

Stakeholder Summary

Students Benefit from College Preparatory Programs

College preparatory programs help students who are interested in attending postsecondary education (PSE) but may lack the admission requirements or have been away from school for an extended time and need additional skills development. A new study published by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) examines the perspective of students in preparatory programs at Conestoga College and finds that students perceived the program to be a success and felt they experienced a great deal of intellectual and academic growth.

Project Description

The study examines the experiences of students who took part in one or more of Conestoga's three main preparatory programs, which are aimed at transitioning non-traditional students into a college program. Thirty-five participants took part in interviews about their experiences in the program. Of those participating, 16 were currently in a preparatory program, 15 had completed a preparatory program and were currently in PSE and four were in the work force.

Findings

Students entered the preparatory program with a number of concerns about returning to school. The most common theme was a lack of confidence in their academic abilities. The longer students were away from high school, the less confident they were in their abilities. Other commonly raised issues were impact of age compared to other students and the ability to keep up with the workload while juggling personal responsibilities.

The previous education experiences of program participants were quite diverse, ranging from very positive to very negative. The two main factors affecting their high school success were social relationships and the level of support they received from instructors and their family. Many of the students interviewed commented on "how they were not in the right mindset during high school to succeed in academics" during high school, but felt that by choosing to return to education to achieve personal goals, they were now more motivated.

The preparatory program helped many of the students further define their educational and career goals as they became more aware of the labour market, increased their comfort with course materials and developed better awareness of their strengths and interests. Another frequent comment was that the skills learned in the preparatory programs carried over into other aspects of their lives.

A common theme from the interviews was the positive relationships that existed in preparatory programs between students and their instructors. Participants appreciated the opportunity to work

closely with their teachers and connect on an individual basis. The authors also cite the sensitivity of instructors to students' personal learning styles and willingness to try multiple methods.

Non-Traditional Pathways to Postsecondary Education: A Qualitative Study of the Experience of Students in College Preparatory Programs was prepared by Glen Gorman, Thanh-Thanh Tieu and Taylor Cook from the Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning.