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2020 Insider's Guide



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How to make the most of your Grade 12 year

Aside from finding ways to maintain important end-of-school traditions, students should also focus on learning about self-care

KRISTEN THOMPSON
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

School definitely looks different this year. From masks and cohorts, to online events and distanced classes, students in all grades have to adapt to a new way of learning and socializing. And for Grade 12 students, this change can be particularly frustrating.

But there's still opportunity to embrace and even celebrate the year for what it is — you just need to know

how to make the most of graduating high school during a pandemic.

The last year of school is always a time of transition, and the usual challenges that come along with it have been magnified due to the pandemic, says Joyce Erogun, student engagement lead at School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON), which works in collaboration with Ontario school districts to support student mental health.

SMH-ON has been working with Grade 12 students since June, to get a sense of how they're coping with the chaos (and disappointment) of finishing high school in the midst of COVID-19. Twelfth graders this year are particularly worried about falling behind academically, and how that might affect them after graduation

in terms of not being adequately prepared for college or university.

They're also stressed about finances, "including trouble finding a summer job to pay for college or university, or not being able to work after high school," says Erogun. And of course, there's sadness about missed rites of passage, "like not being able to graduate with their class, attend prom or say warm goodbyes to high school friends as they prepare for the next leg of the journey."

But among the stresses and disappointments, there are ways Grade 12 students and their families can boost morale (and by extension, grades), while following COVID-19 protocols around health and safety.

High schoolers from coast-to-coast last school year, for example, held socially distant proms at home, organized physically distanced photo-ops and put together virtual graduation ceremonies with other schools.

"Students have shared so many innovative ideas during this time," says Erogun. "Like creating and sharing inspiring and funny videos, and getting together online."

Aside from finding ways to maintain important end-of-school traditions, students should also focus on learning about self-care — a skill that will continue to prove useful after graduation.

"Managing feelings of anxiety is more important than ever for this year's Grade 12 students," says Erogun. "Pay attention to good sleep habits, nutrition and exercise. Students can prioritize their mental health care by keeping things in perspective and trying to have a hopeful outlook, taking time for relaxation, noticing the good and connecting with friends, family and communities that affirm their strengths."

It may also help for students to focus on activities that make them happy, get involved in something bigger than themselves, write letters of encouragement to friends or other students and work with siblings to maintain traditions and habits that

aren't as impacted by COVID-19.

To share these ideas with high schoolers, Kids Help Phone and School Mental Health Ontario have teamed up with Jack.org, a national charity aimed at empowering youth through mental health resources, to create a COVID-19 Youth Mental Health Resource Hub.

The digital centre includes tips for students to recognize signs of anxiety and practice empathy with peers, as well as information about why the pandemic has hit some of us harder than others. There are also resources specifically geared toward BIPOC and LGBTQ youth, as well as parents and educators.

And Wisdom2Action, in partnership with SHM-ON, has developed a series of visual aids for youth describing various strategies for anxiety management. These resources have been co-developed in collaboration with students, and include exercises on breathing, muscle relaxation, visualization, gratitude and more.

Beyond practicing self-care, students moving to post-secondary institutions might also want to reach out to their school to learn what to expect in the coming year, inquire about financial, academic and mental health supports, and learn how the school is connecting its campus community during COVID-19. Being prepared for the year after graduation can help alleviate some of the stress and anxiety students are currently facing.

"Families can support their Grade 12 children by listening, validating and helping them to focus on positive aspects of their Grade 12 year and post-secondary destinations," says Erogun.

The pandemic impacts all of us in different ways, but as Grade 12 students during a challenging time like this, it's normal for anxiety to rise. "What matters most," she says, "is that we learn how to manage it for ourselves, how to be there for our peers and how to notice when we need to reach out for help."

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Yes, influencer marketing is a real job

The work that goes on behind the scenes to create marketable, profitable social media content reaches far beyond the realms of a quick click

LIZ BEDDALL
 SPECIAL TO THE STAR

When Jenna Jacobson completed her PhD in 2017, her decision to specialize in social media and influencer marketing was met with some resistance.

“Various people were very skeptical and told me they figured that social media wouldn’t even exist by the time I graduated,” says Jacobson, now an assistant professor at Ryerson University’s Ted Rogers School of Retail Management.

“The reality is that now, 90 per cent of Canadian adults are using some form of social media in their everyday lives. This is something that cannot be ignored, and it’s clear that organizations and academic institutions are taking the industry and its players much more seriously.”

Whether it be a video posted to TikTok, a photo to Instagram or a branded article to LinkedIn, Jacobson says the work that goes on behind the scenes to create marketable, memorable and profitable social media content reaches far beyond the realms of a quick click. She suggests that to achieve true influence in this sphere requires a skillset more in-demand than ever, as digital transformation continues to sweep the global landscape.

“You’ve got to understand search engine optimization, you’ve got to be skilled in design, you’ve got to know and understand the ethical and legal requirements of sponsorship disclosure,” she says.

“Research has shown that people



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today trust people more than they trust brands,” she adds. “Careers in this field are flourishing because corporations and brands are now wholly recognizing the value of influencers and micro-influencers, who are connecting to their audiences in what’s perceived as a more authentic way.”

Leighann C. Neilson, associate professor of marketing at Carleton University’s Sprott School of Business, has been teaching digital marketing since 2006. She says that while digital marketers and social media influencers seem to be under the spotlight at the moment, their existence in the business world is not new.

“When I first began teaching digital marketing in 2006 it was all about websites,” says Neilson. “Websites were very text-based and what I see now is a huge switch to image-based consumption. This really extends to

all areas of our lives.”

Neilson explains that students who choose to study within this field will walk out with a range of deeply desirable skills, not the least of which is the ability to self-brand — an area of expertise that is becoming hugely important across industries and in all professions.

“In our program we have students build a digital portfolio around a personal brand,” she says. “It is so important now to not just say, ‘I have these particular skills,’ but instead say, ‘Let me show them to you.’”

Chantel Guertin, who leads the Lifestyle Media graduate certificate program at Centennial’s Story Arts Centre, says the skills of an influencer were, in the past, mostly learned on the job. It was her goal in developing the Lifestyle Media program to prepare future digital marketers to enter the job force already hold-

ing the tools needed to thrive.

“We knew that this was no longer seen as just fluffy, fun side-work, but a real strategy that companies are now fully incorporating into their business plans,” she says. “It really has entered the realms of an industry that you have to be trained for.”

Guertin says that while there’s often a perception that influencers lead a life of relaxation and glamour, there is in fact intensely hard work going on behind the scenes, with more niche roles popping up at every edge of the social media landscape.

“One of my former students had a particular passion for video work and ended up specializing in GIF creation,” says Guertin. “Now they create customized GIFs for companies, whereas another student now works for an influencer agency, which pairs influencers with brands and companies.”

Blair Smith, coordinator of the digital marketing media postgraduate program at George Brown College, often reminds students that marketing themselves as an influencer of one requires all the same principles as managing the social media of a company with 10,000 people. This is why, he explains, skills such as agility, adaptability and problem-solving are just as important to any digital marketing curriculum as technical know-how.

“I’m biased of course, but I think digital marketing is the best job in the world,” he says. “Why? Because at the heart of it all, despite all the social networks and ads, it’s really about understanding humans and what will make them choose your product, service and ideas over another.”

He considers it “an essential literacy, whether you’re working for yourself or for someone else,” he adds. “And it’s a heck of a lot of fun.”

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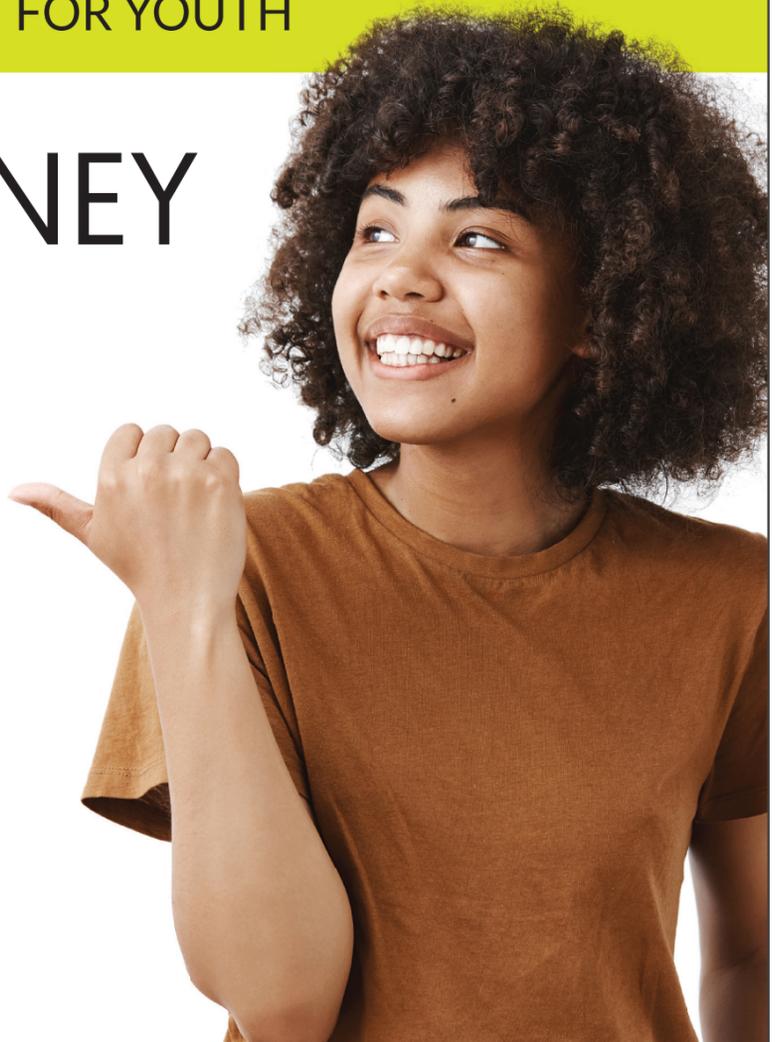


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'Greta Effect' drives interest in social justice

Young people are seeking out careers that touch on environmental, social justice and non-profit sectors

DICK SNYDER
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

So far, the events of 2020 appear to be custom-designed for activating the next generation of social justice and environmental warriors.

Wildfires, racial strife, questionable world leadership, ecosystems in peril ... oh, and a global pandemic. Don't forget the pandemic. You don't have to look far to find something in the news that makes the worry lines deepen.

Well, there's nothing like angst to drive action, especially among young people. Just last fall, we had the "Greta effect" — a media buzzword popularized on the heels of teen eco-warrior Greta Thunberg's assault on the decisions of the powers that be.

"I think the trend in waking up to the inequity and intergenerational injustice of climate catastrophe began in younger folks pre-Greta, but Greta did a great job of popularizing a mass movement and sustaining the urgency in the media — though adults in power are still doing extremely little about it," says Holly McLellan, executive director of Youth and Philanthropy Initiative Canada, which runs youth engagement programs across Canada.

"It's very important to note that Indigenous, Black and young people of colour have been pushing for system change and ecosystem protection for a long time, but do not receive the same visibility or opportunities for public platforms because of racism," she says, noting that Thunberg also cites this fact.

Recent data on the effect is sparse — partly due to the lurching halt

COVID-19 has brought to the economic and educational cycles — but it sure feels like the gradual rise in interest among young people in careers that touch on environmental, social justice and non-profits is maintaining an upward trajectory.



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An article posted to the website of Washington's National Educational Association in September cites the Greta effect for inspiring "unprecedented" environmental activism among youth.

In the 2019 federal election, for example, climate change was a major part of the conversation — and many in the movement would say it's about time.

At U of T's School of the Environment, it's David Powell's job to ensure young people find the practical work they need to complement their formal education. He helps place students in the workforce with environmental companies and research entities.

Powell has a wealth of information to help students find fulfilling jobs in the category, and he focuses much of his time on coaching and advising students on the academics required to enter jobs in the sector.

"It's a great job, working with these

many new jobs available related to renewable energy technologies," says Powell. He also directs students to the work being done by the Sustainability Network, a resource for people in the environmental non-profit sector.

Due to our current economic situation, we're in danger of losing some non-profit and social justice entities, warns veteran social justice leader Nick Saul. So there's a fear that the sector may not be able to absorb all the eager young graduates.

"I get calls all the time — pre-COVID and now — from people who want to get out of 'working for the man,' as we say, in the private sector," says Saul, CEO of Community Food Centres Canada and recently appointed chancellor of the University of Toronto's Victoria University. "They're looking to be involved in social justice work or community work and putting their skills into our sector."

In 2013, Carleton University launched the first — and still the only — Masters in Philanthropy and Non-profit Leadership. The program took 30 students in the first year, and has remained at capacity each year.

"[We] recognized that that non-profit sector accounts for about 1 in 10 full-time jobs and requires a highly educated labour force, at least in leadership positions," says Susan Phillips, professor at Carleton's School of Public Policy and Administration and editor of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly.

Aspiring young professionals, she says, "are certainly interested in social change and educations that will help them make the world a better place. Interest in the environment is strong, reflected in interest in our Masters in Sustainable Energy."

But as with any sector, the non-profit arena is subject to the prevailing winds of government and industry. "Applications fell when governments came to power that were less inclined to advance green agendas," she says.

Given the commitment by the Trudeau government to developing the environmental sector, we could be entering a boom time for future eco-warriors.

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Future physicians train for uncertainty

Healthcare education shifts to a focus on digital upskilling, a global mindset and the ability to adapt

LIZ BEDDALL
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended social norms, disrupted industries and caused unparalleled damage across the global landscape. Yet it has also led to a seismic refocusing of priorities and shed an unobstructed spotlight on the world's ever-urgent need for adept, skilled and future-facing healthcare professionals.

"My students are currently studying what they're living," says Steven Hoffman, a professor of global health at York University, which boasts Canada's first-ever global health undergraduate degree program.

"There are huge opportunities in the healthcare industry for students focusing on issues that defy national boundaries," says Hoffman. "We tend to think of healthcare existing solely within our community hospitals, but what we are seeing more acutely is that our health is often determined by factors and decisions made in places far beyond our immediate environments."

Considering that viruses don't carry passports, he says globally focused healthcare education is preparing students for issues that require a coordinated international response such as tobacco control, narcotics distribution and, of course, global pandemics.

"There are plenty of recent headlines around vaccine procurement, for example," says Hoffman. "In our learnings we are studying these issues one step further — we are looking at the structures we

have in place to distribute such a vaccine globally and what factors influence what countries would get it first and last."

Hoffman emphasizes that students of today have been born and raised in a globalized world, and are showing increased interest in careers that reflect the world in its entirety.

"It's just as easy to send a text message to a friend on the other side of the world as it is to pay a visit to your next-door neighbour," he says. "The rapid evolution of modern technology has meant that we live in an increasingly connected and interconnected world, and in the healthcare industry that's being reflected in a 'we're all in this together' mentality."

Michelle Okeefe, a chair of the Program Advisory Committee for the Digital Health Program at Algonquin College, is afforded a unique and firsthand view of the ways that technology is both impacting and elevating the delivery of healthcare in Canada. She brings her frontline experience as a health industry lead in the IT sector to the classroom, and has long emphasized the vital importance of technology upskilling in healthcare education.

"Digital health has been quietly chugging around in the background for years, but COVID-19 has brought this industry to the forefront," says Okeefe, who describes digital health as the leveraging of data, information and electronic solutions to support patients in their care journey.

She stresses that while the pandemic has brought with it tragedy of epic proportions, it has also pushed digital health solutions forward and provided a wake-up call to those who have traditionally resisted the emergence of virtual care and healthcare technology.

"What technology can help us to do in this context is provide us with



YORK UNIVERSITY

a big-picture view," she says. "We can vastly improve processes and leverage such tools as robotic process automation to free up time for clinicians to work exclusively at the top of their scope of practice. Digital health will also continue to improve access to care for those who need it most."

Dr. Marcus Law, director of foundations for the University of Toronto's MD program, agrees that medicine must continue to be taught in tandem with technological advances, but stresses that human-centred skills must also be prioritized in any healthcare context.

"Let's look at it this way," he says. "Students who enter medical school in 2020 will finish in 2024, then they will take on a residency for maybe two to five years. That brings these practicing physicians up to 2029 — that's a long time away. The world will have changed a lot by then."

It's with this in mind that Dr. Law says he and his colleagues have built their MD curriculum, emphasizing the need to train future physicians who are prepared for times of great uncertainty — like the times we're facing today.

"The public may think that an education in healthcare is all about memorizing concepts and terms, but remember that no one would have been able to teach students about COVID-19 two years ago," he says.

"The pandemic has reminded us that the world is constantly changing, and as healthcare providers we must remain adaptive and possess the humility to know that learning will never cease. That is true both at this particular time in history and will remain so into the future."

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Finding fulfillment in the skilled trades

In Ontario, there will soon be more jobs in the trades than people to fill them

STEPHANIE ORFORD
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

A typical day starts early for Benjamin Valliquette — an entrepreneur, a carpenter and a construction manager. First it's breakfast with his wife and two young kids, then it's off to the construction site.

Work there usually starts with a team meeting. "In the morning huddle you talk about what you got done yesterday, what are you going to do today and what you need from others to succeed," he says. "That's the magic of getting into this industry — it's 100 per cent a team sport."

Opportunities abound in the skilled trades. "Ontario is facing a looming crisis: There will soon be more jobs in the trades than people to fill them," says Ontario Minister of Labour Monte McNaughton. "As a government, we're tackling this problem head-on."

McNaughton recently announced \$43 million in provincial funding to help young people from Grade 1 and up learn how they can find a career in the skilled trades. "When kids are growing up ... they need to know how to enter the skilled trades," he says.

The pandemic has made it more difficult to predict the labour market and what kinds of opportunities might lie on the horizon, says McNaughton.

However, certain jobs are currently in high demand, including customer service representatives, cooks, transport truck drivers, construction trade helpers, automotive service technicians, IT support technicians, industrial engineering and manufacturing technologists, bakers, teachers, educational assistants, painters and plumbers.

People who work in the skilled trades make an annual salary 25 per cent higher than the average Canadian salary, according to the Canadian Construction Association. On average, an electrician makes \$62,000 per year.

No matter which trade you choose, "the learning never stops,"



BENJAMIN VALLIQUETTE

says Valliquette. The industry is always evolving and incorporating new technologies.

"If you show an interest in getting trained in [a specific skillset], the super or your foreman will support you in that," he says. "You can go anywhere once you become a skilled [tradesperson]. There are so many educational bridging opportunities."

Valliquette studied carpentry, building restoration, construction engineering and construction science and management at George Brown College and is now doing his executive MBA at Northwestern University and York University.

A skilled trade can also take you far beyond a job in construction, says Valliquette. The entrepreneur, carpenter and construction manager forged his own path in the skilled trades, using these skillsets as a springboard for his own goals.

Following his passion for music, he and an old friend fulfilled their childhood dream of creating a music

studio. Using Valliquette's construction expertise, they built Lynx Music, a "modern music conservatory" in downtown Toronto with music facilities available for people of all ages and skill levels.

"Construction is where art and science meet," Valliquette says.

Volunteer in the skilled trades

Skilled tradespeople have specialized skills they can use to give back to their communities. Before Valliquette started his skilled trades education at George Brown College, he volunteered in the Middle East and Africa, providing humanitarian relief.

"I realized that, because we have this privilege here ... we should do everything we can do to help others," he says. "I thought that following my heart and also this trade would be a way that I could help people."

Valliquette says people with a skilled trade can volunteer to bring deeper satisfaction to their work. Volunteering could be as simple as

helping an elderly couple in your neighbourhood with yard work or volunteering at the local library to show kids how to make candleholders, says Valliquette, who has volunteered with Habitat for Humanity and numerous other community projects.

"For me, a key ingredient is that social community element to my projects," he says.

Volunteering can help people in the skilled trades develop their trade-specific skillsets as well as their project management and leadership skills. It can also help those who are just finding their niche to discover what kind of work they like best.

It's also an opportunity for a skilled tradesperson or student to develop rewarding lifelong social and professional connections. "Once you get into the trades, there's just so many pathways to help people," says Valliquette. "Start with where your passion is."

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Gen Z and the future of creativity

This generation is more comfortable educating themselves online, but not all online courses are created equal

STEPHANIE ORFORD
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

As Generation Z heads to college and university, post-secondary institutions are rethinking how to provide education that fosters creativity.

Gen Z is the generation born after 1993, according to Statistics Canada. As millennials graduate into the workforce, more Gen Zers are heading to university.

They currently make up about 21 per cent of the student population at Ryerson University, and that number is increasing, says Gary Hepburn, dean of The Chang School of Continuing Education at Ryerson.

Ryerson is working overtime to respond to the needs of what McKinsey & Company calls "the first generation of true digital natives." This year in response to the pandemic, The Chang School transitioned from offering courses that were 60 per cent in-person and 40 per cent online to offering most courses 100 per cent online.

That probably suits Gen Z just fine. According to McKinsey, this generation is more comfortable educating themselves online than in traditional learning institutions. This may be one reason why enrolment at The Chang School is now up 15 per cent over last year.

"Using online-only, we're beginning to move toward enrolment records," says Hepburn. "And there's no sign of this stopping."

However, not all online courses are created equal. That's why Ryerson and The Chang School are also enhancing the online experience with game-based learning, case-based examples, technology-based solutions and experiential learning.

"A lot of this is designed to be career relevant," says Hepburn.

It's not just about delivering the same old course material in a new mode. It's about rethinking the course material entirely and making it more relevant to the real world.

"We have the emergence now of the true online education consumer and I think Gen Zers are at the forefront of this," says Hepburn. "This isn't just learning for the sake of learning. These are people who are going to go out and have an opportunity to shape the world like few generations have done before them."

Pragmatism is a key characteristic of Gen Z, according to McKinsey. Today's education must be applicable to real life.

"Lectures are important to share with students established knowledge, theories, ways of thinking, but the true magic comes in when we ask students to apply those," says Hepburn.

Some Ryerson courses encourage creativity by using case-based learning to bring real-world problems into the classroom.

"It's not only having the skills to ... bring new ideas forward and solve problems," says Hepburn. "We're trying to ... give them the skills to take a leadership role as the economy, and in many respects society, is reformed at the end of the pandemic."

Students' learning skyrockets when



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their education gives them real responsibility and context, says Sami Ul Haq, a member of Gen Z and a graduate student at the Institute of Medical Science in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto.

Ul Haq says he would like to see more lectures integrated with a project aspect. "I've taken a lot of courses in undergrad — a lot of technical bio, chemistry, physics courses — but I don't remember them as well as I do my thesis experiences," he says.

The thesis project he did as part of his fourth year in the undergraduate Pharmacology program at the U of T helped him learn much more about himself and his area of study than he would have in traditional classes alone, he says.

This project produced real results that directly affected other people's work in the field — and drove him to excel. "In biomedical research, you're not an island," says Ul Haq. "Everything you do builds on other people's work."

The real-life responsibility and applicability of his project boosted his educational experience. "In scientific research your experiments get published and they can potentially have an impact on patient care down the line," he says.

The thesis project required teamwork, communication skills, leadership skills and time management — all skills that students might not learn in a traditional lecture hall, but which are critical in a working environment.

"It helped me grow as a person because you have a thing to do, and if you don't do it, there's some accountability," says Ul Haq.

Project-based courses and research have helped him learn how to be creative in his field. "It encourages you to look at things and find ways of doing things that are potentially more efficient or better — finding answers or investigating things in a way that has not been done before," he says.

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CEL takes learning beyond academia

Community-engaged learning gives students an opportunity to see academic topics from a real-world perspective

STEPHANIE ORFORD
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Classes and education programs that blend different academic disciplines and real-world perspectives deliver powerful learning experiences.

Universities and colleges are now using a range of educational tools to bring these experiences to classrooms, including community-engaged learning (also called service learning) and multidisciplinary studies.

Multidisciplinary programs are the definition of a multi-perspective education. They bring together courses from different disciplines to give students multiple angles on a topic. For example, students in cognitive science programs at universities across Canada take courses including philosophy, linguistics and computer science, according to a report by Higher Education Strategy Associates.

Community-engaged learning (CEL) is also focused on giving students the opportunity to see academic topics from a real-world perspective. Michelle Arnot held her first CEL class at the University of Toronto in 2009, called Pharmacology and Toxicology in Society.

"I was really concerned with the fact that students often take university classes to tick a box, and they don't necessarily always understand the applicability of the knowledge that they're learning," says Arnot.

She designed the course to help students learn through real-world experiences in the field by partnering them with community organizations, many of which provided harm reduction services for substance-us-

ing communities in Toronto.

"A key tenant of community-engaged learning is personal growth," says Arnot. "Students go through a broadening of compassion, if you will. They gain a different perspective."

As CEL has grown in popularity, faculty skepticism has evaporated. When Arnot's course launched in fall 2009 it was one of only 18 CEL courses at the university. Now the univer-



MARK BLINCH/RYERSON UNIVERSITY

sity has around 4,000 students in 53 CEL courses spread across a diverse range of disciplines at undergraduate and graduate levels. And the diversity of disciplines that offer CEL courses is growing, says Arnot.

There's growing support for faculty that teach CEL, too. The University of Toronto's Centre for Community Partnerships has created a fellowship program to help faculty develop more CEL courses.

Community-engaged learning "makes you more aware of the community around you and things you

normally wouldn't understand," says Sami Ul Haq, a graduate student doing his master's on lung cancer at the U of T Institute of Medical Science in the Faculty of Medicine.

He took Arnot's class and worked at Davenport Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre for his community placement. His work there included preparing harm reduction kits for community mem-

bers who used illicit substances. "The experience shattered a lot of biases and incorrect beliefs and assumptions I had," he says.

Community-engaged learning also helps students remember the course material better than they might otherwise. "When I first started, people were like, 'Students aren't going to learn anything,'" says Arnot, but over time she was able to demonstrate that her students tend to do well academically.

"Doing this helps you learn the things you learn in lecture better because you're actually applying them, as opposed to learning things in lecture for an exam and then forgetting about it," says Ul Haq.

These are also experiences students take with them into the world when they graduate. More community-engaged learning means better educated graduates ready to tackle the diverse challenges that await them in their chosen careers.

Isabelle Laksono attended Arnot's class four years ago and did her community placement at StreetHealth in Regent Park.

"I was really excited," she says. "Especially at the U of T where there are really big classes in science programs. In Pharmacology, for us it's a lot about lectures and learning from textbooks."

She volunteered twice a week over four months to survey community members and identify how the organization could serve them better.

"It gave me a better understanding of the importance of healthcare access," says Laksono, who is now a third-year medical student at the U of T. "Now every time I'm interacting with patients I use that learning to have an open mindset and advocate for considering different socioeconomic factors in all of my interactions with patients."

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