

Our Voice

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Academic Upgrading Partnerships

Funding for Academic Upgrading Partnerships (AUP) was first announced in the Ontario Budget in 2004. The AUP is “intended to help early school leavers develop the literacy, numeracy and essential skills required for entry into and success in college postsecondary and apprenticeship.” (Source: LBS letter of September 18, 2006).

In the fall of 2006, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) introduced a partnership approach to help Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs more actively participate in AUP. This partnership approach encourages shared delivery among colleges, school boards and community organizations. The funding announcement limited participation to current LBS deliverers for the 2006-7 fiscal year.

Prior to MTCU’s 2006 announcement, academic upgrading was delivered by all 24 Ontario Community Colleges using the Academic and Career Entrance (ACE) curriculum. Under the AUP, MTCU hopes to increase access to academic upgrading for “underserved and under-represented groups including first generation learners, Aboriginal and Francophone learners, persons with disabilities and remote/rural learners.” (Source: LBS Funding Guidelines for Academic Upgrading Partnerships, September 18, 2006).

All MTCU information pertaining to the Academic Upgrading Partnership initiative can be found in the Info-LBS discussion group on AlphaCom in letters dated September 18, 2006 and March 27, 2007. Literacy agencies can also contact their MTCU program consultant for more information.

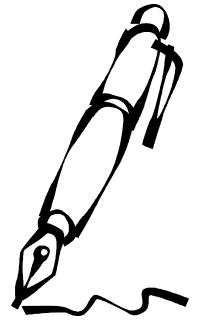
In this newsletter, Community Literacy of Ontario is pleased to:

- ⇒ Provide background information on AUP
- ⇒ Overview Phase 1 and Phase 2 of AUP
- ⇒ Share information on partnership agreements
- ⇒ Give “quick facts” on ACE
- ⇒ Share information on five successful AUP partnerships

Phase 1 – Academic Upgrading Partnerships

Phase 1 of the Academic Upgrading Partnership initiative was introduced in Fall 2006 and included:

- ⇒ expansion of academic upgrading through the introduction of a partnership model of delivery through current LBS providers
- ⇒ development of online curriculum and
- ⇒ data gathering to create baseline data for further program development



According to Lynne Wallace, Executive Director of the College Sector Committee, the first phase of the Academic Upgrading Partnership initiative has been quite successful. Despite a relatively short turnaround time (funding applications were due in mid-October 2006 with a January 2007 start date), 23 projects are currently underway. Nineteen of the projects involved at least one community-based literacy agency, including programs from the Aboriginal stream. Most of the partnerships target improved access for rural and isolated learners. All partnerships had a college partner. The college acted as the lead partner agency in most cases. The various partners typically report overall positive experiences and want to continue. In short, the AUP initiative is doing what it was designed to do which was to address the needs of rural and isolated learners and expand delivery of academic upgrading.

Phase 2 – Academic Upgrading Partnerships

Information about Phase Two of AUP (2007-2008) was released by MTCU on March 27, 2007 as part of the business planning process. Applications are due to MTCU by April 27, 2007, with start-up of new projects to be no later than September 2007. In the meantime, existing Phase 1 projects will continue to be supported, and further funding will be based on an evaluation of results that will be conducted by June 20, 2007.

In its letter of March 27, 2007, MTCU notes that the partnership approach is consistent with its broader plans for Employment Ontario since this approach expands models of delivery and ensures a focus on successful transitions to postsecondary programs and apprenticeship training.

The second phase of funding allows for partnerships to be established with other non-LBS funded agencies (funded by MTCU or the Ministry of Education) including school boards, First Nations technical institutes, apprenticeship training delivery agencies and universities. Only agencies who currently receive LBS funding are eligible to apply as Lead Partners.

Phase 2 projects must clearly identify a target group such as Aboriginal learners, first generation learners, Francophones, persons with disabilities, rural/remote learners or youth-at-risk. Projects must achieve a goal of 70% of learners moving on to postsecondary education or apprenticeship training at exit. Quarterly reports will be required.

A third phase, slated for the 2008-2009 fiscal year, is also planned to expand on work accomplished in the first two phases.

Phase 2 – Continued...

According to the March 2007 funding guidelines for Phase 2, MTCU's principles and goals for this partnership approach are to:

- ⇒ enhance pathways to postsecondary education and apprenticeship training for adult learners by providing locally-relevant community-based solutions
- ⇒ be time-limited, fast-tracking direct access to college postsecondary or apprenticeship training
- ⇒ demonstrate increased access to college postsecondary or apprenticeship training for targeted underserved and under-represented groups
- ⇒ address the limits of existing college-based delivery of academic upgrading to reach areas and populations not served by existing sites or programming
- ⇒ leverage the expertise of Employment Ontario to enhance college-based programming
- ⇒ respond to local labour market emerging needs and government priorities.



Partnership Agreements

Signed agreements clearly outlining the roles and responsibilities of each partner are extremely important for initiatives such as this one. You can find some general tips on developing these agreements in CLO's June 2005 Family Literacy Partnership Bulletin (www.nald.ca/CLO/NEWSLET/family/june05/7.htm). All applications for Phase 2 funding require a signed Letter of Commitment to be submitted with the funding application.

In the first phase of the AUP initiative, usually colleges were the lead partners. They were provided a template by the College Sector Committee to help them develop Phase 1 agreements. Because the working relationships that were formed as a result of the AUP initiative are a new way of working for most LBS agencies, some partnership agreements may be re-negotiated in upcoming phases. Roles and responsibilities will evolve as the AUP programs grow and expand. The funding guidelines for Phase 2 outline specific responsibilities for the Lead Partner and for the other partnership organizations.

Partnership agreements will likely include specific administrative responsibilities such as:

- ⇒ deadlines for submitting learner attendance reports and who is responsible for maintaining accurate records
- ⇒ deadlines for submitting staff hours
- ⇒ procedures for enrolling new learners



Agreements will also specify who pays expenses, the human resources and material resources to be supplied by each partner, and who owns any products that result from the partnership. The partnership agreement should also state how many learners will be served and how many contact hours will be provided. Other responsibilities such as marketing, learner recruitment, assessment and/or learner recognition may also be included.

Current AUP Partnerships

Community Literacy of Ontario interviewed representatives from some of the community-based agencies across the province who implemented a Phase 1 Academic Upgrading Partnership. These partnerships are taking place in various cities and in small towns across Ontario, but no two are alike. In some partnerships, community-based agencies have an active role delivering training. In others, they are supporting their local college with ACE delivery, and in one area they are assessing potential learners but aren't actively involved in delivery. Each area and group of partners has worked out what best suits their area and the students who live there.



In order to support other community literacy agencies, CLO has profiled five innovative AUP partnerships in various parts of Ontario. We thank you all for taking the time to share your successes and challenges with us!

AUP: Northeastern Ontario

The Iroquois Falls Adult Learning Centre (a community-based literacy agency located in Northeastern Ontario) partnered with Northern College to provide support for the delivery of the Academic and Career Entrance (ACE) program. The Learning Centre selected a part-time staff person for the AUP initiative. They also provide computer equipment and the physical space for program delivery. Northern College pays the staff person and provides curriculum.

Denise Tremblay, Coordinator of the Learning Centre, reports that the academic upgrading partnership has been a success so far, and she looks forward to continuing to work with Northern College to deliver this programming. Most of the challenges that have arisen during this first phase of the partnership have been administrative in nature, and the partners have worked them out.

Based on the experiences of the first phase, Denise will be requesting some changes to the partnership agreement. Ultimately, she would like to see community-based programs have the opportunity to become lead partners for these projects.

Some of the ACE students are also enrolled at the Learning Centre in order to upgrade their skills in regular LBS programming in order to prepare for ACE. Students in the ACE program can access the Blackboard system hosted by Northern College, which allows them to work online with their ACE courses. This is accessible from their homes or during class time. The tracking and reporting of contact hours has been a bit of a challenge, but this has been smoothed out. AUP projects required partners to commit to a certain number of learner contact hours, so it is important that these hours be monitored and tracked accurately.

Denise reports that having a staff person on site has been very valuable and helps learners achieve their goals and work through problem areas. Happy and flourishing learners equals a successful experience with this initiative!

AUP: Ottawa

Algonquin College and three local community-based literacy agencies have established an academic upgrading partnership to provide opportunities in downtown Ottawa for people to complete their grade 12 equivalency in community-based programs using the ACE program.

The community-based partners are ALSO (Alternative Learning Styles and Outlooks); People, Words and Change; and the John Howard Society Literacy Program. For the first phase, Algonquin College acted as the lead partner and looked after the administrative requirements. When these partners apply for Phase 2 funding, the John Howard Society Literacy Program will likely be the lead partner.

Once Phase 1 approval was received from MTCU, the agencies purchased new computers for course delivery. A college instructor was assigned to the initiative to provide support. The John Howard Society job coach was given extra hours to provide support to learners to help them explore apprenticeship opportunities and requirements. The partners advertised extensively in Ottawa's downtown core.

This partnership has met its initial target of 18 learners, and they most definitely want to continue! They are currently offering the program from two onsite locations: Heartwood House which is in the downtown core of Ottawa, and the John Howard Society. Kae McColl, from People, Words and Change, reports that many of the learners require more support than originally thought. These students face barriers (including transportation and child care needs) that make it difficult for them to attend a college program on a regular basis. The Academic Upgrading Partnership initiative allows them to continue their education with more flexibility and with the additional support they require.

Kae says that this project has definitely been a success, and all of the partners look forward to seeing it grow and continue.

ACE Quick Facts

- ⇒ ACE stands for Academic and Career Entrance.
- ⇒ ACE is accepted as the equivalent of Grade 12. This is important for entrance into post-secondary programs and/or apprenticeships.
- ⇒ ACE was launched in 2004. It used to be called Basic Training for Skills Development.
- ⇒ ACE is only available at Ontario's 24 colleges.
- ⇒ ACE provides upgrading in math, English, science and computers.
- ⇒ ACE is recognized by colleges and employers.
- ⇒ ACE is available in English and French.



AUP: Eastern Ontario—St. Lawrence College

A group of LBS providers in Eastern Ontario have set-up an innovative Academic Upgrading Partnership called PALS (Partnering for Adult Learning Success). The partners in this project are St. Lawrence College, the Limestone District School Board, and two community-based literacy agencies: Northern Connections Adult Learning Centres and Kingston Literacy. This group of LBS providers has had an excellent working relationship for many years. Joining together in a formal partnership for the Academic Upgrading Partnership initiative was a logical next step. When the partnership began, they signed a letter of intent. Later in the partnership, a memorandum of understanding was drafted and signed by all parties.

In this partnership, the school board program is responsible for recruiting and assessing learners. The college reviews evaluation assessment tools to make sure that learners are ready for college level training. This area of Eastern Ontario has also been fortunate to have had a common assessor's group for a number of years, so there is a regional understanding of assessment results.

Program delivery occurs at the community-based programs at either the Hartington site of Kingston Literacy or at Northern Connections in Sharbot Lake. All training occurs on-site; there is no distance delivery option at this time.

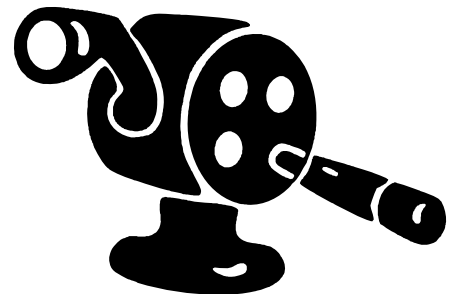
A combination of the ACE curriculum and LBS materials are used, depending on individual student needs.

As of mid-March 2007, the partnership had almost met its target numbers for new students. For the project partners, this means that the partnership has been successful in reaching out to rural and isolated areas that programs previously weren't able to serve.

Marketing for the project was initially done independently by each of the partners. When Phase 2 of the initiative begins, the group plans to develop a common marketing strategy and tools to more widely market the training opportunities they provide.

Carynne Arnold, Executive Director of Kingston Literacy, reports a very successful AUP experience! She says that the main benefits have been:

- ⇒ financial contributions towards overhead costs
- ⇒ greater support for rural programming (for example, their Hartington site now offers an additional day of programming)
- ⇒ the opportunity to work more closely with the college sector
- ⇒ greater opportunity for colleges instructors and community-based instructors to meet and discuss programming



AUP: Eastern Ontario—Loyalist College

Five community-based literacy agencies are involved in an academic upgrading partnership with Loyalist College: Northern Connections, Prince Edward Learning Centre (Belleville), Quinte Adult Day School (Trenton), Quinte Literacy (Madoc), and the Napanee site of Kingston Literacy.

This partnership was set up so that academic upgrading could be provided by community-based programs (with the support of the college) in more isolated and rural locations to adults who were unable to access regular college programming.

Under this partnership, students are offered academic upgrading at one of the community-based partner agencies. These students have access to a series of workbooks from Loyalist College that allows them to work independently. The community-based instructors assist when needed. A Loyalist College staff member visits the various community-based delivery sites each week to provide assistance and support as needed.

Training includes materials from the ACE curriculum, from the Skill Plan work book series, from Literacy Link Eastern Ontario's Occupational Curriculum, as well as any other instructional material that meets learner needs.

Marketing for this partnership included putting 500 inserts in Ontario Works mail outs, putting up posters in as many locations as possible. As well, direct contact was made with Ontario Works, Northern Reflections (a local employment preparation program), Job Connect, Career Edge and schools (both primary and secondary). Laurie DesLauriers from Kingston Literacy reports that the most successful marketing tool was a large sign in the front window of their storefront location.

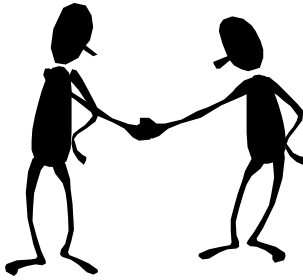
Laurie sums up the challenges and successes to date of the AUP initiative as follows:

Challenges

- ⇒ Finding available staff/volunteers with the time and skills to support ACE learners.
- ⇒ Offering ACE learners the hours they need on site, with support.
- ⇒ Working out partnership logistics, e.g. tracking hours and progress, who is responsible for what, demonstrating when students are ready for ACE.
- ⇒ Finding students who meet the program criteria and who are motivated. Motivation and attitude is particularly a concern with younger learners.

Successes

- ⇒ It is wonderful to see students working hard to achieve their goals.
- ⇒ Learners who didn't succeed in a school learning environment have found a program that can help them get where they want to go.
- ⇒ Overall, it is a terrific group of students who fit in well with how their community-based program works.



AUP: Grey-Bruce-Georgian

An interesting academic upgrading partnership has occurred between Georgian College and a community-based agency called Georgian Literacy. Georgian Literacy is the Collingwood site for the Adult Learning Centres Grey-Bruce-Georgian. Their main role is to work with Level 1 and Level 2 learners, so they don't have an active role delivering ACE programming.

However, Georgian Literacy saw an opportunity to become involved in the AUP initiative in a different way. They are responsible for marketing, recruitment, assessment and referral for the Academic Upgrading Partnership in their area. Actual programming and project administration is done by Georgian College.

Roger Hannon from Georgian Literacy reports that the community-based agency has assessed a wide range of potential students for this initiative, including laid-off workers, women wishing to re-enter the workforce and youth who have left school.

One of the benefits of this arrangement for Georgian Literacy is that potential new learners for both AUP and regular programming have been identified through the assessment process. Tim Nicholls-Harrison, Executive Director of the Adult Learning Centres, believes that this role is important, because it can also help the community-based agency increase its community presence. Eventually, Georgian Literacy hopes to be seen as the "go-to" place for people thinking about upgrading their skills. This in turn can help reduce the stigma that is all too often associated with literacy agencies who work with lower level learners.

Because this partnership is working out well, Roger expects that the community-based agency will continue to promote and support the College's ACE delivery as well as become the accepted first point of entry (for assessment and referral) for adult upgrading in the area. These partners plan to apply for Phase 2 AUP funding.

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OUR CORE FUNDER

CLO gratefully acknowledges its funder: the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

APRIL 2007 OURVOICE NEWSLETTER

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