

St. Andrew's College: The Journey from Then to Now

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The Formative Years

An institution's life, much like our personal lives, follows patterns that shape its character and how it responds to the world. St. Andrew's College, in its formative years, developed certain characteristics and values that continue to guide its journey. Whether in times of joy or difficulty, these attributes serve as guiding principles, allowing the institution to navigate the unexpected.

St. Andrew's College was established over a hundred years ago through an Act of the Provincial Legislature in Saskatchewan. Despite initial attempts in 1912 to find a permanent home, it took nearly a decade and three interrupted attempts, due to the First World War, for the College to settle at its current location, near the entrance to the University of Saskatchewan.

Dr. Edmund H. Oliver, the first Principal of St. Andrew's, provided leadership during this period of upheaval, including the impact of the First World War. While in Europe, Dr. Oliver introduced distance learning classes for most of the College's students who were involved in the war. This commitment to distance education, recognising the context of the students, remains a fundamental aspect of St. Andrew's identity to this day.

After the war, Dr. Oliver returned to the College and played a role in navigating another transformative moment: the establishment of an ecumenical movement. Despite the College's origins as a Presbyterian Seminary, Dr. Oliver supported and encouraged ecumenical partners from different denominations, including the Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregationalist, and Evangelical Brethren, which resulted in the formation of The United Church of Canada in 1925.

During this period, when the College prepared individuals for ministry, the Great Depression and the dust bowl had a significant impact on the prairie region. These challenges instilled a commitment to innovation in the face of austerity and a readiness to respond to the needs of the church, which were magnified during this time of disturbance.

Within this timeline, Dr. Oliver also encouraged Lydia E. Gruchy to enrol at St. Andrew's College. Lydia became the first woman to study theological education both at the College, and more widely in Canada. Following her graduation, she went on to become the first woman ordained in the United Church and was later the first woman granted an honorary Doctor of Divinity by St. Andrew's.

The purpose of highlighting the College's first thirteen years is to emphasise the lasting influence of Dr. Oliver's vision. St. Andrew's continues to embody these characteristics, which have been central to its journey since its last comprehensive study in 2014:

- A commitment to partnerships and ecumenical relations.
- A commitment to diversity and embracing plurality.
- A commitment to innovative and timely responses to the needs of the church and the world.
- A commitment to context-based learning and distance education.

As St. Andrew's College engages in its current self-study with the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), these enduring attributes resonate strongly with all that has transpired since the previous evaluation.

A 2020 Strategic Journey

In 2018, St. Andrew's College initiated a process of missional discernment due to the realisation that its previous strategic direction was becoming outdated. To address this, the College decided to bring in an external consultant who had knowledge of theological education, specifically within the context of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). This strategic decision was made considering the changes occurring within the United Church and the increasingly secular Canadian environment.

Over the following eighteen months, a core team consisting of administration, faculty, staff, and alumni engaged in focused groups, surveys, conversations, and data gathering. Their commitment and intentional approach allowed them to recognise the shifting landscape faced by St. Andrew's College. They came to understand that both the existing educational model and institutional structures required revitalisation and transformation. With the consultant's assistance, a retreat was planned for the winter of 2020, involving various stakeholders from governance to alum, as well as representatives from ATS and In Trust.

During the retreat, participants explored the current context of theological education and the changes it entailed. This period posed challenges but also provided an opportunity for the community to celebrate the existing educational model while acknowledging its unsustainability. Through storytelling and small group work, the data became evident: for St. Andrew's to thrive, the college would need to forge deeper partnerships within the Saskatoon Theological Union and expand beyond its traditional United Church context. If the college wished to continue supporting learners pursuing theological education in response to a vocational call and foster pioneering scholarship, it had to venture into new territories.

Drawing upon the four foundational characteristics that have guided the college since its inception, the final Strategic Plan, approved in November 2020, reflected these important touchstones. The plan encapsulated the vision with a sense of hope, emphasising "Theological Education that embodies compassion, hope, and justice." It outlined six priorities that would soon face significant testing:

1. Financial sustainability (Achieve and demonstrate a model of long-term financial sustainability);
2. Engagement and Excellence (Engage students through academic excellence, theological expertise, and ministry preparation);
3. Partnership (Cultivate and leverage collaborative partnerships)
4. Visibility and Recruitment (Develop and implement plans to increase visibility and recruit/retain students);
5. Creativity and Experimentation (Embrace and demonstrate a pioneering and resourceful mindset); and
6. Culture (Foster a justice driven, student-focused culture of collaboration, leadership, research, and innovation)

The Pandemic: A Strategic Journey Accelerated

Like many institutions, St. Andrew's College faced significant disruptions caused by the pandemic, which continue to impact its operations. These disruptions were further compounded by the contraction experienced by the United Church, including the loss of communities of faith and members. To navigate these challenges, the College relied on its Strategic Plan, which outlined six priorities that specifically considered the effects of the pandemic. By the end of 2020, progress had been made in terms of aligning with ecumenical partners and innovating the academic program.

Throughout the Strategic Planning process, it became evident to the partners of the Saskatoon Theological Union (STU) – which includes St. Andrew's College, the College of Emmanuel & St. Chad, and Lutheran Theological Seminary Saskatoon – that any deepening of their relationship must be driven by mission. Recognising the necessity of this conversation, the partners engaged in covenantal development throughout 2019. This covenant became a valuable resource for the partnership as they navigated the challenges posed by the pandemic, eventually leading to its ratification in 2021 and official signing in 2022.

However, the Strategic Plan did not anticipate the loss of a significant revenue stream in 2021, which presented an unforeseen crisis for the College. Faced with existential questions at the beginning of 2022, the Strategic Plan became a crucial guide for making extremely difficult decisions. It is safe to say that without the development of the Plan, especially during the pandemic, different choices would likely have been made. Recognising the upheaval, the Board of Regents made the decision to expedite the implementation of the Strategic Plan and deepen the College's commitment to ecumenical academic relationships.

Academic Redesign Team

Following the decision of the Board of Regents to accelerate the rollout of partnerships, particularly with regards to the STU, admissions were temporarily suspended. In response to this initiative, an Academic Redesign Team was established. The primary mandate of the Team is outlined below:

Areas of Responsibility

ART will have five primary areas of responsibility:

- Consult: Core internal college community and The United Church of Canada partners
- Inform: The work of the curriculum design team based on consultations and evidence gathering
- Assess: Ongoing work of curriculum designer and Team member(s) (See Areas of Work) who works with the Saskatchewan Theological Union (STU) Design Team
- Validate: Through each iterative stage of curriculum development, both academic and continuing education, test and consult internally for validation
- Recommend: Final program redesign will be recommended by the STU Design Team to ART, who will thereafter recommend it to the Academic Committee, and thereafter by the Academic Committee to the Board of Regents

Areas of Work

- Internal: regarding academic and continuing education, including input from: alum, current faculty and Academic Committee. The data that is generated will be shared with the Curriculum Consultant
- Internal: ART will report updates to Academic Committee regularly
- Internal: ART and Academic Committee will work with the Curriculum Consultant to address concerns about admissions. This work, in regard to the academic program, will require clarity by 2Q 2022 for the existing programs to determine where teach out, transitioning and suspension will be required for existing degree paths
- External (STU): One or more representatives will accompany and support the Curriculum Consultant to the STU Design Team meetings

The composition of the Academic Redesign Team was intentionally diverse, representing various stakeholders and perspectives. The team included indigenous and denominational partners, as well as

alumni who possessed extensive experience in adult education and lifelong learning. This diversity aimed to ensure that the team's work incorporated a broad range of insights and perspectives.

One of the key aspects of the Team's mandate was to conduct a comprehensive scan of both current and projected trends in lifelong learning and academic pathways. This involved examining the evolving needs of learners and identifying emerging trends and practices in the field. By understanding these trends, the Team aimed to develop strategies and initiatives that would effectively address the changing demands of education and provide lifelong learning opportunities for students.

In alignment with the College's commitment to innovation, the Academic Redesign Team received additional support through a Pathway to Tomorrow grant. This grant enabled the team to engage an educational consultant from the University of Saskatchewan. The consultant's expertise and insights further enriched the team's work by bringing in external perspectives and sharing best practices from their institution and generally to the academy.

The culmination of the Academic Redesign Team's efforts, supported by the educational consultant, has resulted in several conclusions that are now being prepared for implementation in the upcoming Fall of 2023. These conclusions encompass both the lifelong learning and academic pathways, with one notable example being the introduction of Context-Based Learning.

Context-Based Learning (See Definition below) provides learners with the flexibility to explore either pathway without the requirement of a residential expectation. This means that learners can engage in their educational journey without the need to be physically present on campus or reside in a specific location. This approach recognises the evolving needs and preferences of learners, acknowledging that individuals may have personal or professional commitments that make traditional residential education challenging.

By embracing Context-Based Learning, the College aims to offer a more inclusive and accessible learning environment. Learners will have the opportunity to engage in educational experiences that are tailored to their individual contexts, allowing them to pursue their academic goals while accommodating their unique circumstances. This approach may include online learning opportunities, remote collaborations, and innovative pedagogical methods that leverage digital technologies to deliver quality education.

With the implementation of Context-Based Learning, the College anticipates attracting a diverse range of learners, including working professionals, individuals with family responsibilities, or those who prefer a non-traditional educational path. By removing the residential expectation, the College aims to create an environment where individuals from various backgrounds can thrive and access high-quality education.

As the Fall of 2023 approaches, the College is diligently preparing to deploy these innovative approaches, grounded in a Context-Based Learning paradigm, as part of its lifelong learning and academic pathways. The intention is to provide learners with the flexibility, support, and resources they need to embark on their educational journey, regardless of their physical location or personal circumstances.

Context-Based Learning (Definition)

During the St. Andrew's Academic Redesign Team's work in 2021-2022, it became clear that the College had the opportunity to create new Academic and Lifelong Learning Pathways that could both draw on the past and address identified limitations. These limitations were identified both in relation to the College's specific context and aligned with current research from the Association of Theological Schools.

In the process of committing to Context-Based learning and an integrated curriculum, various terms have been used to describe this approach, including 'hybrid,' 'distance education,' 'remote,' 'remote learning,' 'virtual,' 'online,' 'digital,' 'dual,' 'mixed,' and 'flexible.' The most commonly used term has been 'hybrid.' However, following the direction set in May, it has become clear that these terms carry various connotations and institutional meanings within and outside the College. This variety has hindered the establishment of shared understanding and clarity among the various working groups in the Union. As a result, it has been decided to adopt a new term to ensure better communication among these groups.

Context-Based Learning, therefore, takes seriously the location in which a learner is situated. By providing various modes of curricular deployment, as listed above, a learner has the opportunity to pursue and complete a degree without leaving their context. Context-Based Learning includes the full range of learning opportunities, from in situ through to online asynchronous courses. Finally, the contextuality of the learner is harnessed to offer a praxis-based learning in which their assumptions are explored through the College's long history of employing critical theory, such as Liberationist and Feminist hermeneutics, to prepare them for vocational work in a changing world.

Curriculum Design Group & the Common Faculty

As the Academic Redesign Team explored and developed the lifelong learning pathway, it also supported the College's faculty team that was working with the STU Curriculum Design Group. Over the course of 18-months, the group outlined and created the framework for an integrated intensive based academic pathway. Furthermore, incorporating the best of each of the partners, the Curriculum Design Group laid the foundation to a shift from a semester model to a trimester.

In their final report, they shared the following as they handed off the work to the new Common Faculty of the STU, which continued to develop the curriculum, which is now developed to the extent that admissions have been opened and the first learning cohort will begin their learning journey in a deeply ecumenical curriculum that is foundationally interdisciplinary:

As the Academic Redesign Team developed the lifelong learning pathway, they provided support to the College's faculty team collaborating with the STU Curriculum Design Group. Working closely together for a period of 18 months, the group worked diligently to outline and create a framework for an integrated, intensive-based academic pathway.

In a collaborative effort that drew upon the strengths and expertise of each partner involved, the Curriculum Design Group successfully established the groundwork for a significant transition from a traditional semester model to a trimester system. This shift in the academic calendar aimed to optimise the learning experience for students by allowing for a more focused and immersive approach to education.

Upon completing their work, the Curriculum Design Group presented their final report, which served as a handoff to the newly established Common Faculty of the STU. The Common Faculty, in continuation of the curriculum development efforts, took on the responsibility of further refining and finalising the curriculum. Their work has reached a point where admissions have been opened, signifying that the curriculum is sufficiently developed and ready to welcome its inaugural learning cohort.

The first cohort of students embarking on their learning journey will experience a deeply ecumenical curriculum that promotes a rich understanding and appreciation of various faith traditions. The curriculum

is also foundationally interdisciplinary, emphasising the integration of diverse disciplines to provide students with a holistic and well-rounded educational experience.

Through these collaborative efforts and the commitment of the Academic Redesign Team, the Curriculum Design Group, and the Common Faculty, the STU has successfully developed a robust curriculum that aligns with its vision for interdisciplinary and ecumenical education. The opening of admissions marks an exciting milestone as the STU prepares to offer a transformative learning experience to its inaugural cohort of students.