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CIBC Navigator Program designed to empower students with disabilities

A new program in support of employment opportunities for students with disabilities is up and running thanks to a major gift from CIBC.

The CIBC Navigator Program is a five-year project made possible by a \$250,000 donation. Its goals are to support the development of co-operative education placement positions for students with disabilities, provide comprehensive supports to enhance student success upon placement and encourage all students within the University's [Accommodated Learning Centre](#) to participate in volunteer or co-operative education opportunities. The program also seeks to develop effective partnerships with employers so that they can provide quality co-operative educational opportunities for students with disabilities.



“Through this project, we are building an environment based on diversity and inclusion,” says Eileen Sowunmi, a third-year sociology, co-operative education student who has helped develop the CIBC Navigator Program from the student perspective. “Initiatives like this help reduce the stigma surrounding people with disabilities. With different forms of accommodation, such as adaptive technology, students with disabilities are able to flourish in various work environments, benefiting themselves and employers.”

Co-operative education combines real-world work experience with academic studies. Its benefits are many, including allowing students to explore a variety of employment sectors, develop valuable research skills for future work experience or graduate school, aid in the transition to a career upon graduation, increase students' marketability after graduation and more.

In addition to tangible skill development such as interpersonal, planning, team and problem-solving skills, co-operative education experiences increase social and community connections for students and enhance a sense of belonging, self-identity, confidence and purpose. Many students with disabilities are hampered in accessing these benefits because the framework to help them into the workplace does not exist.

“As an institution we are strongly committed to inclusion by supporting the development of disability-confident and inclusive co-op placements,” says Jasmin Berteotti, the U of L’s director of Co-operative Education and Applied Studies. “I have seen how co-op experiences empower students by providing them with meaningful and paid career-related opportunities. With CIBC’s support, we intend to continue this legacy and ensure these impactful experiences are also accessible to our students with disabilities.”

The yearly funds will support the hiring of a program developer and navigator, a hiring subsidy for employers, and scholarships for students selected to participate in the program. The first year will see three students selected to take part.

“We believe the CIBC Navigator program will have a strong impact on the students’ competitiveness in the labour market and enable them to be full participants in our economy,” says Per Humle, senior vice-president, Alberta and Central Canada, Personal and Small Business Banking. “This, in turn, will also lead to increased social and community connections and help build a sense of belonging and future opportunities.”

The investment by CIBC is part of the U of L’s SHINE campaign and highlights the corporate community’s involvement in supporting students and promoting opportunities for them to thrive while working to achieve their academic goals.

“This is a great example of the corporate community partnering with the University to create positive change and generate economic opportunities for all,” says Mark Slomp, executive director of Student Services at the U of L.

To view online: <https://www.uleth.ca/unews/article/cibc-navigator-program-designed-empower-students-disabilities>

-- 30 --

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