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University of Lethbridge student earns national work-integrated learning award

University of Lethbridge student Lionel Migrino has won a national work-integrated learning award after his efforts through a co-operative education work placement led to tangible change at a major Alberta employer.

Migrino, an undergraduate student studying Human Resources Management and Labour Relations in the Dhillon School of Business, entered Pembina Pipeline Corporation dividing his time between multiple teams — Compliance and Technical Training, Integrated Talent Management and Talent Acquisition, and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. His passion for equity, diversity and inclusion drove change and inspired action among employees, as he became a sought-after speaker joining business strategy sessions to bring awareness and issue a call to action for leaders to see the ability in disability.



For Migrino, who has cerebral palsy, the work was personal. He says it hasn't been uncommon to be made fun of for the way he talks, the way he walks, or to be the target of microaggressions, even on the job. At one job interview, Migrino says he was even told his disability was a liability.

"I want people to address how they can help people reach their full potential," says Migrino. "How can they empower ability? All I want is for people to see that ability in disability because we're all capable, it's just if people will give us an opportunity."

Migrino, who attends the ULethbridge Calgary campus, is one of four students recognized nationally for their commitment to work-integrated learning (WIL) and their

determination to contribute positively to their workplaces. He's been recognized as a 2021 Co-operative Education and Work Integrated Learning Canada (CEWIL Canada) Student of the Year Award winner.

He learned a valuable lesson on the first day of his co-op term, taking the advice of a colleague to heart.

"She said 'Make sure that you stay visible.' With that she meant make sure you are heard, make sure you are valued, make sure your talents are recognized, make sure you are seen, and you have a voice," says Migrino.

Shortly after beginning his placement, he had an idea for disability training that would include the consequences of inaccessibility and some of his personal experiences with exclusion. He got the support to do the training with his immediate team initially, and before long he was asked to speak to different business units, then to different leadership groups. Most recently, Migrino created a series of Disability Awareness Training workshops that will be available to Pembina employees this year.

"I created the disability awareness training in hopes that people, personally and professionally, will take action on accessibility and inclusion," says Migrino. "This training will increase participants' awareness of accessibility, the disability models, ableism, microaggressions, and communication."

In his disability awareness training, Migrino encourages leaders to get uncomfortable in conversations because therein lies the possibility for change.

"I'm always uncomfortable living in this ableist world because I know the systems that are put in place are not made for people like me," he says. "I always ask people to embrace uncomfortableness for 15 minutes, for however long I am facilitating the training, because if you're not uncomfortable, then how can you learn? I ask them to look at themselves and consider how can they make the world more accessible for people with different kinds of disabilities."

Martha Mathurin-Moe, executive director of equity, diversity and inclusion at ULethbridge, says Migrino is a deserving recipient of the national award having had the chance to work alongside him to further EDI initiatives on campus.

"Lionel is a true example of an EDI champion for change," says Mathurin-Moe. "His continued commitment to advocate and centre the voices and experiences of persons with disabilities is a key part of the work we must continue to do in order to create equitable, safe, accessible and inclusive spaces for all students."

The co-op experience has proven to be a win-win for all involved — so much so that Migrino recently accepted a permanent job with Pembina.

“I really want to continue in that EDI space and become a leader and strong advocate for empowering others’ voices,” he says.

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