



NEWSLETTER

CONNECT Immigration Projects

Fall 2010

MESSAGE

from the Director

The fall semester at the Ontario colleges brings new students, fresh ideas and innovative programs to serve our students' and communities' changing needs. CONNECT is pioneering effective ways to work with the diverse needs of learners. This commitment to innovation was behind CONNECT's planning of an HRSDC-funded forum, "Making Connections: Labour Market Integration, Immigration and Essential Skills". This forum brought together stakeholders from education, government and community agencies to discuss how essential skills programs and services intersect with immigrant-serving programs and services in order to create more streamlined programming.

CONNECT is excited about the ongoing work in our other immigration projects. The Colleges Integrating Immigrants to Employment project (CIITE), funded by MTCU, continues to serve internationally trained immigrants (ITIs) across 18 Ontario colleges. Since April 2009, more than 15,000 ITIs have been served by advisors and referred to programs and services that assist them to find employment in their chosen field.

Occupation Specific Language Training (OSLT) is continuing to have success and there are now nearly 60 courses offered at 14 Ontario colleges. Increasing the Capacity of Small and Medium Sized Employers to Hire and Retain ITIs (ICHR) is continuing to deliver its *Are you Ready?* workshops at 15 colleges across the province. For information and to register for these free workshops visit www.collegeconnect.on.ca/project/areyouready.

Cynthia Murphy, Director, Immigration Projects

Algonquin College takes an integrated approach to serving ITIs

by Sharon Aschaiek

Ontario colleges are constantly looking for new ways to support the success of their internationally trained immigrant (ITI) students, and Algonquin College is a leader in developing innovative programs and services for this cohort. Building on the principals and protocols of the Colleges Integrating Immigrants to Employment (CIITE) project, Algonquin has developed a fully integrated approach to ITI student services, the Algonquin College Access Program (ACAP). ACAP ensures appropriate guidance throughout an ITI's entire life cycle at the college—from registration to education to graduation.

"We look at the various processes and functions for ITIs at the college and figure out how to improve what we're doing to make things work more effectively for this population," says Denyce Diakun, Director, Workforce and Personal Development.

ACAP stands out in that it operates not as a silo, but as a facilitator, promoting better services for ITIs across the college.

ACAP works with college staff in areas such as academic advising, language training, mentorship, bridging programs and credentials assessment to serve ITIs more effectively. The result of ACAP's progressive approach is that ITIs can more easily access personalized counseling and mentoring to help them create and achieve their education and career plans; formally assess their international qualifications and language skills; learn about programs to improve their academics, language abilities and

their academic credentials, language abilities and employment-preparation skills; and connect directly with employers. "We've educated the faculty and administrators and had them look at their systems to determine how to adapt them so as to be more responsive to these clients. Everyone is involved in building the strategy to support ITIs," Diakun says.

One way ACAP achieves this objective is by using a database to track ITIs to ensure they are accessing relevant services and for follow-up. "I can use the database to send targeted e-mails to everyone who might be interested in particular courses. It's a wonderful means to reach out and help these people take advantage of these opportunities," says Bernice Klassen, ESL coordinator of language training projects at Algonquin's Language Institute, which runs a variety of second-language training courses.

For academic referral advisor Stephanie Hampel, who helps prospective students accomplish their academic and professional goals, a benefit of ACAP is that it connects ITIs with services in a timely fashion. "In the past, an ITI might get referred back and forth to different departments before getting the help they need," Hampel says. "With this integrated approach, the referral system has become 10 times better—it lets the student follow a cohesive path to the right place."

Sharon Aschaiek (sharon@cocoamedia.ca) writes about education, employment and job training trends and issues.

CONNECT hosts learning and essential skills forum

by Mary Smirle

CONNECT has a history of managing immigration projects, as well as initiatives which promote the integration of essential skills into workforce training and development programs.

These two areas, both strongly promoted by the Ontario college system, rarely seem to intersect, making it very exciting when CONNECT was awarded a contract with the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC-OLES) to host the third in a series of three conferences, designed to solicit advice on potential policy development around the role of essential skills training in the labour market integration of newcomers.

On October 4th and 5th, 2010, CONNECT hosted the "Making Connections: Labour Market Integration, Immigration and Essential Skills" forum, bringing together stakeholders from Ontario, Quebec, the northern territories and the Maritimes for a day and a half of discussion. The forum's objectives were:

- Become better informed about the connection between immigration and essential skills in the context of labour market integration
- Share information and best practices on immigrant initiatives and literacy and essential skills
- Identify strategies, opportunities and issues relating to immigration and essential skills in the context of labour market integration
- Facilitating, networking and making connections between stakeholders, and provide an opportunity to hear stakeholder perspectives

To set the stage, keynote addresses were given by Naomi Alboim, Adjunct Professor at Queen's University discussing the current labour market and the role immigration will play, and Rick Miner, President Emeritus of Seneca College, discussing the impending skills shortage across the country. Representatives from HRSDC-OLES and Citizenship and Immigration Canada presented on current initiatives, and panel discussions looked at partnerships, best practices and challenges in the integration of literacy and essential skills to the newcomer experience. Participants from nine provinces and territories (the other provinces had forums in Calgary and Vancouver) represented various stakeholder groups, including educational institutes, settlement agencies, government, employers, sector councils and advocacy organizations.

The discussion brought a number of issues forward including the ways the essential skills can determine what skills are needed for immigrants to succeed in the labour market; the need for cultural competence both on the part of immigrants and on the part of employers; and the need for a better understanding amongst employers around the value of essential skills. These and other topics will be addressed in more detail in a report to be released early 2011, and will be available for download on the CONNECT website, www.collegeconnect.on.ca.

For further information on CONNECT's work with Literacy and Essential Skills or the Making Connections forum, please contact Mary Smirle at smirle@collegeconnect.on.ca.

ITI advisors help mature students succeed at St. Clair College

by Ani Yildirim

Mary Rose Jacson would have never dreamed of going back to school if she was not in Canada. At 39, she considered herself too old to study in her home country, the Philippines. "There is no age discrimination in Canada," says Jacson, "I'm very happy to have a chance to study again."

Jacson's journey for a better life took her to Singapore and Hong Kong before she landed in Canada in 2004. She has worked as a domestic helper and caregiver. She never thought of looking for a job in a different field or building on her existing skills and knowledge by going back to school to study a new profession, until one day one of her friends planted an idea in her mind: study for a better job.

"I'm very patient, loving and caring towards old and disabled people," she says, "I thought about my friend's suggestion to make a profession out of it." She decided to enter the Personal Support Worker (PSW) program at St. Clair College. It was not easy for her to follow her plan. She hesitated because of her

age and the fact that she had been away from school for more than 20 years.

With fear and a lot of questions in her mind, she visited St. Clair College and met with an ITI advisor. "Whenever I needed to talk, the ITI advisor was there for me." Her ITI advisor assisted Jacson in enrolling in ESL classes, before registering for the Personal Support Worker program.

"I was so scared; the ITI advisor encouraged me a lot. I thought I would be the oldest and less smart one in the class, and everybody would look at me." Things turned out to be different for Jacson. She is enjoying being a student again. "I am not the only mature student."

She is looking forward to completing her ESL classes and starting the PSW program in January 2011.

Ani Yildirim (aniyildirim@yahoo.com) writes about immigrants, culture and urbanization.

Occupation Specific Language Training

Meeting the needs of skilled immigrants by Sharon Aschaiek

Comprehensive curriculum, an innovative format and dynamic learning tools combine to make

Occupation Specific Language Training (OSLT) a truly groundbreaking communication initiative.

Developed by Colleges Ontario, funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada and offered at 14 Ontario colleges, OSLT courses provide skilled immigrants with in-depth language training that allows them to develop the communication skills and cultural knowledge required to excel at their jobs and in their sector. "The Government of Canada is committed to helping immigrants succeed," said Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism. "The sooner newcomers can benefit from settlement services, the sooner they can integrate into their communities and improve their job prospects."

OSLT courses encompass communication training and workplace culture awareness in 28 occupations within six high-demand employment sectors: business, health sciences, human services, construction, automotive and technology. The free, 180-hour courses were created by curriculum developers who worked closely with employers and professionals in the occupations, interviewing and job shadowing them in order to identify their full range of communication tasks. The result of this research was the development of sector-based and occupation-specific communication skills training that reflects the real-life language needs of the workplace, and provides an authentic understanding of the social and cultural aspects of sector workplaces.

"Participants really like the fact that the courses are so strongly grounded in their occupation, and they also like the socio-cultural focus. It increases their confidence in being able to move forward in their careers," says Peggy Irwin, OSLT curriculum consultant. "As well, people like being able to connect with others in different occupations but in the same sector—they network with and learn from each other."

Contributing to the practical nature of the courses is the

fact that the curriculum developers are also practising language teachers. "That the curriculum writers were also instructors allowed us to ensure the training ideas we had were actually going to work in the classroom," Irwin says.

OSLT courses are also forward-thinking in the variety of ways they allow students to learn. In-class role playing makes it possible to put course content into practice, and audio files of workplace-specific dialogue are available online for students to work on their speaking and listening skills on their own time. "The online dialogue is a new tool that I'm really excited about—it lets students practise their language skills and work on their pronunciation," says Patrice Palmer, bridging programs manager and professor at Mohawk College who has taught the Human Services and Health Sciences OSLT courses.

Also unique is how the OSLT initiative supports the success of its instructors: an online knowledge exchange network allows them to share their teaching experiences with other OSLT instructors, and to consult an OSLT support team member for help. "It helps you make better sense of the course material, and make sure you're on the right track," says Palmer.

So far, almost 1,000 people have participated in OSLT courses, and more than 90% have reported their overall satisfaction with them. This fall, Ontario colleges are offering close to 60 classes, and that number may expand as the initiative grows. Linda Franklin, president of College Ontario, says "Reviews from experts and instructors in the field confirm that the material in OSLT courses is relevant, helpful and of the quality needed to prepare immigrants for the workplace in Canada."

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