

**#MyCareer:** How Ontario university career services prepare students for the future

# The job market is constantly changing in Canada and around the world.

Some jobs are disappearing, while new ones are being created. Consumer, economic and societal trends suggest this will continue.

Ontario universities are reacting to these conditions in several ways. They are developing innovative academic programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels to prepare students for careers in these evolving workplaces. Universities are also bolstering their academic and student support services, such as their career centres. They continue to develop robust career centres that place the importance of students and alumni's future at the forefront of their services.

Universities also recognize that the key to a well-rounded academic experience is helping a student develop both hard skills that can be directly applied to a job, and a variety of soft skills and life experiences that would allow them to adapt to a dramatically changing workplace. While both sets of skills are fostered through academic programs, career centres offer added value to both students and graduates. This report highlights the breadth of service and innovation in career services at Ontario universities that help to prepare students for their future.



In order to help students succeed, universities must combine academic experience and learning, both inside and outside the classroom, with an understanding of how these experiences can prepare students for a career. This means thinking about a career not just as a series of jobs, but rather as what the National Career Development Association in the United States calls "a continuous process of lifelong learning, growth and development" that adds "experiences to our toolbox of life." This is why career centres believe that one of their top priorities is helping students learn more about themselves, examine their beliefs and appreciate the work they are doing as they move towards a degree.

Ontario universities are committed to equipping students and alumni with the tools they need to succeed, whether that means further education, such as graduate or professional school, or a transition into the workforce. By offering comprehensive career services, universities across the province are supporting students as they move towards their future prospects, while keeping in mind the unique needs of the diverse student and alumni populations.

"The students we hire through career centres are more prepared for the workforce and clear about what skills and experience they bring to the table."

#### **Nancy Moulday**

Manager Recruitment, TD Business Banking

### The basics of career services.

All university career centres in Ontario offer essential core services that allow students to flourish as they take that next step after graduation. For example, they offer career counselling by both trained professionals and peers in personality and self-assessment, career exploration, career decision-making and employment preparation, including resumé writing, interview skill development and job search. These core services are offered individually and through workshops, seminars, conferences, job fairs and other types of events that bring in experts, professionals and alumni to provide a vast array of career information. Students throughout Ontario can go to their career centre for guidance on resumé and cover-letter writing, networking and interview techniques, all of which give them an advantage when applying to jobs.

All universities also provide electronic job posting services that allow employers to advertise employment opportunities on campuses to students and alumni. These systems are used by employers locally, nationally and internationally. Feedback from employers, such as the Human Resources department at TD Business Banking, indicates that this is an invaluable service. Like thousands of other employers, TD actively recruits on campus by holding information sessions for prospective employees, participating in job fairs and conducting on-campus interviews with selected students. Representatives from TD also hold "office hours" on campus to provide undergraduate and graduate students with advice, career coaching and information about working for the bank.

Another example of the core services offered by career centres is Laurentian University's *What to do with a degree in...*, a comprehensive listing of the potential academic and career opportunities that come from each program. In addition, each program description includes a list of skills developed, areas of employment and sample careers, employers who have hired Laurentian grads and the current work prospects and trends for the particular industry.

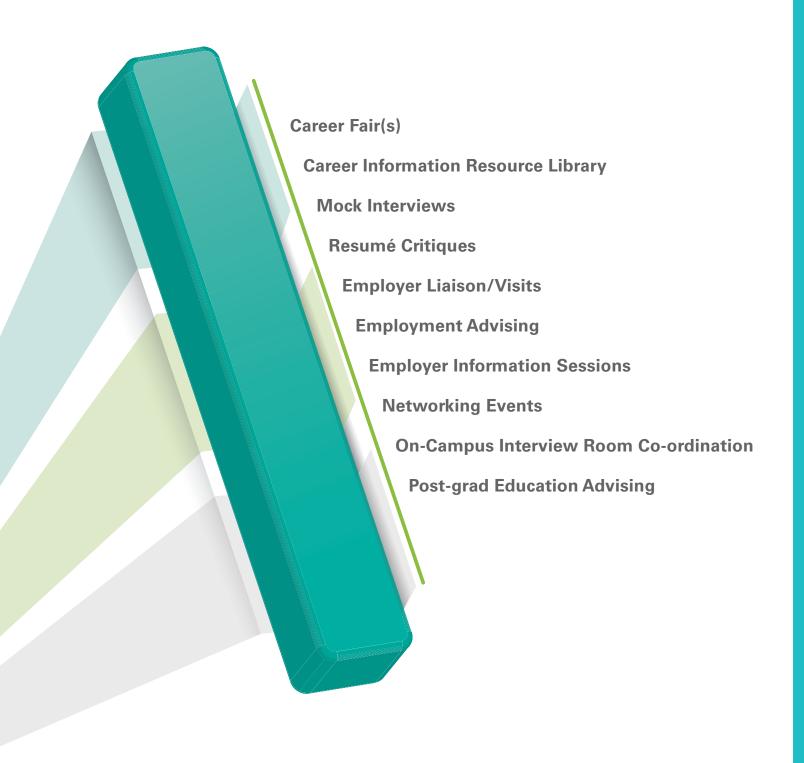
While these core services are available at all of the province's universities, the way in which career centres have tailored them varies, depending on the needs of the student population, trends in student learning and participation, and the available technology. Just as universities are constantly thinking about how to enhance the student experience and offer high-quality programming, so too are their career centres regularly looking at best practices to find career services that prepare students for success.

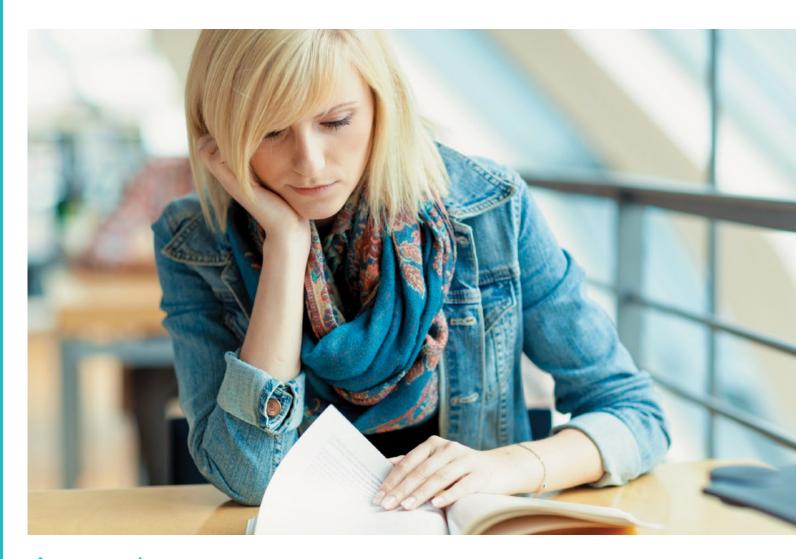
"After all the preparation I did at the career centre, I had confidence in my interviewing skills. They provided me with the guidance to ask the right questions."

#### **Vanyely Saavedra**

International Associate, Scotiabank Canada

# Top services at Ontario universities' career centres.





# An early start...

Universities understand that career development is an ongoing process, beginning when students first arrive on campus and continuing through university and beyond. It never truly comes to an end during an individual's career. Career centres encourage first-year students to use their career planning services as soon as they are enrolled, rather than waiting until their upper years. There are some instances where career development and information are embedded in the course curriculum in the first few years of a program. For example, at Wilfrid Laurier University, an introductory Global Studies course of approximately 1,000 first-year students has mandatory supplemental instruction sessions that include discussions about self-assessment and career planning, career options and other skill development to assist students with their first-year transition.

The Student Success Centre at Western University offers a variety of programs for first-year students who are transitioning from high school. Western's Leadership and Mentor Program (LAMP) assigns new students an upperyear mentor from within their department to help them navigate through university life, and includes a tour of the Centre. Students participating in the LAMP program gain access to career workshops, faculty meet-and-greets, exam reviews and other related programs. For students living off-campus, the Society of Off-Campus Students (SOCS) provides crucial social links to the university, including support, mentorship, event invitations and regular contact with upper-year student leaders via phone and Internet.

Lakehead University, which has recently incorporated its career services office into a broader student services area, seeks to ensure students get off to the right start in the first year of university, and advises them to start thinking about their future careers early on. First-year students discuss with their advisors skills development, personality assessment and career opportunities associated with their fields of study.

# Developing the toolbox: Personal development and skill set identification.

From the moment students set foot on university campuses, they are immersed in a variety of life experiences – from navigating a new town or city to being a part of a club; from living in a student residence to participating in a seminar where views and opinions are challenged. University life provides students with an opportunity to lead teams and projects, and enhance communication skills through countless co-curricular activities, such as clubs, university newspapers and residence events. In addition to the skills in critical thinking and problem-solving that are derived from their studies, the university experience is rich with opportunities for personal development.

There are also many study abroad and community-based research programs that allow students to develop a vast number of soft and hard skills, such as communication,

Universities recognize that while students are selfassessing their skills and interests, they benefit greatly from the many counselors and programs at the career centre, as well as alumni who recently have been through their own skills development and identification. For instance, Brock University's career centre tracks students' volunteer activities on and off-campus, including participation in clubs, on-campus employment, workshops and certifications. They track students' skills development by collecting feedback from supervisors or employers, using a skills checklist modeled on the Conference Board of Canada's Employability Skills. Once students identify these skills, career centres help them add these skills to their resumés and cover letters, and refer to them during interviews. Many universities also offer students the ability to catalogue their campus involvement on their transcripts, such as joining a

"The staff at Career Services truly cared about my future. They were always willing to give advice and help me achieve my professional goals."

#### **Julie Ogier**

Graduate of Brock University, B.A. Honours in Child Youth Studies and B.Ed.

interpersonal, problem-solving, multicultural awareness and teamwork. The career centre at Trent University, for example, has partnered with the Trent Business Students' Association to provide students with the opportunity to assist in the planning, development and marketing of its events. The business students involved in the partnership are able to develop time management and communication skills, as well as self-confidence. The Leadership Education Program (LEP) at Western University is an initiative that allows students to develop leadership skills. LEP is a series of free classes, facilitated by graduate and upper-year students, that allow participants to learn about leadership and practice leading a team. In addition, students volunteer in the community for a mandatory 20 hours.

club or a society. These co-curricular transcripts offer students an avenue for showing employers their extracurricular achievements, and the learning outcomes from those experiences, in a formal document released by universities.

York University also addresses student self-assessment through the Career Conversation Series. Panel and webinar discussions allow students to discuss their personal career paths with employers and alumni. Students who participate in the discussions also gain insights into career areas of interest and get advice from professionals currently working in the field. Similarly, York's career centre created "Who Am I?" – a self-reflective board game that aids career discovery by encouraging students to reflect on their desires, abilities, skills and personalities. The game has caught on at other institutions, with Brock University and Western University having purchased copies for their own career centres.



# Learning outcomes: An academic record of skills acquired.

All programs at Ontario universities must develop learning outcomes for their students under the Quality Assurance Framework, adopted in 2010. The Framework allows students to easily identify the skills they've gained from their studies. Many students track what they've learned using tools such as e-learning portfolios, which

can also be used to track learning from co-curricular activities and from summer and part-time employment. Students have a greater array of tools than ever before to demonstrate to future employers the value that their university experience has provided.

### Other career services.

Universities have many different services to meet the needs of students. Beyond the most common ones already listed, here are some of the other services provided on university campuses, in part or in total:

- Career counselling and coaching
- Continuing Education fairs
- Employer panel discussions on industries and careers
- Faculty-specific workshops and career fairs
- In-class career presentations
- Interview scheduling

- Mentoring programs
- On-campus recruiting
- Skills or personality assessment/test administration and interpretation
- Web-based career exploration tools
- Work abroad support
- Co-curricular transcripts

### Hands-on experience.

The hard skills derived from hands-on experience are as important to students' development as the soft skills. In a survey by Brainstorm Strategy Group, a majority of university career centres said they consider experiential learning to be a leading trend in preparing students for their careers.

To supplement the many co-op programs offered at the University of Waterloo, its Centre for Career Action has partnered with the Waterloo Professional Development Program (WatPD) to offer an online co-op preparation course. Co-op Fundamentals is the first in a series of courses designed to encourage students to reflect on and improve the skills they need to gain employment and to be successful in the workplace. Currently, the WatPD program offers nine courses: co-op fundamentals, critical reflection and report writing, communication, teamwork, project management, problem-solving, conflict resolution, developing reasoned conclusions and developing effective plans.

The University of Windsor's Centre for Career Education runs an internship program every semester that places 100 students at non-profit and publicly funded organizations in the Windsor area, such as charities, schools and hospitals. The Volunteer Internship Program (VIP) gives students an opportunity to build their careers

by acquiring first-hand skills and experience in their field of interest. After completing 40 hours of volunteer service, VIP students prepare a professional presentation, take part in a group reflection discussion, and attend a workshop that teaches them how to market their internships for future employment.

Because many university undergraduate degrees don't include these organized co-op or structured experiential learning components, career centres help students identify the marketable skills they have gained through other experiences, such as volunteer work, university organizations or even class projects. Brock University's career centre created a series of "Plus" programs, designed to help students tailor their skills and experience to specific careers. The programs offer skill development through workshops, a speaker series, job shadowing, mentorship, volunteer and service learning opportunities.

# Understanding students.

Career centres are constantly re-assessing where and how students spend their time, as well as how they get information and advice to ensure that their services meet student needs and behaviours. For example, the University of Toronto Mississauga career centre staff holds "office hours" in high-traffic areas on campus, where students get on-the-spot assistance, such as resumé critiques or advice on career opportunities for specific degrees. The program, called the Roving Career Centre, seeks to provide convenient service hours to reach the most students possible. The program also provides an opportunity to work with the faculty members of different departments and help them fulfill their own goals for student success.

Not surprisingly, online services are an extremely efficient way to effectively deliver career information. All universities offer online career services through comprehensive websites, including resources on self-exploration, job searching, networking, interviewing and writing resumés, career options and job postings. Some institutions also provide resources through interactive tutorials and online workshops. The University

of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT), which keeps career development at the core of its programs, recently streamlined all career development services into one convenient career services portal, which students, alumni and employers are free to access for information.

The Carleton University Career Centre offers online workshops for undergraduate, graduate and international students on a variety of career preparation topics. Several of the workshops are pre-recorded and audio-narrated, so that a student can access them anytime and view them more than once. The workshops were created so students could access services when they wanted to, and not be limited by office hours or travel time.

Ryerson University's Job Spot, an e-newsletter and blog, provides students with job-seeking advice and encouragement from their peers. The site also features a Book of the Month section, which suggests self-help reads about career advancement.

# Serving a diverse Ontario.

A point of pride for Ontario is its incredible diversity. The student population at Ontario universities reflects the diversity of the province and is further enriched by students from all over the world. When creating programming and other initiatives, the diverse needs of students are central to the strategy.

"Career services made me see my undergraduate years for what they are: a rich experience offering me a range of knowledge. University is not just a stepping stone."

#### **Aysegul Karakucuk**

B.A. Honours student, studying political science, English and Italian studies, University of Toronto

All university career centres offer services geared towards specific student groups, including international students, Aboriginal students and Francophone students. They are also aware of the importance of making their services as accessible as possible for students with disabilities.

The career centre at the University of Toronto St. George created the Canadian Work Experience Program, designed to help upper-year international students secure relevant and applicable work experience to supplement their traditional education. Participants discover the skills necessary to obtain work in Canada, learn about workplace culture and labour market dynamics, and the tools and resources needed to prepare for future work. Through networking events and informational interviews with employers, students can build connections that are often integral to developing a career.

Similarly, Algoma University's career centre connects international students who wish to work in the Sault Ste. Marie community with local businesses and employers, as part of its larger co-op program. The International Work Study Program (IWSP) helps international students obtain work on campus. Both the IWSP and co-op programs contribute to international students' skill set development and networking opportunities, and also promote career opportunities and the benefits of a career in Northern Ontario.

At York University, there is a website dedicated exclusively to Aboriginal students and graduates to better assist them with career development. The site seeks to address the unique questions and concerns that Aboriginal students may have about their career exploration, development, job search and available community supports.

The University of Ottawa's Career Centre offers a full suite of workshops specifically designed for students with disabilities. This program runs during the fall and winter semesters, and seeks to prepare students for a successful transition into the labour market, develop and expand on various transferable professional skills, and discuss and meet with peers, professionals and employers in various fields. Discussion topics include the impact of a disability on one's career, legal issues affecting persons with disabilities in the workplace, ways to develop essential employability skills and other helpful job searching tips.

"As an international student, the career centre taught me that I had transferable skills that applied to a job setting, although I had no real work experience in Canada. They showed me how to effectively market those skills to employers."

#### **Pacinthe Mattar**

Producer, CBC Radio One, "The Current"

At the University of Toronto Mississauga, Frenchlanguage networking nights bring together students and Francophone professionals from a variety of fields. After the event, students complete assignments that earn them marks towards a course credit from the Languages Department. The goal of the program is to help students improve both their networking and French skills, while also meeting their curriculum requirements and deepening their understanding of career options. Students first attend a Learn to Network preparatory session, so that at the event they can make the most of their time with the professionals, talking in French about their career paths or the types of positions that exist in their field. Students then submit a course assignment to reflect on what they have learned and what their next steps might be. Participants report being better prepared, having greater confidence in networking, gaining an increased understanding of their career options and receiving valuable advice from professionals in their field.

University career centres also tailor career development services to graduate students. Many schools of business, medicine, nursing and engineering have their own career centres aligned to central service, but with specialized strategic directions and target markets. Increasingly, graduate programs in all disciplines provide professional skill development courses for their graduate students that focus on preparing them for a career after graduate school. Waterloo's Centre for Career Action has begun offering a Career Boot Camp for master's and Ph.D. students in the Faculty of Arts. Twenty graduate students participate in a full-day program, which includes a selfassessment game, a resumé and interview Q&A session, a workshop focusing on careers beyond academia, work search and networking advice, and a panel discussion with alumni who hold arts graduate degrees.

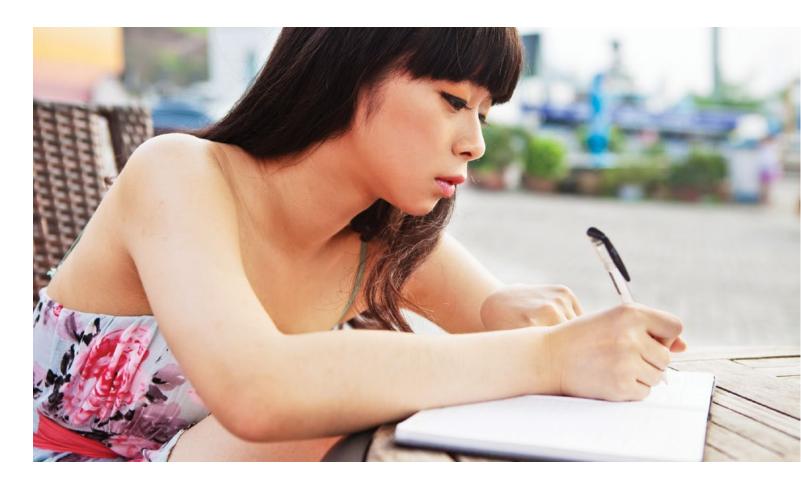
# Preparing for academia.

For many students, the next step beyond an undergraduate degree is not the workforce, but further education or a career in academia. Universities recognize that preparing students for graduate studies is as important as preparing them for the job market.

Many career centres collaborate with their university's schools of graduate studies to provide advice and information about that next step after an undergraduate degree. For example, The University of Toronto St. George Career Centre, collaborates with the School of Graduate Studies and the Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic, to host a day-long conference for graduate students considering careers in academia. Conference topics include preparing an academic application, effectively interviewing during a campus visit, negotiating your first contract, and navigating academic career choices and challenges.

Students interested in graduate studies can participate in Queen's University's Summer Work Experience Program (SWEP), which includes summer placements supporting research projects with faculty members. The SWEP program gives Queen's undergraduate students the opportunity to experience a taste of graduate work, so that they can decide whether to pursue further schooling or graduate with some experience under their belts.

University career centres also provide workshops, career fairs and information sessions specifically for graduate and post-graduate students.



# Continuing the journey: Our alumni.

In today's economic climate, labour markets are constantly changing. Some industries are shrinking, while others are only emerging. It is also becoming much more common for people to change careers after having worked in a single field for several years. That's why universities are proud that employers continue to value degrees so highly. They know that university graduates have the critical thinking and problem-solving skills that give them the flexibility to excel in the jobs of today and in jobs of the future, some of which haven't even been thought of yet. Two years after graduation, 93.8 per cent of those with an undergraduate degree were employed, according to a 2010 survey commissioned by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Universities know that a changing economy means graduates may need their services more than before – that's why some universities continue offering support to their alumni. In fact, seven universities in Ontario offer unlimited lifetime career services to graduates – sometimes for a small fee. Throughout the province, alumni can return to their university career centre to learn about changes in the workforce, career management strategies, get information about a new sector or industry, use university job search engines, or just brush up on cover letter, resumé and interview skills.

"The caliber of students from this program is excellent – we will continue to use this resource in the future, as it provides the skill base that our organization needs."

#### **David Morris**

Director of Human Resources, Niagara Parks Commission

At the University of Guelph's Co-operative Education & Career Services (CECS), alumni can access all of the services that the undergraduate student receives, including assistance in determining what to do with their degree, career advising, job search assistance, connection to employers and job postings, and help with professional school applications. Alumni use the Recruit Guelph website's online tools to explore career possibilities, practice interview skills, and apply to jobs posted by employers interested in Guelph alumni. Employers and alumni can also participate in Connections, an online database system offering job shadowing opportunities or conducting informational interviews with professionals in their field of interest.

Similarly, the University of Toronto Scarborough runs a multi-day conference, called Hire Power, that connects recent graduates with employers for skill and knowledge development, and networking opportunities.

For alumni who have been out of school for a while, and who are looking for help in advancing their careers, Nipissing University has partnered with CareerJoy, a career-coaching firm. Through Nipissing, alumni of any age can access a series of webinars, speaking events and roundtables on career advancement. In addition, Nipissing alumni can get a discount on all CareerJoy services, which include one-on-one, in-person and online coaching.

Wilfrid Laurier University offers lifetime career services. It has created a career consulting position to meet the needs of alumni. It also partners with Alumni Relations on a number of initiatives and events to support alumni in continuing their career development. One such program is "Alumni Sharing Knowledge," a database that provides current students and alumni with connections to approximately 600 Laurier alumni, who voluntarily provide information and assistance on career opportunities and job searches.

# Working together: Faculty involvement in career centres.

Universities are most successful in their missions when all of their departments are involved. That's why outreach to faculty members across campuses is a critical piece of the career service mandate. Faculty members are also interested in learning more about their students' pursuits following graduation, so they often collaborate with career centres on programming, and refer students to the resource when approached with questions or concerns about their careers. They recognize the added value of career centres in providing students with expertise that can lead to a successful job search.

The career centre at Wilfrid Laurier University regularly works with undergraduate and graduate faculty advisors to inform them about career centre programs and services designed to meet the needs of their students. They also deliver a workshop tailored to undergraduate faculty advisors that educates them about advising students on applying to further education programs. Wilfrid Laurier's career centre even develops resources related to each discipline of study, and the associated career paths, to inform faculty and students. These resources include a list of knowledge and skills students acquire during their studies, sample jobs, typical industries and websites of interest. Finally, Laurier distributes a campus-wide Career Centre faculty newsletter to keep the group informed.

OCAD University's Career Development office is also closely engaged with faculty in a variety of ways. Its Experiential Learning program, which supports academic internships for students, offers a host of administrative resources that complement faculty efforts to ensure that students are fully engaged in the learning, milestones and objectives of their placement. The Career Development office is also invited by faculty to visit the classroom to deliver seminars on many topics, ranging from career preparedness to identifying skill requirements. Each presentation takes into account the teaching philosophy of the faculty member, the particular discipline and the level of the students. The OCAD U Talent Network is a portal that provides students, faculty, staff and the external professional world a way to identify and/or locate talent among the OCAD U student body. This portal is another excellent way for faculty to reach out to the Career Development office, initiating discussion about how to help their students gain skills and knowledge that will help them in their future pursuits.

# The next generation of career services.

Universities are constantly looking for ways to improve the student experience and to better prepare students for their future. Career centres are continually examining best practices and modern methods to ensure students are well-equipped to join the labour force or continue their education.

This fall, all Ryerson University students will have access to a new online tool in which jobs chase candidates rather than the other way around. Each day, the WhoPlusYou system, which was pioneered and developed at Ryerson, scans jobs posted by public and private companies listed on the Globe 1,000, the Globe 350 and the Forbes 2,000. Currently, there are over 200,000 job postings in the WhoPlusYou system. At the other end, job-seekers create robust and searchable profiles that act as a magnet. Want a B.Comm. graduate, who speaks Spanish, lives in Ottawa and has leadership experience, with a background in finance? The system filters, matches and connects jobs to candidates who are a high-percentage match. Once the match takes place, WhoPlusYou provides a rich, multimedia environment that allows candidates and employers to communicate by using, chat, video and audio conferencing, and multimedia presentations. Currently, only large organizations can afford to undertake on-campus recruitment, but WhoPlusYou makes it possible for smalland medium-sized employers - who create the majority of new job opportunities in the marketplace - to recruit top young talent at universities.

Another new approach in career services is municipal partnerships. The Student Success Centre at McMaster University, in partnership with the City of Hamilton, created the Hamilton Employment Crawl that brought about 120 students and alumni to the workplaces of 16 employers from the downtown Hamilton area. Students met executives, entrepreneurs and business leaders, and visited the work environment of a range of sectors,

such as manufacturing, technology, health care, social services, creative industries, government and finance. The two-day initiative concluded with a networking reception.

Similarly, Queen's University has partnered with the Kingston Economic Development Corporation to offer the annual Live and Work Kingston event. The career fair connects local organizations from a range of sectors with students interested in living and working in Kingston after graduation.

To ensure that career services bring to bear the latest research and technology, their directors regularly share best practices. A working group of five Ontario career centre directors from the University of Windsor, Trent University, Western University, the University of Waterloo and the University of Toronto developed Career Centre Evaluation: A Practitioner Guide. This online document is a culmination of the working group's research and analysis of approaches for evaluating career development services. The guide is a walkthrough for setting up an evaluation framework, and provides case studies and tools for the evaluation process, including spreadsheets, surveys and rubrics.

Career services directors meet regularly to share best practices and participate in surveys to gather sector-wide information. Results of the previously mentioned survey by Brainstorm Strategy Group suggest that the top five priorities for career centres are: increasing student usage of services and programs; increasing student engagement in career planning and development; attracting more employers; increasing the level of understanding and support from departments and faculties; and measuring key learning outcomes in the area of career preparedness.

"SWEP is a fantastic opportunity to do what you love in a safe and supportive environment. I'm getting paid to do theatre; it's a dream and a fantastic learning opportunity."

#### **Dylan On**

Third-year student, Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Drama, Queen's University

Universities also use graduate outcome surveys in a number of ways: to conduct academic program reviews, to determine career centre programming to meet student needs, and to help students explore career options. These surveys provide information on the pursuits of graduates, such as employment obtained, salary ranges, postgraduate education and unemployment rates – information that allows career centres to provide students with up-to-date information about options and in-demand fields. Some universities conduct their own surveys for graduates from specific fields of study or programs, and all universities participate in the Ontario University Graduate Survey, a provincial study that looks at what students are doing six months and two years out of university.

"They taught me that with the right perseverance, the right attitude and focus, you can build yourself a career."

#### **Daphne Ling**

Trent University alumni, currently working as a research assistant & technician in the department of psychology at the University of British Columbia

Ontario universities continue to be innovative in academic program development, in order to meet the changing needs of graduates who pursue careers in a vast array of traditional and emerging fields. Nearly all new programs approved by the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance this past year have been in the areas that relate closely to the job market, reflecting a high demand by students for programs that will connect them to employment following graduation.

Universities also continue to be innovative in the areas of career planning and development. The ways in which universities deliver their career services to students are changing rapidly to reflect advances in technology, meet the needs of an even more diverse student and graduate population, and react to the changing workforce. Underscoring the missions of these career centres is a commitment to preparing students for success.

# COUNCIL OF ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES

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