

ST. CLAIR COLLEGE – MANAGER INTERVIEW

Increasing government attention is being focused on meeting the needs of early school leavers who are unable to make a successful transition to postsecondary, pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs. We are interested in learning more about how Academic Upgrading funding can facilitate accessible and successful pathways for early school leavers - especially youth, Aboriginals, Ontario Works clients, and online learners. Please provide your thoughts regarding **what works, what improvements/changes are needed at your college, and what supports are needed** in those areas.

YOUTH (ESPECIALLY AGED 16 TO 18 YEARS)

- We're trying to figure out why they're leaving high school early with all the initiatives that have been set in place.
- Our experience so far is that primarily our young clients are the English as a Second Language learners. The other programs tend to pick up older students who are looking for ways of improving their lives with programs like the apprenticeships.
- We don't see 16 year olds coming into upgrading programs. Our experience is with the mature learners.

ONLINE LEARNERS

- The need for online/distance education seems to be minimal here. Students require face to face support (teacher directed learning).
- A couple that came in recently, both looking to upgrade, were asking about working online in the LBS & ACE programs and were only satisfied when they understood that the program is set-up in a mini lab situation with a teacher to help but that you are able to progress at your own pace.

ABORIGINAL LEARNERS

- Chatham's Aboriginal population is larger than the Windsor area.
- The LBS needs in that community are being met by the community agencies for literacy.
- ACE was offered in Chatham for the first time last year. More advertising will assist with the program promotion and growth.
- We offer postsecondary programs for Aboriginals in Chatham. There is a potential to increase the literacy programming.

ONTARIO WORKS CLIENTS

- In the past few years, most of St. Clair College's LBS referrals have been OW clients.
- Our program was providing all 5 levels of LBS learning. (1-5).
- Our program direction is changing. With support from the Ministry, we will only be accepting LBS levels 3 or higher.
- We will no longer be able to service clients who are functioning at a literacy level 1 or 2. These particular clients will be referred to our community literacy partners.
- In Windsor, the Jobs Now pilot caused a disconnect to the referral process of OW clients to the community literacy providers.
- We are also meeting with OW and the literacy agencies to discuss the current disconnect.
- OW does an assessment for level placement but does not offer any language learning tracking enhancements.

MARKETING ACADEMIC UPGRADING

- The problem is that the target client groups are not aware of the program. We're currently implementing a number of initiatives to rectify this situation. We've developed a marketing/promotional flyer that is aimed at ACE and LBS clients.
- We are trying to be very sensitive to our community partners (mainly the secondary schools) and are being very selective with our advertisement messaging.
- We are working on a double sided flyer: workforce focus on one side and an academic focus on the other.
- We are also experimenting with an ad in the local newspaper in the classified section. Lambton College shared this idea with us. The response for us has been phenomenal; however, at \$300 an ad is a costly solution.

- We have changed our program name to College and Employment Preparation (CEP) to sound more professional. Many of the provincial colleges have already experimented with title changes. It was done for promotional and marketing purposes.
- From a marketing perspective it is difficult to get the message across because the colleges throughout Ontario are not unified on this. We still have and are known as LBS and OBS internally and externally, but we had to find the politically correct wording.
- We assume that the college web site is not the main source of information for our LBS/OBS or the college calendar. It's not likely where these students would look for help.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND REFERRAL PROCESSES

- The community partners are not always aware that the college is an available resource to students.
- We refer a number of students to St. Michael's (school board program) to get their GED. St. Michael's is currently located on our Windsor campus; however, the program will be relocating in June...
- We will then begin to aggressively advertise and promote our ACE program.
- We have a very high functioning LSP in the area, and there are many referrals between agencies.

INTERNAL COLLEGE LINKAGES

- We need to strengthen our internal college linkages.
- We will lead a number of information sessions for the departments that would typically be connecting to potential learners (i.e. Registrar's Office, Counseling, Recruitment Office, Job Connect, etc.).
- Currently, our own college staff cannot speak knowledgeably about ACE and LBS because it is still too new.
- We are forming a stronger relationship with Job Connect.
- The new Manager has been communicating with us to set up workshops on Fridays, and this will compliment our LBS and ACE programming. This way we can all become more knowledgeable and in turn pass this information on to others.

PRE-APPRENTICESHIP AND APPRENTICESHIP LINKAGES

- Not discussed

EMPLOYER LINKAGES

- Linkages with employers have been minimal to date.
- We have a couple programs which assist the learner to identifying goals (e.g. individual online evaluations).
- We need to strengthen our communications with employers, to help the learner move forward with career placement. Workshops are also beneficial.
- Our distribution will be through our offices and delivery to business/factory connections.

ALTERNATE FORMS OF DELIVERY (online, web-based, software applications, learning technologies, distance delivery)

- The ACE program will incorporate a number of alternate delivery methods. Currently it's a text delivery which helps lower the cost to students. UID – Universal Instructional Design methods.
- Computer components help the students to learn how to get basic computer skills.

TRACKING, REPORTING, AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Statistics on how students find out about this are not yet done, but we are considering putting forth how they're finding out.
- Internal performance indicators have been very narrow for a while. Now that the school board program is leaving the premises, there will be an opportunity to build this type of indicator from the ground up. We want the information to be accurate so that it is useful. We want to track a student, for example, who starts in LBS level 3 and follow that student straight through into employment, so for perhaps even a 10 year window of tracking.
- Currently there is no database but it is something we would like to have put in place.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

- We are in a state of flux. Faculty is excited by the changes going on, but at the same time our numbers are low and they have concerns with funding and cuts. This is an ongoing trial and error process and we are working on it.
- It helps to have consistency when you're working on something like this. The best way to get connection is through the College Sector Committee.

ST. CLAIR COLLEGE – FACULTY/STAFF FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES

LEARNER PROFILES

To what extent does your program serve youth, Aboriginals, and Ontario Works and online learners?

- Traditionally the 16-18 year old age group has been out of our range.
- These students have been the exception to the rule; mostly we have had 19 and up. The Future Links program may change that.
- Aboriginal students numbers are low we may have had 2 or 3 in the last while.
- The Can Am centre provides literacy and culture to the aboriginals in the Windsor Essex area. There doesn't seem to be much of a market for the college as a provider at this time.

STUDENT RECRUITMENT

How do they know about and gain access to your program? What data do you have about how students find out about Academic Upgrading?

- Word of mouth is how most students hear about us.
- Ontario Works has been our primary source of new students, but I expect that this will change shortly as we will be recruiting only Level 3 and above students.
- We don't use online services such as AlphaRoute; the interface and need to have mentors on site is too time-consuming.

What are the main reasons why students select an Academic Upgrading program?

- Many students enter the program just to review and refresh past learning so that when they do enter ACE, college postsecondary programs, or the workplace, there is an increased likelihood that they will be successful.

What community and/or internal outreach strategies do you have in place?

- We have just recently made contact with Job Connect and the Apprenticeship office.
- This new initiative has just begun since our new manager took over in September 2005.
- We have an external partnership with the Tri-County Literacy Board which looks at the needs of the region.
- How helpful is the college's 'mainstream' promotion in recruiting learners to Academic Upgrading?

What are you considering?

- We don't feel we're picking up on the needs of the county – Essex, Leamington are the heart of tomato country which employs a lot of migrant workers (e.g. Mexican Mennonites, etc.).
- The greenhouse growers and farmers want workers who are literate.

How helpful is the college's 'mainstream' promotion in recruiting learners to Academic Upgrading? How well informed are other college staff (Liaison, Job Connect, Contract Training, Apprenticeship, etc.) about Academic Upgrading?

- Ads in the local newspaper for ACE have been the most successful.
- Word of mouth is a big help.
- Internal referrals can be improved. Part of the problem is that we need consistent management to create a supportive infra structure. Instead, we have had eight (8) different chairpersons in the past ten (10) years.

LEARNER GOALS & CAREER COUNSELLING

In your experience, what are the goals of your learners? In other words, what do they expect the program to do for them? How are the goals of youth and Aboriginal learners different from other students? Do learners come to the program with program goals already set by someone else? By whom?

- A lot of our students don't have a goal when they enter.
- Others do have goals "suggested" to them by referring agencies.

Describe the process and supports that help them clarify/confirm/establish goals. Why do they change goals?

- There is some career counseling at the front end (i.e. Career Cruising and Choices software).
- However, we do not have an integrated system like Lambton where their counseling department handles career and goal exploration.
- We have a very limited number of counselors for the size of our college.
- If we were to refer our students to them, it would tie them up for months.
- We are exploring developing a working relationship with Job Connect.
- A lot of the students have unrealistic goals in relation to their past experience and potential abilities. Counseling is needed to help them find and secure more attainable and realistic goals.
- Students are not always aware of the new programs or the choices available to them. As they become increasing aware of these, they change direction in an attempt to exercise more control over their lives.

What are the factors that affect why they do not reach goals?

- Some people have major learning disabilities and we don't have the resources or time necessary to prepare them for employment.
- We feel the program should be run in conjunction with Job Connect to provide on the job exposure or job shadowing experiences. A lot of these folks are immature, or have had very limited or no prior work experience. They need exposure to the real working world and to the demands and expectations of the work environment.
- Another issue with the younger group is that some come out of vocational schools and have neither the social nor intellectual skills to benefit from postsecondary or apprenticeship training.
- Nevertheless, there needs to be a job path created for this group of learners after they leave high school. Perhaps we should be developing an apprentices' helper program.
- For many of our learners, personal problems such as health issues, social and family problems, chemical dependency for pain management, substance abuse, and legal matters, are all contributing factors to them not reaching their goals. Some feel doomed before they start.

CURRICULUM, CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND DELIVERY DESIGN

How do student's learning and your teaching needs affect the way you design curriculum, deliver it, or use alternate learning strategies (i.e. technology)? What specific adjustments are made for youth, older and Aboriginal learners?

- Implementing real-world activities and demonstrations allows learners to see the connection between new information and its application to the demand expectations of both academic and workplace environments

What benefits or challenges do youth, older and Aboriginal learners present in your learning environment?

- We've been looking at the impact of using Essential Skills. There is a lot of information available online, but people aren't really taking advantage of it.
- Younger people are more comfortable with technology and the use of computers.
- However, a lot of the students want instant gratification without investing the necessary time and effort needed.
- The group that I've encountered doesn't engage in reflection or critical thinking.
- Many of our students are unwilling or unable to take notes. They are passive rather than active learners who want or need to have to everything done for them either on the blackboard or in the form of printed handouts.
- Younger people seem to prefer information in smaller chunks. We've talked about developing shorter modules. However, the problem even with shorter modules is that our learners don't appear to be able to take the info from each module and see where and how they fit into the bigger picture of their prior learning.

EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS

Describe how your college program serves these groups of students through external partnerships with educational or employment providers.

- We've got great hopes for the Job Connect side of things.
- With a good front end assessment we could to walk them through areas they need to development to make the transition into the workplace or to further education. This would be in line with "One Stop" and "No Wrong Door".
- Ultimately, that's where we want to be. Right now we're a long way from reaching that goal.
- CBC radio did a program about a team of students building a house in Hamilton supervised by people from Mohawk College. It gave them both on the job experience and a connection to in class knowledge making it relevant. That is also something that I would like to see here.

INTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS

Describe how your program serves these groups of students through internal partnerships with the college's programs and services. Do your students have access to the same programs and services as funded postsecondary students?

- Starting liaison with Job Connect and Apprenticeship

APPRENTICESHIP

Are you aware of links with apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs at your college? Describe them. How did you find out about them?

- Just starting as noted above

BLENDED, ONLINE AND DISTANCE DELIVERY

Describe your experience with using alternate forms of delivery (i.e. online, web-based, software applications, learning technologies, distance delivery). What are the opportunities and challenges?

- No new discussion

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

How do you anticipate your professional development needs changing if this group of learners has a more significant role in your teaching practice?

- We just had the "5 O'clock Whistle" workshop that looked at the generational differences amongst learners. I think that's important to get immediate feedback.
- Some of our faculty also participated in the AWAL workforce training.
- PD related to connecting essential skills to literacy would also be useful, especially how to design instruction that moves learners from a lower complexity level to a higher one.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

- For a lot of youths and adult learners, the learning environment is really important.
- A lot of these students have left school because they felt that they weren't treated with respect. We find that a large part of our job involves rebuilding trust and self-esteem before any real learning or teaching can take place.

ST. CLAIR COLLEGE – LEARNER FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES

What motivated you to enroll in the Academic Upgrading Program?

- Had problems in school - learning disabilities. I got my GED through distance education but it is not recognized here.
- Got about half way through high school; I came from a broken home and had attitude problems so I dropped out early.
- I went to grade 9. I had a baby, and then the child died. I worked for my Dad's company but decided I wanted to get the achievement of getting my high school. Unemployment help was how I got here. They gave me a literacy test and that was really what made me realize I needed to go back.
- I went to grade 10. I was frustrated and decided to quit school and go to work in the world. I had an accident and then unemployment help referred me here, which was good because I didn't know that this kind of program was available.
- I went to grade 10, got kicked out. I partied a lot, had a child, and now realize that I need my high school equivalence.
- I went to grade 9 or 10, got pregnant, so I left and got married. I was later hurt on the job and decided to get my education to better my life.
- I don't want to say how far I went in school. I partied a lot. Now my daughter has dropped out of school and I've decided to do this because my mother came here and liked it and so my daughter can see me doing it.
- My problems started in grade 9 and I had family problems. I've decided to go back to school now.
- I went to grade 11 and felt frustrated and that school just wasn't for me...it was too much to handle at the time.

What made you choose to come here?

- I came here because it was free, and I didn't have to pay for it.
- I came here because my friend told me about it, and I wanted to do it. Her friend also came here because the program was cancelled from her school.
- Unemployment help referred me – the literacy test was what encouraged me to come.
- I had more options but I chose here because I can continue after this within the college.
- I felt that the GED program was "lacking".
- I tried online but it was no good because not enough help was available. I needed to be in-class with a teacher.
- My mother came here and she had a very good experience. Also I wanted the structure as opposed to online learning. I need that responsibility and structure. I also would like to continue after this with the ACE program.
- I did correspondence and found it hard. I heard about St. Clair from Public Works. I didn't want to do night classes because it would take too long. I also went to an adult school but was unmotivated at that time.
- I spoke to Debbie about the program and how you could go at your own pace, but that teachers were here to help if you need it. This system works well for me.

How did you find out about the program?

- I found out about the program when I took a skills test in the college. I went into a college English course which was too hard. I dropped that and checked the website for other options. I found the LBS and sent an inquiry, and then signed up for it.
- I found out about the program from a friend. She found out through work, being retrained for her job.
- I found out through the unemployment help. I didn't think I needed to go back to school until they did the assessment testing and then I could clearly see I needed to go back.
- I found out because my best friend was coming here and liked it. I feel the school systems are partially to blame for letting people get through the system without being able to read. They just pass people to get them through whether they can read or not.
- I found out from the adult school; they referred me.
- I found out because my mother attended previously. You should promote this in places where people who haven't graduated congregate. They all hang out in the same area. Advertising should be geared to go through those types of employers so that the information gets to the people who need it...like McDonalds.
- I found out from Social Assistance. They did an educational assessment and then a counselor referred me to St. Clair College. I think you should offer companies incentives to send their employees back to school. Instead of waiting for people to get unemployed and be helped from Social Assistance or Unemployment help centre, get the information and opportunities to them while they are still employed.

Are you receiving support from any other agencies?

- Employment Works - several
- Employer is paying for me.
- WSIB

Do you have career goals in mind?

- I want to get a business diploma; it's just something I've always had in my mind.
- I haven't gotten that far yet.
- I would like to get into Nursing – something to do with babies; it's something I just wanted to do.
- Electronics – I enjoy taking things apart.
- I was told testing is available to help me decide but I haven't taken it yet.
- I volunteer a lot and wanted to do something to help people. Unemployment help gave me a “Protocol Choice” to help find what I like. It was interesting because everything I thought I loved I'd be good at. I should be in counseling/social work or helping the elderly, and I'm very investigative. I think the test should be part of the LBS program to help students have a goal. If there's no “prize” at the end of all the work it's hard to stay focused. There also is advanced standing credit offered for experience.
- I want to go into order desk/inventory control because that is where my experience is, and I'm too old to change into something else now.
- I originally wanted to get into Business Administration, and then I took a college program and lost interest. Then I took a psych course at the University of Windsor and found it too difficult, and now I would like to try Travel and Tourism.

What could be improved now that you're here?

- I found the placement testing was scary. You should reassure people that there is no mark for that and it's just to help you find the right class.
- Information is a good thing but you can get information overload and you need to be sensitive about delivery.

In what ways has your learning experience been positive?

- Teaching is done at a slower pace, and the teachers are always available to help.
- Convenience and flexibility because I work midnights. Negative- we don't get to keep our test results to review and learn from our mistakes. Tests should be used as a learning resource.
- In orientation it would be nice to meet a student who has had a successful story from this program.
- Perhaps there should be a “people skills” course.
- More flexibility on class times for people who are working or shift workers