

# college *matters*

ACADEMIC UPGRADING  
NEWS & SUCCESS STORIES  
FROM ONTARIO'S  
PUBLIC COLLEGES

SPRING 2023



discovering  
a new  
path

JADE'S  
INSPIRATIONAL  
JOURNEY  
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# CSC

COLLEGE SECTOR COMMITTEE  
FOR ADULT UPGRADING + ACE



# The promise of Spring... and all the opportunities it brings



Spring brings with it growth and change. Collectively, we are watching some changes unfold with our college Academic Upgrading clientele, both post-pandemic and even pre-pandemic.

We are seeing more newcomers in our programs, many more individuals who are employed in one, two, or even three jobs while trying to upgrade for a new career, more younger people, an increasing number of individuals with complex barriers including mental health challenges and, as always, those who just need a small leg up in AU to launch their path to postsecondary, apprenticeship or direct employment.

Even after almost 60 years in existence, college AU programming continues to be a strong, stable, meaningful and relevant place for adult learners to come to when they are ready to embark on a path to improve their lives and, so often, the lives of their families as well.

We celebrate some of their stories in this issue of *College Matters* — with sincere thanks to our

college AU colleagues who have so generously shared them.

Spring also brings with it the promise of exciting things to come — including our upcoming CSC conference in June at Niagara College (first in-person CSC conference since June 2019!).

I would be remiss if I didn't address the theme and inspiration of our June 2023 conference — Two Row Wampum — and the principles of friendship, peace and respect that it represents.

Tom Keeler, general manager of the *Two Row Times*, says:

“The Two Row Wampum is a foundational philosophical principle, a universal relationship of non-denomination, balance and harmony between different forces.

The Two Row principles of peace, respect and friendship can exist within any relationship between autonomous being working in concert.”

The Two Row Wampum can also represent the relationship between colleagues, between teacher and student, all of us travelling side by side in friendship, peace and respect.

This is the spirit in which we hope you will celebrate this year's gathering as we come together to engage, to collaborate, to learn and to grow as autonomous beings working in concert to support our AU students — and one another.

—*Barbara Glass, Executive Director, CSC*

# Upgrading allowed her to feel more confident about returning to school.

In Academic Upgrading, we get the privilege of assisting learners accomplish their goals and change their lives. Sometimes, we simply take the back seat and witness focused and driven individuals use our services exactly how they need them.

**JADE** is such a student: determined; capable; resilient; and, quite simply, inspirational.

In the Fall of 2018, Jade suffered a brain injury while at work that resulted in additional PTSD symptoms.

As a nurse, Jade focused on helping and healing all who were under her care; something that is clearly part of her nature. However, when one cares for others in this capacity, it often comes at the expense of one's own self-care. Jade says that burnout was on the horizon for her then — and the injury almost happened serendipitously.

After the incident, Jade focused on healing and working with her "new brain." Getting beyond the belief that the injury was a punishment was an important step for her. Positive change came once she found acceptance in the situation. Instead of a punishment, the universe was simply redirecting her life.

The challenges of this injury were then met with a drive to move forward and, in the process, discover a new path.

Against pressure to pursue other fast-paced programs, Jade advocated for her own future. She knew that she wanted to be working in a capacity that connected her to her indigenous heritage and culture.

Jade came to our upgrading program already an accomplished student. Upgrading allowed her to feel more confident about returning to school and become acquainted with the resources on campus.



Now, Jade is in our Social Service Worker – Indigenous Specialization program and is an elected member of Cambrian's Indigenous Student Circle. She says there are still good and bad days in relation to her injury. But she has found balance between managing her studies and her personal wellness.

It is an understatement to say that Jade has been through a lot and has done so with grace. Her mantra is, "One day at a time. One moment at a time."

Looking to the future, Jade says she'd like to specialize in mental health for youth and use her skills in the community.

—Jessica Ravenscroft, Cambrian College Academic Upgrading



# The program supported them through challenging times.



Due to intense bullying during their transition, **LOGAN** stopped attending high school. This led them to believe that they had lost it all with no hope for the future. Nothing felt good and they just stayed at home and struggled with debilitating anxiety and depression.

Logan tried homeschooling and moving out of province — but continued to be paralyzed by fear and could not force themselves to leave the house.

Logan eventually moved back to Simcoe, ON and made the initial phone call to the Haldimand Norfolk Adult Learning Centre (HNLC), our community's local literacy council. This move to HNLC was a stepping-stone to academic upgrading at Fanshawe College.

The thought of coming to a college was terrifying for Logan and walking through the door for the first time was a complete leap of faith.

Logan was a learner in the Fanshawe College upgrading program from 2018-2021 and stuck with their studies throughout the pandemic via zoom classes, emails and phone calls.

When Logan and I first met, we discussed short- and long-term goals. For Logan, this meeting and conversation sparked joy and fascination — and led to a plan to help them reach their ultimate goal of college.

After completing their upgrading, Logan achieved their goal and was accepted into the Adventure Expedition and Interpretive Leadership program at Fanshawe's Simcoe/Norfolk Regional Campus.

They have now found a chosen family within this special little campus and feel that they are appreciated and supported.

Logan was even invited by a professor to lead a class as they have such a breadth of knowledge on fungi! Following their graduation, Logan plans to continue the study of mycology.

Logan highly recommends the academic upgrading program to others. They carry our business cards with them and share them with others who may be unsure of what to do next.

Logan deeply appreciates that the program supported them through challenging times, helped to keep them focussed, had excellent instruction and never gave up on helping them to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals.

—Tracey McIntyre, Fanshawe College Academic Upgrading





“I would recommend academic upgrading to anyone who needs to improve their grades or is missing credits.”

**RYAN** struggled to find his path.

Since leaving high school, Ryan considered several career paths but never found his true calling until last year. His passion, he discovered, was the paramedic field.

But he quickly learned that to follow his passion, he would need to earn the science prerequisites of the program before he could apply.

Ryan had a hard time with science in high school and opted not to take grade 11 or 12 science — not realizing how it might hold him back later on. Ryan contacted an Academic Advisor at Algonquin College for advice on how he could earn the requirements he needed for the Paramedic program and was quickly directed to Academic Upgrading.

Within a week, Ryan was enrolled in upgrading. And within two semesters, Ryan not only received the science credits for both Chemistry and Biology — he aced both courses. Ryan gives thanks to his exceptional professors Akram Bagheri and Safoura Danesh for assisting him in his success.

“I realized that I was a lot better at science than I previously thought,” says Ryan. “This boosted my confidence and gave me the credits that I needed to apply for the Paramedic program.

I would recommend Academic Upgrading to anyone who needs to improve their grades or is missing credits for their desired program. I promise you won't be disappointed!”

—Akram Bagheri, Algonquin College Academic Upgrading



**ALGONQUIN**  
COLLEGE

# Partnerships within the college, like CICE & Upgrading, benefit students.



The CICE Program (Community Integration Through Co-operative Education) started at Confederation College 10 years ago. Since its inception, CICE and Academic Upgrading have worked closely together—making joint presentations to potential students and their families as well as to guidance counsellors at local schools and consulting on students who might benefit from one program or the other.

Academic Upgrading has also offered courses like Soft Skills and Essential Skills that help CICE students get ready for employment. As Rose Hankkio, the Lead Integration Facilitator of CICE states, "Both programs work hard to remove barriers to education and employment that many of our learners face."

CICE has been able to support students from Academic Upgrading in accessing postsecondary by helping them overcome learning, social, and intellectual challenges.

Students are supported in and outside the classroom by Integration Facilitators who help them

learn study skills, prepare for tests and overcome their specific challenges so that they can succeed after college with their next goal — whether it's for employment or further education.

Rose also states that "students who thought attending postsecondary was not possible for them given the learning challenges they face have the opportunity to grow, develop academic and essential workplace skills, and form meaningful friendships and social connections too. It is inspiring to see our students grow in confidence and self-esteem during their two years in CICE."

Academic Upgrading can help by building their skills and confidence before they enter the CICE Program. It can also help once they have graduated from CICE if they decide that they want to pursue a PS program and need to upgrade to meet the admission requirements.

Following are the stories of two wonderful students, Samantha and Elsie, who started in Academic Upgrading and are about to graduate CICE with big plans ahead of them!

# “Do like I’ve been doing. Don’t give up. Just keep pushing forward.”

**SAMANTHA** came into Academic Upgrading after a frustrating experience in high school. She was told that she would never be able to work or learn or even live independently because of her learning disability. But somewhere inside her, she knew differently.

Her mother had attended Academic Upgrading and knew that it had a different approach — one that might work for Samantha. Samantha started first in the Personal and Career Development course and then moved into the upgrading program to work on her math and communication skills.

Everyone who worked with her in Upgrading saw her potential and was excited when she decided to apply for the CICE Program. She is now finishing her second year and will graduate soon.

Samantha has proven to herself and everyone around her that we should never underestimate anyone’s potential.

Samantha is fully capable of learning and just finished her contract at her first paying job. She is a leader among her peers in CICE and a favourite among her teachers.

When asked if she has advice for other students thinking about coming into Upgrading or CICE, she says, “Do like I’ve been doing: Don’t give up. Just keep pushing forward.”

**ELSIE** says that her high school experience was “kind of horrible.” She was bullied and never felt supported. While Elsie graduated with her grade 12 at the Locally Developed level, she knew she could do better.

After taking time to raise her kids, Elsie realized it was time for her to pursue her dream of being a Personal Support Worker. She had been out of school for a while and knew that she needed to build her Communications and Math skills.

She started in Academic Upgrading, worked hard on her classes and developed her skills. She then transferred into the CICE program so that she could take college courses and do work placements in her field.

Like Samantha, Elsie started in the CICE Program with a leg up, thanks to Upgrading. She knew her way around the college, knew how to use her college email and Blackboard and had learned how to advocate for what she needed so she could be successful. Her plan is to graduate from CICE and work as a PSW. And, if she keeps her marks up, she hopes to register at Lakehead University in the Native Nurses Entry Program.

Elsie’s favourite thing about Academic Upgrading was meeting other single parents. She also said that she tells her friends and family who are thinking about coming into Academic Upgrading to “keep their minds open.” She said she experienced no judgement or racism in Academic Upgrading or CICE.

“I’ve been talking to my cousins,” she says, “and they want to come back to school but they’re scared because there’s so much racism, they think. But I tell them that there’s not. I have never experienced that here.”

She also has some inspiring advice for people thinking about Academic Upgrading or CICE:

“It’s never too late to come back to school. Even if you’re a single parent it could be difficult, but it’s never too late. Even if you have a learning disability, there are people to help you.”

—Judy Barton, *Confederation College Academic Upgrading*





# “I never thought I would be as successful as I have been so far.”



“I am feeling quite good about myself in the Adult Upgrading program. I never thought I would be as successful as I have been so far,” says

**DARBY**, an Academic Upgrading student at St. Lawrence College in Brockville.

“The evening after I enrolled in upgrading, I tried my first writing sample for my communications course. My instructor looked over the assignment and gave me some good advice to improve my writing. I worked on it some more, made changes and then I submitted it. I was happy that my instructor was helping me recognize the parts of the assignment that I needed to work on,” Darby explains.

And there the journey began.

“I remember that one of the instructors told me that I would really enjoy the Adult Upgrading program because it is low stress and you can work at your own pace,” recounts Darby.

“They were right.

I attend class once a week and often work at home on my assignments, when my work schedule permits,” says Darby.

“In my previous schooling, I didn’t get the chance to take English courses at the college level. I have really enjoyed learning how to dissect different stories and to share my own perspective on them. The one-on-one help and instant feedback make completing my assignments much easier. And it helps improve my marks too!

I am happy that I can work at my own pace. Writing comes more easily to me now. I will soon be starting the Math course. I am determined to work through it for as long as it takes. It is a course I think I will need for my future, and I know I will get the help I need.”

Darby is a very positive and very motivated individual. He loves extra-curricular activities and plays several sports. When he competed in cross-country, he won the Most Inspirational Runner award. Darby brings his motivation to the classroom as he strides towards his career aspirations. “If you have a goal or dream,” he says, “take each step that it takes in order to get there!”

Darby’s goals and dreams include planning for postsecondary, as he is considering his many options for the future.

—Robert Bell and Laura Gibson-Hawkins, St. Lawrence College Brockville Academic Upgrading (Career/ College Prep)



## St. Lawrence College



# “ACE gave me the hope I needed to get started again.”

“As I looked forward to the next big step in my life, I was unsure what to do and how to begin,” says **JOY**. “However, I was determined to attend school. I found the help and support I needed to fulfill my dreams at Niagara College.”

Before Joy immigrated to Canada, she was a student in the Philippines working towards a career in nursing. Arriving in Canada, she continued to hold her dream of one day becoming a nurse. She knew she needed to improve her English skills to be successful so, when she discovered the ACE program, she knew it was the first stepping stone to furthering her education.

She credits the kind and caring student advisor in Academic Upgrading with giving her the encouragement she needed. “She gave me hope that I could achieve my career,” Joy says.

Once in the program, she described her professor as an “outstanding” mentor who sees the potential in each of her students.

“I have never met someone who recognized that I was capable of doing better. The idea of starting from zero was challenging, but ACE gave me the hope I needed to get started again.”

Joy recently completed the ACE program with a final mark of 96%. She was surprised that she had achieved such a high grade in her class. “I first believed that I would be lucky to just pass the class, and I had my doubts about my ability to get a high mark; but I stayed focused and was determined to succeed.”

Joy has applied to both the PSW and Pharmacy Assistant programs and has been accepted into both.

Her passion, however, continues to be in nursing. She has applied to the Practical Nursing Program at Niagara College and is hoping to hear good news soon.



Joy's goal is to work in a long-term care facility. “As I work towards becoming a nurse, I am looking forward to working with the elderly one day. My interest in working with seniors was sparked by my early years in the Philippines, where I was raised by my grandparents.”

Reflecting on her experience and offering suggestions to others, Joy says, “As a new immigrant, I was scared, but I didn't lose hope and saw it as an opportunity to grow. I would tell others not to be afraid to get out of their comfort zone and keep their eye on the goal.”

—Rebecca Nicholls, Niagara College Academic Upgrading



“The environment, from orientation to graduation, was one of constant support from staff to peers to professors.”



ASHANA

Due to this environment, I persevered through the course and saw Humber as my home, my safe space, and built on my sense of self.

With the knowledge gained, I graduated and continued within the Humber community where I obtained a diploma in Community and Justice Services.

I then continued to Guelph Humber to gain my degree in Bachelor of Applied Science - Justice Studies.

I am currently Master of Education - Teaching and Learning.

I have also come full circle. I am now a Humber employee, working closely with the very Academic Upgrading program that helped me to start my academic journey.

Even when we think we are too old, or unsure of the direction we want to go, just taking that first step could open a world of possibilities you could never dream of.”

—Ashana, former student, Humber College Academic Upgrading

“I remember thinking, how am I going to go back to school after 10 years, in a new country?

I was terrified but decided to take that leap of faith. I enrolled in Academic Upgrading at Humber College and it was the best decision that I made.

The environment, from orientation to graduation, was one of constant support from staff to peers to professors.

There was not a day where I felt that I didn't belong.







This year's 3-day CSC Conference will be held at Niagara College on June 6, 7 & 8.

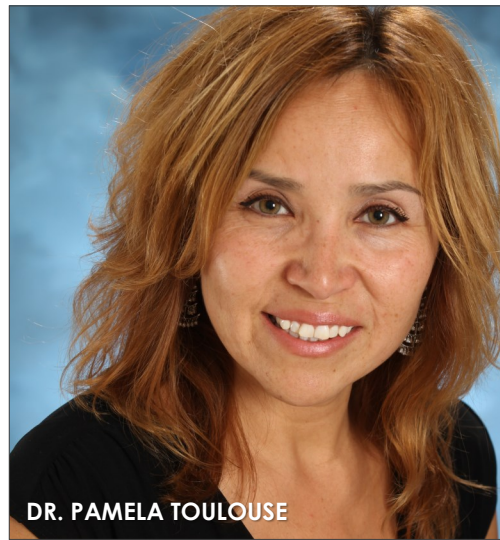
Inspired by the Two Row Wampum, a symbol of commitment to friendship, peace and respect, the conference will welcome college adult upgrading delegates from across the province to connect, learn and share.

For the first time, the CSC has created a conference website where delegates can learn more about the Two Row Wampum history, register for the conference, book accommodations, find out more about speakers and plan their schedules — all at [cscconference.ca](https://cscconference.ca).

Featured speakers include Dr. Pamela Toulouse, consultant in Indigenous education, training and cultural safety and member of Sagamok First Nation and Julie Brown, psychotherapist, wellness and mindfulness expert and specialist in the treatment of grief, trauma, anxiety and depression (online at [tabonotherapy.ca](https://tabonotherapy.ca)).

Workshops will cover a wide range of topics including Mitigating Trauma in Academic Upgrading Classrooms, Positive Space in the Classroom: Supporting Learning for Your 2SLGBTQIA+ Students, Decolonizing Digital Delivery, Being Trauma-Informed in the Workplace, Ontario's Employment Services Transformation and much more.

Watch [cscconference.ca](https://cscconference.ca) for information and updates on programming and special events.



DR. PAMELA TOULOUSE



JULIE BROWN

# college *matters*

Collegematters is a publication of the College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading (CSC), the support organization representing academic upgrading programs and staff in Ontario's 24 public colleges.

The CSC created and administers the Academic and Career Entrance program (ACE), a recognized grade 12 equivalent certificate program provided on campus and online, and the SKILLSMARKER suite of assessment tools.

## CSC

COLLEGE SECTOR COMMITTEE  
FOR ADULT UPGRADING + ACE

## ACE

ACADEMIC + CAREER ENTRANCE

## SKILLSMARKER

ACADEMIC + VOCATIONAL ASSESSMENT TOOLS

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