

Algoma

UNIVERSITY

SEPTEMBER 2024 REPORT TO THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



The 2024-25 academic year at Algoma University is off to a great start. Once again, we are seeing increased domestic enrolment on each campus, including an 11 per cent increase in Indigenous enrolment and 82 new Master's students in Biology and Computer Science. With just over 8,000 students spread between three campuses and the Creekbank site, we remain committed to small class sizes. More than 80 per cent of our classes are in-person, over half of our classes have fewer than 40 students and the median class size is 36. With pass rates from the previous term of over 90 per cent for both international and domestic students and the second-highest scholarship and bursary awards in the country, we are proud of our university and all we do to ensure student success.

As we head into the new term, the University remains guided by the implementation of our strategic plan and our vision: ***leading meaningful change for generations to come.***

While there is much to be excited about, we would be remiss if we did not emphasize that this is a time of grave uncertainty for the university sector, both provincially and nationally. I believe it is fair to say that all in the higher education sector are navigating some very difficult policy decisions, changing landscapes, political engagements, the introduction of private universities and uncertainty in provincial financial commitments.

There is no question that Algoma University will have to continue to be nimble, flexible and adaptable over the coming years in this new reality; from structural deficits to the pandemic to this period of uncertainty - there will be no shortage of challenges to overcome.

This report reflects on where we were (2018-2023), provides an overview of where Algoma University is today, and highlights key investments and recent accomplishments across our campuses.



Where we were

In 2018, the provincial government cut domestic tuition by 10 per cent and then froze it (this is still in effect today). Furthermore, enrolment corridors for domestic students were capped at 2019 rates, meaning no additional funding for domestic student enrolment for universities, such as Algoma University, experiencing growth in domestic enrolment. The funding cap is still in place. The lack of a long-term tuition and corridor framework coupled with rising inflation rates has been challenging for universities in Ontario, and in the last two years, more than half of Ontario universities have expressed [major concerns](#) about serious structural deficits.

From 2019 to 2023, Algoma University not only faced a tuition freeze but also had to develop an aggressive strategy to emerge from a serious structural deficit – exacerbated between 2016 to 2018 by significant budget cuts and two rounds of layoffs. This was no easy decision given the additional challenge of navigating a global pandemic. Sector-wide vulnerabilities were revealed when Laurentian University filed for insolvency in 2021, which led to significant program and staff cuts.

An important document that emerged from this period was the Blue Ribbon Panel's 2023 report, which stated that for the sector's survival, the government needs to inject about \$2.5 billion in ongoing base funding into colleges and universities over the next three years, with \$1.9 billion specifically for universities. Since there is no guarantee that the recommendations of this panel will come to fruition, we continue to plan for alternative ways to sustain the university, including a relentless focus on continuing to diversify revenue streams.

Where we are now

Economists forecast it will be at least a decade before the government addresses inadequate funding models in public universities. Reports such as Alex Usher's "[No One is Coming to Save Us](#)" (June 12, 2024) predict continued underfunding until at least 2027-28. Organizations like the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) have been vocal in reporting the sector's financial troubles and the need for government investment.

Today, the sector as a whole is facing considerable financial challenges. A recent analysis from COU normalized sector data from 2018-19 to 2023-24 and estimated a total decrease in net operating income of over \$1 billion, a major departure from historical trends.

As we move forward, the financial challenges and strains on the system will only be exacerbated by the funding cap placed on Ontario high school students projected to attend an Ontario University. Based on data provided by COU and the Ontario Ministry of Finance, the gap in total unfunded students is expected to grow from just under 31,000 students in 2022 to more than 107,000 students in 2030. As such, ongoing advocacy leading to increased domestic corridor funding is critical during the upcoming Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA4) negotiations.



The COU has recently penned a letter to the Minister of Colleges and Universities expressing sector-wide concern about the new SMA4. The letter advocates for a new mandate that boosts base operating grants in line with the Blue-Ribbon Panel recommendations and the need to establish a tuition framework in the provincial budget. The letter also calls for an increase in funding for enrolment expansion adjustments for universities, which have increased domestic enrolment and are now operating significantly above the corridor. According to the Blue-Ribbon Panel, about 20,000 domestic students are above the corridor, reducing operating funding by \$175 million annually. Algoma University is currently one of the institutions operating above its corridor.

The COU revealed that approximately half of the universities in Ontario are reporting more than \$300 million in operating deficits in 2023-24.

Between 2019 and 2023, Algoma University experienced a period of tremendous growth. Decisions around the University's expansion were made during a time of severe financial uncertainty for the institution and the entire Ontario university sector, compounded by rising inflation rates. Today we are focused on stabilizing this growth and diversifying revenue streams. We have strong plans in place to achieve this, helping to mitigate the risks of being overly reliant on any one revenue stream.

Key investments and accomplishments

Today, Algoma University stands on a solid financial foundation, ranking among the top Ontario universities in the [financial health metrics framework](#) laid out by COU. We are consistently reporting a healthy surplus operating budget and reserves, and we are making key investments in talent, program expansion and partnerships that will ensure our future sustainability.

Between 2023 and 2025, Algoma University will welcome 51 new faculty members, including specialists in computer science, cybersecurity, immersive technologies, business, social work, and psychology. All full-time faculty now have access to hire research assistants to support increasing research outputs, and we currently have 30 faculty-led academic initiatives being funded at \$4.2 million. This fall, we introduced a new deanship to lead our fifth faculty: the Faculty of Computer Science and Technology. Additionally, approximately 95 new staff members will be hired between 2024 and 2025.

Algoma University is investing \$800 thousand in accessibility, health, safety and security. This includes expanding mental health supports for students, growing the Learning Centre and Accessibility Services office, providing students with six hours of free peer tutoring per course each semester and expanding our orientation programs. We are working on building our first student residence in Brampton with 500-plus beds and planning for an additional 100-beds residence in Sault Ste. Marie.

► STUDENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (SIS)

Algoma University is moving forward with a new Student Information System (SIS).

The University will continue to use our current system, OASIS, for student registrations throughout the remainder of the fall 2024 term and into the winter 2025 term. The SIS project team is working diligently to set a launch timeline for 2025.



► BUDGET PRIORITIES - CAPITAL INVESTMENTS ACROSS OUR CAMPUSES

Algoma University's stable financial position is allowing the University to plan long-term for an investment of \$218 million in capital projects over the next five years.

Sault Ste. Marie

- \$6 million for a new Animal Care Facility and Containment Level 2 (CL2) lab.
- \$4 million for renovations including a new space for Visual Arts and Psychology.
- \$45 million to construct Makwa Waakaa'igan over the next five years.

Brampton

- \$15 million to expand programming spaces in Psychology, Social Work and the Mental Health and Addictions Research and Training Institute.
- 16,000 square feet of new space, including four classrooms on the second floor of 24 Queen, sessional faculty lounge and work space, and 26 new offices for full-time faculty and staff, added this summer.

► MAKWA WAAKAA'IGAN DEVELOPMENTS

Last month, we celebrated a significant milestone with \$2 million in funding from Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC), announced on-campus by MPP Ross Romano on behalf of Minister Rickford, Minister of Northern Development and Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation.

The Request for Proposals (RFP) process for Makwa Waakaa'igan is expected to identify the successful bidder in September 2024, with the demolition of the East Wing scheduled to begin in Fall 2024. The state-of-the-art facility is anticipated to be completed by Fall 2026. The project is fully funded with contributions from multiple sources, including:

- Algoma University - \$24,702,938
- Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program - \$13,000,000
- The City of Sault Ste. Marie, CDF Funding - \$600,000
- Canadian Heritage - \$5,000,000
- Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation - \$2,000,000

Total Funding: \$45,302,938



► STUDENT SUCCESS ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

Computer Science students from Algoma University returned victorious from the AI Summer Games hosted by HdM Stuttgart University in Stuttgart, Germany. Accompanied by Dr. Mahreen Nasir, Assistant Professor in Algoma University's School of Computer Science and Technology, the students excelled in the competition, securing gold and bronze medals. As the sole Canadian institution among seven global post-secondary universities in attendance, our students demonstrated exceptional prowess, showcasing the university's commitment to providing cutting-edge experiences and fostering academic excellence.

Through the Think Pacific program, we were able to send four Algoma University students on a month-long internship in the rural villages of Fiji. This experience allowed them to immerse themselves in local communities, focusing on mental health, sports development, youth empowerment, and community building initiatives, further enhancing the employability of Algoma U students by providing them with hands-on international learning.

Four students traveled to Vechta, Germany, to participate in a week-long course titled 'Cultural and Social Well-Being, Identity and Participation'. This intensive program, hosted by the University of Vechta, offered students the opportunity to engage with peers from various countries, learning about the diverse social pedagogy traditions and the role of arts education in Europe.

A student studying Accelerated Online Bachelor of Computer Science participated in the 2024 Kyungpook National University (KNU) Summer School program in Daegu, South Korea.

► RECENT UNIVERSITY ACHIEVEMENTS

On the International Day of Peace, Algoma University was honoured as the recipient of the inaugural Global Education for Peace Award, presented by the STAR Scholars Network, a transnational organization supporting a new generation of scholars working across borders on social impact. The award honours and recognizes higher education institutions worldwide that promote global peace, integrate global perspectives in the curriculum, and foster a sense of global citizenship amongst their students.

Dr. Jennifer Foote and Dr. Christine Madliger received a total of \$107,038 in federal funding through the Canada Foundation for Innovation's John R. Evans Leaders Fund (JELF). Dr. Madliger's project titled 'Infrastructure to support the Multi-stressor Conservation Physiology Laboratory' received \$74,998, while Dr. Foote's 'Integrative Approaches to Disentangle Network Structure in Territorial Songbirds' project was awarded \$32,040.

The 2024 Algoma University Golf Classic successfully raised \$35,000 to help establish new student awards to assist first-year bachelor's and master's students. The raised funds supported 14 students; 10 first-year students in high-enrollment bachelor programs at the Sault Ste. Marie campus received \$1,500, while four students from the Master of Social Work and Master of Computer Science programs were awarded \$5,000.

Algoma University and the Canadian Mental Health Association Cochrane-Timiskaming (CMHA-CT) have taken a significant step forward in enhancing mental health support for students. Both institutions are set to bolster the University's mental health team by recruiting three professionals to offer virtual primary mental health support across all three campus locations.



In partnership with the Institute of Peoples, Territories, and Pedagogies for Peace (IPTP), Algoma University's Faculty of Cross-Cultural Studies hosted The Peoples Diplomacy, Environmental Governance, and Self-determination Delegation during a week-long visit. This initiative aimed to enhance commitments to the Special Mission, the TRC calls to action, and global decolonial education. The delegation included Indigenous and Black-Afrodiasporic territorial authorities, land and water defenders, social leaders, educators, and activists from Colombia.

The University and Altitude Accelerator signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to bolster their joint support for entrepreneurs, thereby enhancing Ontario's reputation as a premier market for new businesses. This collaboration enhances experiential learning opportunities for students in Algoma University's Faculty of Business and Economics (FoBE) and the School of Computer Science and Technology (SCST) through cooperative education, internships, work-integrated learning, and placements.

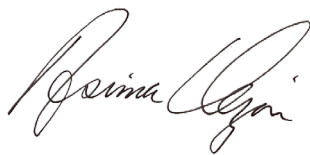
Dr. Michael Twiss, a professor of biology at Algoma University who serves on the International Joint Commission's (IJC) Great Lakes Science Advisory Board, coordinated the IJC's visit to Algoma University to learn more about the institution's leadership in reconciliation, cross-cultural education, and environmental stewardship. The visit underscored the commitment shared by the University and the IJC to environmental protection. It highlighted the impact of joint efforts in fostering a deeper understanding of Canada-US shared waters, a significant element of their environmental stewardship initiatives.

The University launched its inaugural Startup GameJam in Brampton, a two-day intensive game design and development session, led by expert instructors from Unity Technologies Inc. Participating students were given in-depth training on game development, including market research, business plan creation, and crafting compelling pitches. They also developed essential technical skills to create games using Unity, one of the world's leading platforms in the gaming industry.

Algoma University will be commemorating the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (NDTR) on September 30 with planned events, including The Reclaiming Shingwauk Hall Exhibit, the public unveiling of the Wawanosh Memorial, and a Candlelight vigil on our Sault Ste. Marie campus, among others.

As we look ahead to another successful academic year at Algoma University, I want to thank our Board of Governors, Senate, Faculty, Staff, and the broader community for supporting, guiding and uplifting our students on their academic journey. I look forward to an academic year filled with teaching, learning, research excellence and positive community impacts. With challenges comes opportunities and I believe fully that Algoma University's best days are truly ahead.

Chi-miigwetch, merci, and thank you for all you do for Algoma U.



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