on writing skills and the other focusses on presentation and desktop publishing skills. Furthermore, the programs could eliminate the need for pre-requisites. It was determined that the focus of creating the partnership would be primarily on scheduling and determining if Sault College courses would fit within the elective components of the Bachelor of Arts degree. In order for a student to earn a four-year university degree, a student must obtain 120 credits in a Bachelor of Arts program, with 66 credits being electives in the BA (English). Minors are typically 24 credits. Following this, a student would be able to meet all their degree requirements while simultaneously earning the Graduate

Certificate in Public Relations/Event Management. Moreover, the work placement component of the PR program could also count as course hours.

The subject matter experts compiled a list of benefits of offering a major/minor partnership model to students including:

- Providing students with the opportunity to acquire theoretical and critical thinking skills through a university program, while gaining hands-on practical skills at college
- Offering the option to earn three credentials in as little as four years (Bachelor of Arts, minor in PR and Graduate Certificate in Public Relations/Event Management)
- Providing cost savings to students by reducing the number of semesters in school
- Providing an opportunity for students to gain work experience in the public relations/event management industry through a job placement
- Providing students with the opportunity to make professional contacts in the industry through a work placement
- Offering transfer options for students locally
- Making students job ready upon completion of pathway program

As part of the pathway, Algoma also proposed the possibility of offering PR courses during the summer months. Sault College noted that since college is very career driven, course offerings over the summer semester generally do not receive high levels of enrolment as college students often prefer to work at that time. This however, could potentially be an option in the future as the needs of the program change. It was also noted that offering programs during the summer months could be used as a potential marketing tool to attract international students. The courses do not need to be taken in sequence and students could start at any time.

## **Project Challenges**

The project was presented with some unforeseen challenges mostly related to the commencement of a process to reassess academic priorities at Algoma University, which resulted in some final meeting delays. As a result, the original project intent has not been fully realized; however, the partner institutions remain open to continuing with the original plan if/once the time is right and, as of now, we have developed a very workable, transfer-based solution.

## **Future Considerations**

Algoma University and Sault College will continue to work together on this project development and remain committed to promoting the interim transfer-based solution of awarding 1 semester of credit toward the BA students' degree as recognition for their participation in the Public Relations and Event Management graduate certificate. This solution enables students to complete 2 credentials within an 8.5 semester time period — and opens up the possibility of students completing 2 credentials in 4 full academic years based on enrolment in spring/summer courses.