

An accessible hiring process for people with disabilities

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) gives guidelines for Ontario employers to increase access to employment and formalize accommodations for employees with disabilities. As of January 2017, all employers in Ontario need to be compliant with the AODA.

There are obvious things that need to be addressed such as physical barriers or making statements of inclusivity. However, there are many systemic barriers to employment which would unintentionally exclude individuals with disabilities. For potential employees, the challenge is knowing when and how to disclose information to an employer. No one wants to jeopardize their chances of securing or keeping a job.

The first hurdle for many people with disabilities is the interview. Not everyone can articulate their skills and experience in a way that highlights all their strengths. Interviews are stressful at the best of times for the most prepared candidates. An intellectual disability or brain injury can impair processing speed (understanding the question) and articulation (giving a good answer).

Make your interviews more accessible by providing questions in advance, or a printout of the questions at the interview. A demonstration of skills

rather than a conversation may work best for some candidates, or ask to see a portfolio of work which showcases their skills.

Not everyone can articulate how they process information, but most can identify areas that are a struggle. LDOnline.org suggests questions that employers could ask at the interview or at the time of hire to determine what areas might need accommodation:

- This job involves computer data entry. Can you tell me or show me how you would do that?
- Here are my attendance requirements. Can you meet them?
- Here is a list of the essential job functions. Can you perform them?

In the CICE program, we focus on strengths, and we support students in developing their self-advocacy skills. Part of that is developing disclosure skills. As a field placement host, you can encourage students to discuss their workplace needs with you. Often students will be hesitant to use the same strategies or technology at work that they use in the classroom. Your support in the workplace will help them in future work experiences. Contact the Field Placement Officer for advice on working with a student.

Field Placement overview

Winter 2016:

Barrie—32 placements
23 external employers
9 in-house employers

Orillia—6 placements
4 external employers
2 in-house employers

Summer 2016:

Barrie—2 placements (in-house)

Fall 2016:

Barrie—17 placements
14 external employers
3 in-house employers

Orillia—6 placements
6 external employers

Total new employers: 26



Providing a realistic work experience

Although some CICE students have previous work experience, the majority are new to workplace culture and expectations. As a result, students may have unrealistic expectations or be completely unaware of what is expected of them.



We want field placements to be realistic, and a safe place to learn. Here are some suggestions:

- Once they master a task, a more difficult one will be assigned. Explicit explanation of this process is helpful for some students.
- If the student is late or misses a shift without prior notice, they should be treated like any other employee would be when they do this.
- If the student does well in a task or is successful, they should receive the same amount of praise/reward that any other employee would.
- need to repeat the verbal instructions more than once.
- Be explicit as much as possible. Don't assume that subtle, unspoken "hints" are understood. Better to be honest than unclear!
- If a student has personal hygiene or attitude challenges, they should be addressed as with any other employee. However, you may need to be more blunt than you are used to being.

As always, if you need advice, ask the Field Placement Officer!

In some cases, it is important to provide scaffolding (temporary support) or accommodation (permanent support) to ensure success. These supports may be built in to the position or workplace without a lot of expense or effort on behalf of the employer.

- Provide instructions to a new task verbally and with demonstration. A written checklist for future reference is helpful. You may

"I believe that [the] unique experiences that people with disabilities have is what is going to help us make and design a better world both for people with and without disabilities."

Elise Roy

Getting hired from field placement

For most co-operative education participants, the goal is to be hired in a position related to the area of study. In the CICE program, our goal is for our graduates to improve and build on their employability skills while gaining real-life experience in a variety of workplaces. One of our graduates, Jordan Richards (pictured), was hired by one of his field placement employers, Williams Fresh Café. Jordan and his mother, Jennifer, were featured in a video spot sponsored by Bell Canada for the Simcoe Muskoka Workforce Development Board. The video is now on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjY8RC3oXz0>.

Jordan isn't the only graduate or current student to be hired by a field placement employer. Jessica from our first cohort in 2011 has been working at the Georgian Athletic Centre in Barrie while she takes an unmodified post-secondary program at the Barrie campus. Waqar and Tyler were also hired by the Athletic Centre after completing their field placements there. Two other students were offered paid summer positions after completing field placement: Sarah at Conference Services and Dwight at Rama Early Childhood Education Centre.



“I love my placement!”

In the first few weeks of the semester I was already hearing from many second year students about the great things happening in their placement. Smiling faces exclaimed “I love my placement” and “best job ever!”.

What makes a placement so great? What motivates a student who likes to sleep in to get up at 5:30am to arrive at work for 6am?

Like anyone who has found their passion, CICE students love to be in the environment where they have something to offer and get something in return. It is highly rewarding to find a role that relies on individual strengths and develops new skills at



the same time.

We also want to see students stretch beyond their comfort zones to develop their

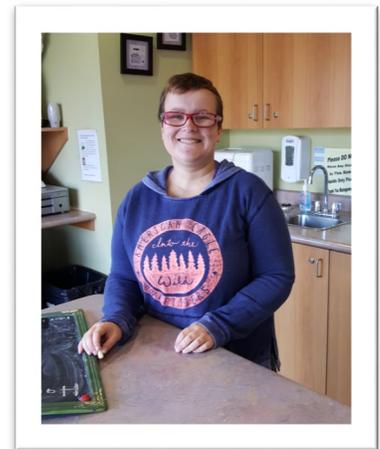
employability skills. That is what the CICE program is all about! We love

stories like these ones:

A shy student is reaching beyond her comfort zone to greet residents of a nursing home and offer them a cup of coffee. A student is working in her first office role at a non-profit and finding that she loves it, while developing her social skills. Another student is helping a kindergarten class with crafts and activities even though she never thought she would be good with children. And another student has tapped into her existing skills with animals to help at a doggie day care centre where she is already excelling while developing initiative.

Field placement employers have been able to offer students experiences in a wide variety of environments from HVAC to hospitality, animal care to office work and retail to retirement homes. Students discover the value of learning new tasks, going outside of their comfort zones and problem solving. The confidence that comes from doing a job well enables students to continue to challenge themselves.

The growth that has come from doing a job well, enjoying new experiences and working as part of a team has



made a huge difference to our students.

The number one thing students say that they love about their field placement? The people they work with is the answer every single time.

Thanks to every employer who has taken the time to host a CICE student and share their workplace. If you have any good new stories about experiences with our students at your workplace, please pass them on to the Field Placement Office.

And, of course, the Field Placement Officer is always here to advise and support employers when students need a bit more help to be successful at the workplace.

Program renewal for CICE

After five years, it is time to completely review and refresh the CICE program curriculum. A formal process of program renewal has been initiated with our Program Co-ordinator, Renee Ferguson at the helm. 33 employers have already been asked to contribute their ideas for changes that might benefit future students of the program. New employers who have not had a lot of experience with us are welcome to provide input as well.

Guiding Questions for Renewal:

- How would you describe your experience(s) as a Field Placement employer with CICE?
- Do you see any holes in the program outcomes or core courses-are there any essential employability skills missing that you think we should be teaching to CICE students?
- What skills and knowledge do you believe are most important to teach CICE students so that they are adequately prepared for today’s workplaces? Why?
- What do you believe are the CICE program’s strengths and weaknesses? Why?

Email your responses to Renée Ferguson, CICE Program Coordinator, at Renee.Ferguson@georgiancollege.ca