

# CollegeMatters

ACADEMIC UPGRADING NEWS FROM ONTARIO'S PUBLIC COLLEGES | SPRING 2025

## Ready for his next adventure

Siyabonga's upgrading story

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# From the Executive Director

As many of you know, we cancelled our annual CSC provincial conference this year due to travel and budget restrictions across our colleges. But the good news is that we were able to host four regional meetings instead!

Approximately 140 AU managers, faculty and staff attended the regional sessions. We shared updates about our colleges, discussed labour market challenges, revisited ACE program guidelines and reviewed the LBS performance measures — with a particular focus on the “Completion” measure and culminating task administration.

For a portion of the afternoons, we divided into breakout groups and engaged in roundtable discussions about many different areas of interest including curriculum, assessment, staffing models, budgets, student services, program delivery models and more.

Many comments in the meeting evaluations noted how valuable these opportunities are to meet with those from other colleges who do similar work. In some cases, participants also stated the value of meeting with people from their own colleges, especially those who have multiple sites and seldom get to dialogue with their internal counterparts.

Given the success of both the Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 regional meetings, we hope to host another set of regional sessions in Fall 2025. In the meantime, have a safe and [enjoyable summer](#)!



Barbara Glass, Executive Director, CSC



Eastern Region Meeting, Kingston, April 15



Western Region Meeting, Breakout Group, Ingersoll, April 29



Central Region Meeting, Breakout Group, Toronto, April 30



Northern Region Meeting, Sudbury, May 14

# “Upgrading played a crucial role in helping us feel welcomed, supported and equipped to thrive.”

“When my older brother and I arrived in Canada from South Africa, our main objective was to study.

Having the passion to become an engineer, and my brother a nurse, we were referred to Academic Upgrading (Academic and Career Preparation) to meet the requirements to pursue those passions in postsecondary programs at the college.

We are proud to have been welcomed with incomprehensible kindness. I remember entering their office for the first time and being met with a heartfelt smile, which helped lower all guards and nervousness.

They exemplified unwavering commitment to student success through consistent support and care. They made a lasting impact on our lives and created opportunities many of us had never experienced before.

For my brother and me, Upgrading played a crucial role in helping us feel welcomed, supported, and equipped to thrive. Their dedication went far beyond academics — they built a foundation of trust, belonging, and hope that made a real difference.

The compassion and practical help they offered reflect a deep commitment to the success and well-being of every student who walks through their doors.

My instructors helped me build a strong foundational knowledge of computer use and office programs. I have never been exposed to office tools, mainly because I have never owned a laptop or computer in my life.

We are just so very grateful for the journey we had with Upgrading.

After I finished my courses, I found a job in Pond Inlet, Nunavut. My brother is expected to join me soon.” —*Siyabonga*



Siyabonga, Georgian College Upgrading

Experience  
 Georgian

“I thoroughly enjoyed the program being delivered at a college... a much better option because it’s a mature environment.”



Trista, Northern College Upgrading



“My education level was limited to about grade 11 when I first started the Academic Upgrading program at Northern College,” says Trista.

“As a teenager, I didn’t take my education seriously. I stopped going to school and decided to work instead. I became a mother at a young age, had my daughter at 19 and my son a year later.

As my children got older and closer to starting school themselves, I decided it was time for me to finish my education as well.

When I first started the program, I mostly kept to myself. But, over the two years I was there, I developed great friendships with students and staff. The classroom’s calm and quiet environment made it easy to focus on the work. It was always a warm, friendly, positive and welcoming atmosphere.”

“I think the format of the program delivery is great,” she continues. “It allows the flexibility that adults need to be able to pursue their education while juggling adult responsibilities.”

All students come to Upgrading as adults and enjoy the mature environment that learning in a college provides.

“I thoroughly enjoyed the program being delivered at a college,” Trista says. “The program being at the college is a much better option because it’s a mature environment.”

Trista completed Upgrading with honours and is now enrolled in the Instrumentation and Control Engineering program at Northern College.

“I loved the Upgrading program,” Trista continues. “The faculty and staff are some of the most supportive, kind, caring and overall amazing people I have met. I can’t thank them enough.

I would (and already have) recommend this program to anyone who may benefit from it.” —*Kate Glover*



“I am now a college graduate with a diploma and the ACE Certificate. I was just hired as a Support Worker and excited for my future!”

“Dropping out of high school in grade 11 shattered my confidence and left me feeling like I was unintelligent. Life wasn’t easy, but I made ends meet to support myself and eventually my family. I wanted more and I knew I would need my grade 12 if I wanted meaningful employment.

In 2022, I enrolled in the free Academic Upgrading (AU) Program at Sault College with the intent of getting my grade 12 equivalency, the Academic and Career Entrance (ACE) certificate. The Academic Upgrading staff at Sault College did a fantastic job of supporting self-directed learning and finding ways to help me manage the workload.

They truly care about their students and were the first to see me and my learning style for what it was. They encouraged me to try out a college course, Introduction to Psychology, while taking my upgrading courses. That experience was a game-changer for me.

I realized that I wanted more than just my grade 12 equivalent. The opportunity they provided me to try college eventually led to enrollment in the full-time Social Service Worker (SSW) program in Fall 2023. I was also able to get a diagnosis for the ADHD that I knew I had all along.

After 2 years of hard work, I am now a college graduate with a diploma and the ACE Certificate. In May 2025, I was hired as a Support Worker at Mariposa Developmental Services in the Sault and am excited for my future!

None of this would have been possible without the support of the Academic Upgrading team and their dedication to ensuring that everyone who comes through their door gets equal opportunity and access to the learning they deserve! —Mark



Mark, Sault College Upgrading



# “The Academic Upgrading program helped me achieve my career goal to become an Early Childhood Educator.”



Thanuja, Conestoga College Upgrading

“The Academic Upgrading (AU) Program laid the basic foundation for improving my English Language knowledge and opened the door for me to follow the Early Childhood Education (ECE) full-time program.

The AU Program especially enhanced my knowledge and skills related to Academic Writing in the English language which was highly necessary to engage with academic studies.

With the knowledge I gained from AU, I could complete different kinds of academic tasks such as assignments, presentations, and exams successfully — and I completed the ECE program by obtaining a High Distinction with a high GPA.

Since the AU program was offered as online, I could finish it fast at my own pace and obtain a higher grade (A+).

Additionally, my professor, who was very knowledgeable on the subject materials, guided me with detailed clarifications whenever I sought professional advice for my English language-related problems throughout the program.

The Academic Upgrading program paved the way for me to complete the ECE full-time program successfully with flying colors.

Finally, with my experiences, I would like to say that the AU Program helped me achieve my career goal to become an Early Childhood Educator.” —*Thanuja*



**CONESTOGA**  
Connect Life and Learning

“I feel much more confident and accomplished, I’m proud of the progress I’ve made and I have more job opportunities.”

“Before coming to the upgrading program, I was working but unfortunately got laid off. It was hard to find a good job without a high school diploma — and I realized that I needed to do something to open more opportunities for myself.

I wanted to complete my A-Z licence and take a heavy equipment course in the future, and I also needed to complete my grade 12 equivalency. The employment center recommended the Academic Upgrading program to help me get back on track.

Before joining the program, I had a hard time concentrating at home. Studying on my own just wasn’t working. However, after starting the upgrading classes, I felt more focused and motivated.

I took the steps toward changing my outcome by seeking support and dedicating more time to learning. Communication played a big part in my growth because I became more open to talk with others in the classroom to share and to learn from each others’ experiences. This helped me grow and understand things better.

There were challenges along the way, especially with math, but I didn’t give up. Even when I ran into obstacles, I remained focused and did not let them stand in the way of my success. I practiced a lot and asked for help when I needed it.

This upgrading experience has not only helped me academically but also gave me the confidence and tools I need for my future.

I’m pleased to say I’ve recently completed the academic upgrading program, attained my Canadian Adult Education Credential, and completed my Heavy Equipment Operator and AZ training. I feel much more confident and accomplished, I’m proud of the progress I’ve made, and I have more job opportunities for the future.” —*Nick*



Nick, Fanshawe College Upgrading



# Fannelle a fièrement obtenu son certificat ACE et s'inscrivant au programme postsecondaire en éducation à la petite enfance.



Fannelle, Collège Boréal FBO



Nouvellement arrivée du Cameroun, Fannelle a rapidement compris que l'éducation serait la clé pour bâtir une nouvelle vie au Canada. Son parcours témoigne d'une force tranquille, d'un courage remarquable et d'un désir profond de s'épanouir malgré les obstacles.

Peu après son arrivée, Fannelle a dû faire face à une réalité difficile : sa mère, souffrante, ne pouvait pas travailler. Sans se laisser abattre, elle a pris ses responsabilités en main. Elle a trouvé un premier emploi comme surveillante du midi dans une école secondaire, tout en s'inscrivant au programme d'alphabétisation et de formation de base (AFB), puis au programme ACE, déterminée à décrocher son certificat pour poursuivre des études postsecondaires.

Mais pour Fannelle, obtenir un certificat n'était que le début. Elle voulait raviver un rêve qu'elle avait été forcée de mettre de côté dans son pays natal en raison de la crise armée dans sa région. Le retour aux études représentait pour elle une nouvelle chance de se reconstruire.

Un moment charnière de son parcours a été sa rencontre avec Grace, une camarade de classe en ACE. De cette amitié sincère est née une nouvelle opportunité : celle de découvrir le domaine de la petite enfance. Encouragée par Grace, Fannelle a commencé à travailler à temps partiel dans une garderie, tout en poursuivant ses études. Elles se soutenaient mutuellement, partageant leurs défis et leurs victoires.

Fannelle a fièrement obtenu son certificat ACE. Depuis, elle travaille toujours dans la même garderie et a franchi une nouvelle étape en s'inscrivant au programme postsecondaire en éducation à la petite enfance au Collège Boréal. Elle avance avec la même détermination qui l'a guidée depuis le début de son parcours. —*Amélie Ouellet*



# Son cheminement démontre l'impact réel que peut avoir l'éducation lorsqu'elle est accessible, flexible et attentionnée.

Le parcours de Grace est un vibrant témoignage de résilience, de détermination et d'engagement envers son développement personnel et professionnel. Mère monoparentale et travailleuse à temps partiel, elle a su conjuguer avec brio ses responsabilités familiales, professionnelles et scolaires pour se rapprocher de son objectif : devenir éducatrice de la petite enfance certifiée.

Dès le départ, Grace s'est illustrée par sa discipline et son sérieux. Travaillant comme aide éducatrice dans une garderie, elle souhaite approfondir ses compétences. Consciente de l'importance d'une formation formelle, elle s'est inscrite au programme ACE (Accès, carrières, études) offert à travers le Centre de perfectionnement des adultes du Collège Boréal d'Hamilton, ainsi qu'au programme de préapprentissage proposé par la section d'apprentissage.

Avec détermination, elle complète la première année du préapprentissage avec succès. Cet accomplissement est d'autant plus remarquable qu'il s'inscrit dans un contexte de vie exigeant, entre le rôle de maman, un emploi à temps partiel et des études rigoureuses. Grâce à une organisation exemplaire et une volonté inébranlable, Grace poursuit son chemin.

L'année suivante, elle redouble d'efforts et parvient à obtenir son certificat ACE. Ce succès n'est pas une finalité, mais plutôt une étape décisive sur le chemin de son ambition professionnelle. Ensuite, elle étant admise au programme postsecondaire en Éducation à la petite enfance du Collège Boréal.

Tout au long de ce parcours, Grace a incarné des valeurs essentielles : le courage, l'assiduité, la passion et la persévérance. Son histoire est bien plus qu'un récit personnel : elle illustre la force de la volonté humaine et le rôle déterminant de l'éducation dans l'émancipation et la réalisation de soi. —*Amélie Ouellet*



Grace, Collège Boréal FBO



# Dakota plans to work in the public education sector, supporting children with diverse learning needs.



Dakota, Cambrian College Upgrading



After completing Academic Upgrading, Dakota is now pursuing her goal of becoming a Developmental Service Worker — a path inspired by her own experience with a learning disability and her desire to better support her nephew.

Dakota has been working non-stop in the Upgrading program at Cambrian College and loves it. She decided on developmental services after completing a volunteer placement at a local elementary school, where she discovered both a feel for the field and a passion for the work.

Getting here wasn't without its challenges. Dakota completed Academic Upgrading while managing a number of priorities, including other academic commitments and part-time employment.

She reflects on that time in her life as “stressful” and “exhausting,” but is grateful for the faculty support that helped her balance her academic and work demands.

What Dakota demonstrates is true determination and motivation and she continues to lean on these strengths as she works through the Developmental Service Worker program and navigate the challenges that come with it.

Even now, Dakota often stops by her former English classroom to check in with faculty, who continue to offer guidance and encouragement as she pursues her postsecondary studies.

When asked where she sees herself after graduation, Dakota says she plans to work in the public education sector, supporting children with diverse learning needs. —*Jessica Ravenscroft*

# “I was doing nothing with my life,” Hayley says. Now she’s working and applying for college.

“I was doing nothing with my life,” says Hayley. Mental health barriers, including social anxiety and depression, were holding her back and she struggled to find the motivation to finish her high school diploma.

An Ontario Works (OW) advisor suggested that she may need to go to college to qualify for the kind of work that she wanted. Hayley says that she also thought it would set a good example for her kids if she went back to school.

Hayley chose the Niagara College Academic Upgrading program to help her reach her goals. Initially, she attended the Niagara Falls campus because it was close to home. When that campus closed, she moved so that she could continue in the program at the Niagara-on-the-Lake campus.

“Fun!” is how she describes her experience. She says that her teachers were “great” and “amazing,” making the learning process easier for her.

She recounts that her ACE Communications professor encouraged her to try some new software so she could create a video in lieu of standing in front of her classmates to make a presentation. She was extremely pleased that her teacher found a way for her to meet the course requirement in a way that didn’t cause a flare-up of her social anxiety.

Hayley graduated with her grade 12 equivalency and an ACE Certificate, having completed six courses. She recently moved to Northern Ontario with her partner and was able to land a job within the first week of arriving in her new community.

Hayley is currently awaiting an admission decision from the Environmental Technician program at Cambrian College, close to her new home in the North.

She says that she would tell anyone who is thinking about Academic Upgrading: “Do it! It’s worth it!”  
—*Kathy Keenan*



Hayley, Niagara College Upgrading





“Upgrading not only provides me with knowledge about studying and life skills... now I can easily transfer to college.”



Jade, Durham College Upgrading



“Being a middle-aged woman who has to take care of five children and still needs to go to school every day, hoping for a brighter future, is not easy.

I signed up for the open summer camp program. Fortunately the lecturers shared with me a program that helped me study and regain my forgotten knowledge... that is the Academic Upgrading program at Durham College.

My upgrading experience was exciting. I learned very important skills. The dedicated teachers helped me understand the different skills to apply when entering college. School also helped me develop better social skills. The experiences and challenges I faced have helped me grow.

Upgrading has helped me improve my life in many aspects, physically and mentally. I have graduated from the basic computer class and I have applied it to my daily life. I have completed my 12 grade equivalency. My advisors are enthusiastic and friendly and are always ready to help me do well. A lot of support around has helped. I have reduced the pressure and stress in my life.

Every time I go to class, I feel warm and happy like I am sitting in a happy home. Upgrading not only provides me with knowledge about studying and practicing life skills to access resources — now I can easily transfer to college.

I would like to thank the school for creating a program that helps all students fulfill their great mission in the present and the future. Once again, I sincerely thank the school and the advisors who helped me complete my studies.” —*Jade*

“My goal is to gain Canadian experience, build new skills and eventually establish a successful career here.”

“I live in Oshawa and am a permanent resident of Canada. I moved to Ontario 17 months ago and I truly appreciate how accepting and diverse the culture is here.

Back in India, I completed my Bachelor of Engineering with English as the medium of instruction. I have over 10 years of professional experience in administration, operations, and recruitment.

I am currently looking for a good job that matches my skills and experience. However, I’ve realized that one of the key factors in achieving this goal is strong communication. I want to become more confident and fluent in English, especially in professional settings. That is one of the main reasons I joined Academic Upgrading at Durham College.

I believe that improving my communication skills will not only help me with day-to-day conversations but will also better prepare me for interviews and job opportunities.

I believe that further education will open new doors for me and help me understand the Canadian work culture better. My goal is to gain Canadian experience in my field, build new skills, and eventually establish a successful career here. I am eager to contribute to the workforce and be part of a professional environment once again.

This journey is important to me, and I know that with dedication, the right support, and continued learning, I can achieve all my goals.

Thank you for being a part of this important step in my journey. I am excited to continue learning and to make the most of every opportunity that comes my way.” —Richa



PHOTO AS SUPPLIED

Richa, Durham College Upgrading



“I am incredibly grateful for the ACE program and the skills I have acquired from it.”



Noah, Loyalist College Upgrading

**LOYALIST  
COLLEGE**

“When I was in Grade 1, my parents decided to homeschool. I was taught long-form division, multiplication and basic fractions. I learned grammar from reading my favourite story books. I even learned basic automotive repair and maintenance. I ended up learning other things that fascinated me as well, including how to build gaming computers and troubleshoot computer issues.

At age 21, I got my first real job. It was retail, which seemed okay at the time. But I quickly decided that it wasn't for me.

Through online job searches, I discovered that most employers want applicants to have a high school diploma — something that I didn't have. I knew that I didn't even have the necessary skills to “fake it till you make it.” So, with a little help and a gentle shove from some friends, I started to look for ways to get educated to find better work.

My cousin mentioned that there might be a program at Loyalist College. I checked out their website and, sure enough, Loyalist had an academic upgrading program called ACE — Academic and Career Entrance — that could help me earn my grade 12 equivalency.

Once I started the ACE program, I learned much more math and grammar. This has allowed me to succeed professionally, in my current job as a service writer, and at home.

I continue to use what I have learned in the computers class to this day for personal budgets and for tasks at my current employment.

The staff and faculty make it amazingly easy to learn and are very accommodating to students' needs. In sum, I am incredibly grateful for the ACE program, and the skills I have acquired from it.” —Noah



## « Pour moi, la FBO, c'est la vie. »



Delva, Collège La Cité FBO

« Je suis actuellement étudiant à la FBO et j'ai été admis au Collège La Cité pour la session de janvier 2026, dans le programme de Préposé aux Services de Soutien Personnel.

La FBO m'a énormément aidé à renforcer mes acquis et à développer les compétences intellectuelles nécessaires pour réussir les tests d'évaluation à l'admission du Collège La Cité. Elle m'a permis d'acquérir une base solide dans les matières fondamentales, ce qui m'a donné la confiance et la capacité de poursuivre ma formation.

Je saisis cette occasion pour remercier chaleureusement toute l'équipe de la FBO pour son accompagnement rigoureux, son écoute et son soutien constant tout au long de ce parcours.

Je recommande vivement à toute personne dans une situation similaire à la mienne de se tourner vers la FBO. C'est bien plus qu'une formation, c'est un tremplin vers l'avenir. Pour moi, la FBO, c'est la vie. » —*Delva*



David, Collège La Cité FBO

« Je tiens à exprimer ma profonde reconnaissance envers la FBO pour le soutien précieux qu'elle m'a apporté tout au long de mes cours préparatoires au Collège La Cité.

Grâce à leur accompagnement constant et attentionné, j'ai pu mieux m'adapter à mon programme d'études et surmonter plusieurs défis sur le plan académique.

Leur disponibilité, la pertinence de leurs conseils et leur engagement infailible ont grandement contribué à ma réussite scolaire.

Au-delà du soutien pédagogique, c'est aussi une présence humaine, rassurante et bienveillante que la FBO m'a offerte ; et c'est cela, je crois, qui fait toute la différence. » —*David*



# Find your college's success story

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For more, search by college at [csc.au.com/success-stories](https://csc.au.com/success-stories)



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 developed and administers the ACE (Academic and Career Entrance) upgrading program. ACE is a widely-recognized grade 12 equivalent with courses delivered on campus and online through ACE Distance (e-learning).

ACE offers adults in Ontario the chance to achieve their grade 12 equivalency, improve their high school marks and qualify for college programs, apprenticeship and new careers. Learners upgrade at college, as college students, for free — with the support of the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

The CSC also developed, manages and administers the SKILLSMARKER suite of online assessment tools.

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