



PROJECT SNAPSHOT

Expanding pathways in Allied Health Sciences

Type: Pathways Development

Project Number: 2020-21 or P2021

Project Lead: University of Ontario Institute of Technology

Collaborators: Georgian College

Project Summary

Ontario Tech University and Georgian College are proposing to develop online pathways from Georgian's Acupuncture program (Ontario College Advanced Diploma) and two of its Human Services programs - Developmental Services Worker and Social Services Worker (Ontario College Diploma programs) into Ontario Tech University's Bachelor of Allied Health Sciences (BAHSc) program with the option of further articulating into Ontario Tech University's unique online Graduate Diploma in Work Disability Prevention (WDP). The Graduate Diploma in WDP contains four courses and a practicum. The four courses will be offered as electives in the BAHSc so that interested students who take the BAHSc pathway can complete all Graduate Diploma in WDP coursework as part of their Honours Bachelor Degree. Graduates from the BAHSc would only have to complete the practicum of the Graduate Diploma to achieve the credential of Graduate Diploma in WDP.

These Georgian College programs have been chosen for articulation into the Honours Degree and Graduate Diploma because college graduates in these programs are ideal candidates to work in the field of work disability prevention and return to work. The field of work disability is a growing field as noted below in the section on labour market demand. Work disability is a multifaceted problem that extends beyond disease and medical diagnosis and requires professionals with multidisciplinary skills that extend beyond health care. Evidence indicates that work disability results from complex interactions between stakeholders (employer, insurer, healthcare providers) and the worker.(1) This is a field where professionals require specific training to work in sectors which address work disability prevention and return to work including social services, employment services, health services, and in human resources and health and safety departments in the private and public sectors. In addition, graduates from these college programs are seeking undergraduate and graduate degree completion as well as differentiated skills, expertise and employment options.

The Graduate Diploma in WDP is offered by the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHSc) at Ontario Tech University in collaboration with the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College (CMCC) and aligns with the objectives of the Ontario Tech-CMCC Centre for Disability Prevention and Rehabilitation (Centre). The Centre's activities focus on the development and testing of interventions to prevent disability and facilitate the rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities. Its work aims to inform policy-makers about the best strategies to reduce the burden of disability in the population. The Centre's activities focus on the development and testing of interventions to prevent disability and facilitate the rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities.

A further pathway could exist for the students who complete the Graduate Diploma in WDP as credits completed in the first year of coursework could be applied to transition into the Faculty of Health Sciences' Master's program and complete the Master's program sooner.

The pathways that will be created with the Georgian College programs will be scalable across the Province. As the pathways will be based on learning outcomes, graduates of the same programs in other Ontario Colleges will be eligible for these pathways.

(1)Young AE, Wasiak R, Roessler RT, McPherson KM, Anema JR, van Poppel MN. Return-to-work outcomes following work disability: stakeholder motivations, interests and concerns. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation* 2005;15(4):543-56. Loisel P, Durand MJ, Berthelette D, Vézina N, Baril R, Gagnon D, et al. Disability prevention -New paradigm for the management of occupational back pain. *Disease Management & Health Outcomes* 2001: 9(7):351-360.

Project Rationale

Workplace disability creates a large burden impacting the worker, the company and society. According to the Canadian Society of Professionals in Disability Management, "At any given time, 8% to 12% of the workforce in Canada is off work due to injury..." (<https://www.cspdm.ca/>).

Work disability is a multifaceted problem that extends beyond disease and medical diagnosis and requires professionals with multidisciplinary skills that extend beyond health care. Evidence indicates that work disability results from complex interactions between stakeholders (employer, insurer, healthcare providers) and the worker. This is a field where professionals require specific training to work in sectors which address work disability prevention and return to work including social services, employment services, health services, and in human resources and health and safety departments in the private and public sectors. Graduates from college programs are seeking undergraduate and graduate degree completion as well as differentiated skills, expertise and employment options. The Georgian College Social Services Worker, Developmental Services Worker and Acupuncture programs were chosen for articulation into the Honours Bachelor of Allied Health Science (BAHSc) Degree and Graduate Diploma because graduates in these programs are ideal candidates to work in the field of work disability prevention and return to work. Many college graduates are already working when completing their Bachelor's degree part-time and an entire additional year for the graduate diploma is daunting. By converting some of the graduate level WDP courses into upper year electives within the BAHSc, it creates an opportunity for students to complete their Bachelor's degree and be immediately eligible for the WDP placement course, saving them a year of schooling and making their skill set available to the WDP labour market much sooner.

Main Collaborators

The collaborators were: Ontario Tech University – Faculty of Health Sciences, Continuous Learning, Centre for Institutional Quality Enhancement Georgian College of Applied Arts and Technology.

Results

- Built on partnership with Georgian College by providing additional pathways for graduates of the Georgian College Acupuncture, Developmental Services Worker, and Social Services Work programs to articulate to Ontario Tech University's BAHSc program and ultimately, if they choose, to Ontario Tech University's Graduate Diploma in Work Disability Prevention (WDP). The Georgian programs were reviewed and a possible limitation was identified for the Social Services Worker Diploma students, in that they were lacking in medical terminology. Therefore, SSW students will be required to complete a medical terminology course prior to enrolling the BAHSc. The 4 WDP courses were completed to be fully online
- Increased degree completion opportunities for college graduates. The pathways that were created with the Georgian College programs will be scalable across the Province. As the pathways were based on learning outcomes, graduates of the same program in other Ontario Colleges will be eligible for these pathways
- Reduced the length of time for undergraduate degree completion and Graduate Diploma completion. Provided online programs that students can complete at their own pace
- Prepared to graduate highly qualified personnel to work in the field of work disability prevention and return to work.

Key Steps

As the group came together we were able to collectively identify the next steps in this process together, understanding what each institution needed to provide to move this work forward. Ontario Tech took the lead and did the bulk of the work, with Georgian providing documentation and consultation along the way.

As an overview, these are the steps that we took:

1. Identify and understand the scope of the ONCAT project
2. Sharing of course outlines
3. Discussing and confirming equivalences and developing the pathway
4. Exploring additional learning for SSW students to support the pathway
5. Consultation with SSW students, and promotion and information sharing with SSW students
6. Finalizing the pathways and providing information and promotional material to students

This process worked very well due to the strong relationships and trust between the two institutions.

Pathways Created

Georgian College graduates will have an Ontario College Diploma (OCD) or Advanced Ontario College Diploma (AOCD), as noted below. Ontario Tech University's BAHSc program is an existing Honours Bachelor Degree. Ontario Tech University's Graduate Diploma in WDP is an existing Graduate Diploma offered in collaboration with the CMCC and graduates of the Graduate Diploma in WDP may use credits from coursework completed in the first year of the

Graduate Diploma in WDP program to potentially transition into the Faculty of Health Sciences' Master's program.

All students must complete the following bridging courses with a minimum 2.3 GPA (on a 4.3 point scale) or higher in their first two required courses in order to continue in the program.

These courses are:

- HLSC 1701U – Information Literacy and Written Communication for the Health Sciences
- HLSC 2700U – Mathematical Reasoning in Health Sciences

Acupuncture:

Graduates from Georgian College's Acupuncture (AOCD) program will go into Ontario Tech University's BAHSc program.

The BAHSc program will contain all four (4) courses from the Graduate Diploma in WDP and students can choose to take those courses so that they only have to complete the practicum to achieve Ontario Tech University's Graduate Diploma in WDP.

Developmental Services Worker:

Graduates from Georgian College's Developmental Services Worker (DSW) program will go into the Ontario Tech University's BAHSc program. The BAHSc program will contain all four (4) courses from the Graduate Diploma in WDP and students can choose to take those courses so that they only have to complete the practicum to achieve Ontario Tech University's Graduate Diploma in WDP. These Georgian College graduates will have an Ontario College Diploma. The DSW program is a well-established program in the community of Simcoe. The Key Performance Indicators for DSW indicate that graduates are very satisfied with the education that they receive and how this translates into professional positions they are able to secure post-graduation. Additionally, Georgian College's employers are equally as satisfied with Georgian College graduates and the knowledge that they bring into the field.

Social Services Worker:

Graduates from Georgian College's Social Services Worker (SSW) program will go into the Ontario Tech University's BAHSc program. The BAHSc program will contain all four (4) courses from the Graduate Diploma in WDP and students can choose to take those courses so that they only have to complete the practicum to achieve Ontario Tech University's Graduate Diploma in WDP. These Georgian College graduates will have an Ontario College Diploma. Similar to the DSW program and evidenced in Georgian College's KPI data, SSW graduates are able to secure employment across varied organizations and high employer satisfaction. Students entering the program from the Georgian College Social Services Worker program will need to complete an additional course in Medical Terminology through Ontario Learn by October 15 of their first semester of BAHSc enrolment. Students from Social Services Worker programs at other colleges will also need to meet this requirement if they have not already completed a Medical Terminology course.

Incomplete Pathways

There were no incompleting pathways.

Challenges

Covid 19 represented an initial challenge, but we were able to pivot to online meetings and requested an extended timeline. It took a lot of work and meetings with Ontario Tech faculty and the WDP course developers, but once the instructors understood the purpose of the exercise, they rose to the challenge and created excellent material.

Another minor challenge was a low response rate to the survey sent to students at Georgian asking about their interest in the pathway (only 3 students responded, 2 of whom were very interested). Georgian faculty felt that the combination of time of year and the fact that the initial presentation was online were responsible.

This challenge was addressed by ensuring that all students were given links to information about the pathway and they were all invited to the winter Open House at Ontario Tech University to discuss the pathway with the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs. Moving forward, an annual “face to face” visit or a short online guest lecture by an Ontario Tech faculty member explaining the WDP and its integration with the BAHSC will also ensure Georgian students understand this pathway.

Student Outcomes

This project provides additional pathways for Acupuncture, SSW and DSW students to consider if they are interested in pursuing additional education post graduation. Additionally and more importantly, this pathway provides a health option for SSW students to consider, which is the first pathway for SSW students; currently pathways are more traditional (e.g., pathway to social work degrees).

Students could save the equivalent of 2.5 to 3 years of university fees. Because they are given a block transfer of 57 credits, they only require two years to complete the 4 year Honours degree. If they opt to take all 4 WDP electives, this is the equivalent of an entire year of full-time post-graduate study (or two years parttime). The average yearly tuition in the BAHSc is approximately \$6000, representing a \$12,000 saving in tuition fees. The fee per 3-credit course in the WDP is approximately \$1800. If a student took 4 courses in advance, this represents a saving of \$7200. In total a student could save 3 years and \$19,200 in tuition if they enrolled in the BAHSC and took all four WDP electives.

Student Credential

Students who complete the pathway will receive a Bachelor of Health Science degree and have the option to apply and receive advanced standing in the Work Disability Prevention Graduate Diploma program.

Student Time Savings

Yes, students could save the equivalent of 2.5 to 3 years of study; they only require two years to complete the 4 year Honours degree. If they opt to take all 4 Work Disability Prevention (WDP) electives, this is the equivalent of an entire year of full-time post-graduate study (or two years part-time) that they would save to complete the graduate diploma. In total a student could save 3 years if they enrolled in the BAHSc and took all four WDP electives.

For students using this pathway, the estimated time to completion from entering college to completion of the BAHSc is 4 years, and from entering college to completion of the BAHSc and

WDP is 4.5 years. If they pursued a regular degree after college it would total 6 years, and regular degree plus the WDP would total 7 to 7.5 years.

Student Financial Savings

Yes, the average yearly tuition in the BAHSc is approximately \$6000. Students would only need to complete 2 of 4 years, representing a \$12,000 saving in tuition fees. The fee per 3-credit course in the WDP is approximately \$1800. If a student took the 4 elective courses in advance as part of the BAHSc, this represents a saving of \$7200. In total a student could save \$19,200 in tuition if they enrolled in the BAHSc and took all four WDP electives.

Student Flexibility

Because the BAHSc is offered fully online, as are the WDP electives, students can complete the degree from anywhere in the province. For those electing to do the WDP graduate diploma placement course, we can work with local employers to find relevant placements. This provides tremendous flexibility for student learners.

Student Work Alignment

Disability rates and compensation costs continue to trend up in Canada with 8% to 12% of the workforce in Canada is off work due to injury..." (<https://www.cspdm.ca/>), resulting in increased employment opportunities for professionals with the skills to address work disability prevention (WDP) and return to work (RTW). Disability determinants can be a combination of physical, work environment, healthcare system and compensation system factors. WDP programs now replace the disease treatment (biomedical) model with a work place prevention biopsychosocial model focusing on patient reassurance and workplace interventions. Such programs need to be customized to training highly qualified individuals with a solid foundation in the intricacies related to RTW. Effective and cost-effective strategies to reduce work disability include workplace interventions (Carroll et al, Disability Rehabilitation, 32(38), 607-621)) and RTW management. Appropriate disability management strategies may produce a return on investment of \$26 per \$1 invested (Tompas, E. Prevention and Management, DOI 10.1007/978-1-4614-6214_4, © Springer New York 2013). There is an urgent need for training practitioners who will act as RTW managers, helping workers and stakeholders to facilitate the RTW process in the complex arena of WDP. Few such programs exist and the complexity of issues and the credibility of these professionals drive the need for education at the graduate level.

Exposure of students to particular labour markets will increase the likelihood of their employability (Pransky G, Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation, DOI: 10.1007/s10926-009-9208-x (published online October 13, 2009)). Return to work coordinators (RTWC) can provide a vital role in controlling the increasing direct and indirect work-related disability costs and significantly better return to work outcomes. This pathway will provide graduates with the necessary competencies to influence systemwide challenges.

Institutional Outcomes

Georgian has now widened what they consider a feasible and desirable pathway for Acupuncture and SSW students, understanding that exploring additional pathways into health related learning and professions is important.

For Ontario Tech, a major change document was approved to create these pathways. Acupuncture, SSW and DSW graduates are well placed to be successful working in the area of work disability prevention. These new pathways broadened the conversation in the faculty around what a "relevant" background is in the area of Allied Health.

Sector or System Implications

For those of us at Georgian, it was good to work closely with Ontario Tech to better understand the processes associated with learning outcomes and course equivalencies. It is evident that while Colleges and Universities differ in some respects, we are similar in how identify learning outcomes which made this work easier to navigate. Our similarities in this regard was in the best interest of students as we could identify equivalencies quickly and confidently based on the processes both institutions use. From the Ontario Tech Perspective, the detail in the documents provided by Georgian made it is easy to assess the equivalency of learning outcomes from various courses. The approach by both institutions was highly collegial and focused on providing a seamless pathway for college to university transfers, while ensuring that college students were not disadvantaged by knowledge gaps.

By providing block transfers of credits, students can focus on taking courses that address their specific knowledge gaps while pursuing their university degree. This also ensures that students from all similar college programs will have access to a similar pathway.

Tips/Advice

Conversations across institutions are great opportunities to work closely with colleagues at other institutions that you would not otherwise have the opportunity to meet. Despite the outcomes, whether you have an agreed upon pathway or not, these collegial conversations are incredibly helpful to understanding how different institutions work and open up opportunities for partnerships in other areas. This has made Ontario Tech in particular more open to exploring future collaborations.

Tools and Resources

The survey provided with the final report can be shared. We have attached to this snapshot a sample pathway infographic.