



Digital Innovation Skills Certificate (DISC)

Program Summary Report

Aug 26, 2016 – Dec 1, 2017

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Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

This report will provide a brief summation of the Digital Innovation Skills Certificate (DISC) program, including its rationale, design, execution, and related outcomes. Key learnings arising from the program will be outlined in detail for funders, post-secondary institutions, municipal administrators, and small businesses.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

As the Digital Innovation Skills Certificate (DISC) concludes after two cohorts, it is important to capture and share the results and learnings of this program for the future of skills development and training for the early 21st century workplace.

2.0 ONTARIO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY

2.a. Youth Skills Connection Project Objective

The workplace of the early 21st century is being redefined by widespread digital disruption. Within this context, the knowledge base and skill set which drive success for both Ontario youth and business owners alike, are becoming increasingly digitized. The rapidly changing landscape of the Ontario workplace has created skill deficits on multiple fronts; leaving certain segments of youth struggling to find employment opportunities, while certain business sectors have found themselves ill-equipped to compete in this increasingly digital world.

The Digital Innovation Skills Certificate (DISC) addressed this Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skill shortage for two key groups of stakeholders in the Kitchener-Waterloo region: small business owners and non-BBA recent graduates & mature students.

The 10-week Graduate Certificate program was informed by the following overall objectives:

- To provide experiential training opportunities that equip non-BBA recent grads with the **Digital Marketing, Ecommerce and Project Management** skills they need to become more employable.
- To provide small business owners with a team of students to execute a four-week Digital Marketing/Ecommerce project that strategically impacts the growth of their business.
- To create a network of industry and academic partners to provide students with world class course content, along with Expert Coaches to guide attainment of learning objectives.
- To provide program graduates with a range of employment opportunities, while giving small business owners a direct line to the talent they need to diversify their workforce.

2.b. Youth Skills Connection Project Timeline

The pilot program ran in two separate cohorts in conjunction with Wilfrid Laurier University's Winter Term, beginning in March 7, 2017, ending May 18, 2017 and the subsequent summer term beginning June 27, 2017 and ending September 21st, 2017.

2.c. Scope of the Project

DISC was a 10-week graduate certificate program consisting of around 80 hours of experiential training across three course modules: **Digital Marketing, Ecommerce and Project Management**. The program employed a 70/20/10 experiential learning model, which allowed students to build essential digital skills through real work experience.

Graduates of the program were equipped with certified skills that created new professional avenues. Wilfrid Laurier University's Centre for Teaching Innovation and Excellence helped to develop, review and refine the program curriculum, along with providing a Graduate Certificate to successful participants. Graduates further augmented their employability by becoming certified Hubspot and Shopify partners.

After this skill-upgrade, the partner network operated by providing certified graduating students with direct lines to employment on two fronts. Since real-world projects were a core part of the program, graduates had the natural opportunity to extend projects after course completion, or to join small business owners in a full-time capacity. Graduates, lastly, left the program well-equipped for a career path in small business digital marketing.

2.d. Project Outcomes and Impact Summary

Key Performance Indicator	Outcomes
# of youth actively engaged in project	60
# of industry partners actively engaged	14
# of young people that complete training	60
# of work placements provided	60
# of jobs filled in industry upon training completion	52

3.0 PROGRAM RATIONALE

3.a. Small Businesses: A Technological Skill Deficit in a Canadian Tech-Hub

As of 2016, it is widely accepted that Kitchener-Waterloo is a global leader as an ecosystem for Innovation and Entrepreneurship. The symbiotic relationships that exist between the city's postsecondary institutions, innovation hubs and incubation centres, industry leading partners, and young local talent, has produced over 440 new start-ups and 650 associated jobs annually¹,

¹ Waterloo Region Small Business Centre. (2014). *Staff Report*. Available for viewing at: http://kitchener.ca.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=&clip_id=251&meta_id=13156

who caused disruption across numerous industries². The emergence of KW as a thriving cluster of technology innovation and venture creation is further evidenced by the 23,000 local jobs in the sector³. The growth of our technology and start-up community is built on a foundation of innovative educational programming provided by one or more of the key ecosystem partners. Campus link accelerator programs, like Velocity and LaunchPad, provide experiential learning opportunities for new venture creation; while market validation and scale-up courses are provided by Communitech and the Accelerator Centre.

In our region, this combination of innovative educational programming, coupled with dynamic engagement from various strategic partners, is a proven formula for innovation, job creation and growing businesses that are regionally, nationally and globally competitive. However, when we step outside of KW's tech and start-up bubble, into other segments of our local economy, it becomes clear that there is a stark dichotomy in the availability of these skills, and this support network. Nowhere is this more evident than our region's ecosystem of small businesses. Our central thesis is that this proven formula can be taken from the tech and start-up community, iterated upon, then transplanted into KW's small business ecosystem, to reconcile the skill deficits that exist for this underserved sector within our region.

Our region is home to over 30,000 small businesses, which represents 48% of the total workforce⁴. While these businesses co-exist in intimate proximity to the KW tech sector, there is a massive digital divide between these two vital engines of our local economy. Simply put, within the context of the widespread digital disruption of the 21st century, small business owners lack the knowledge and skill sets required to execute core business activities to strategically sustain and grow their business.

This was brought to light by the Waterloo Region Small Business Centre's Community Consultation⁵. The 160 participating small business owners lamented their inability to market and sell their products online⁶. In addition, they widely noted increased support from local government, educational institutions and industry leading tech firms, as key pieces to reconciling this deficit⁷.

Further primary research, which took the form of a workshop series executed by our core project team, illustrated that even with the acquisition of digital knowledge and skills, small business owners lack the time they need to implement and execute core digital marketing and sales activities. They are therefore faced with constraints that are directly tied to value creation within their business model. This speaks both to the urgency with which the problem must be solved, along with highlighting the significant opportunities that solving this problem presents.

Our intimate understanding of the problems that exist for small business owners allowed us to develop the Digital Innovation Skills Certificate as a direct solution to this call for help. The inability of small business owners to implement and execute essential digital marketing and

² Communitech. (2016). *FY2016 Annual Report*. Page 4. Available for viewing at: <https://www.communitech.ca/app/uploads/2017/01/2016-annualreport-final.pdf>

³ Brookfield Institute. (2016). *State of Canada's Technology Sector*. Available for viewing at: <http://brookfieldinstitute.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Infographic-SOCTS-2016.pdf>

⁴ Statistics Canada (June 2016). *Key Small Business Statistics*. Available for viewing at: https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/eng/h_03018.html

⁵ Waterloo Region Small Business Centre. *2016 Community Consultations*.

⁶ Waterloo Region Small Business Centre. *2016 Community Consultations*.

⁷ Waterloo Region Small Business Centre. *2016 Community Consultations*.

sales activities necessitates these skills be acquired through hiring and strategic partnerships. DISC leveraged the industry-leading expertise of key players in the digital marketing and ecommerce space to train non-BBA recent grads and mature students in the core ICT skills that small business owners lack. The program offered a bridge across the digital divide for small business owners, while training this specific group of Ontario youth in core digital skills that drive employability in today's workplace.

3.b. Non-BBA Recent Graduates: Gaps in Essential Skills and Work Experiences

The undergraduate experience of non-BBA students is void of training in the ICT skills that drive employment in today's job market. This, coupled with the lack of co-op work placements available to these students, produces an entire segment of university graduates who begin the race to post-school employment with a sizeable deficit in both their skill set and real work experience. This skill deficit is a chief contributor to Ontario's stagnating youth unemployment rate, which has remained at 13% for university graduates since 2012⁸.

However, perhaps the most glaring indication of the impact ICT skills have on the employability of Ontario youth is the drastic difference in the number of jobs that become available to those who acquire these skills⁹.



This staggering increase in the number of jobs available clearly demonstrates that such skills are widely valued. Additionally, the demand for these skills extends across a range of industries, as youth with increased ICT competencies become employable in sectors ranging from manufacturing and retail, to Canadian scale-ups.

⁸ Statistics Canada. (2016). *Perspectives on the Youth Labour Market in Canada, 1976 to 2015*. Available for viewing at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/161205/dq161205a-eng.htm>

⁹ Brookfield Institute. (2016). *State of Canada's Technology Sector*. Available for viewing at: <http://brookfieldinstitute.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Infographic-SOCTS-2016.pdf>

4.0 YOUTH POPULATION: PROFILE

Unemployed populations of people are those who report that they are without work, while being available to work and having taken steps to find work in the last four weeks¹⁰. The unemployment rate for adults aged 25 and older with post-secondary education credentials was 4.5% over the first nine months of 2017 in Ontario, which is a slight decrease compared to the previous year¹¹.

For youth aged 15 to 24 in Ontario, the employment numbers saw an increase in August 2017 (8,000) and September 2017 (8,800 jobs); however, the unemployment rate for youth of this age range remained stagnant at 10.6% in September¹².

Despite this short-run addition of job to the labour market in Ontario, job quality appears to have deteriorated for many young people¹³. Despite greater levels of post-secondary education completion in the population, wages have fallen for men and women under 25, along with other metrics indicating a deterioration in the quality of early-career jobs¹⁴. Additionally, occupations which saw the greatest increase in jobs in September 2017 included health, sales, service, and management, which would exclude the target demographic of this program¹⁵.

Students targeted for DISC held at least one degree from a post-secondary institution and had to be under the age of 30. Although individuals from full-time, part-time, and unemployed situations were considered, they were also assessed for their desire to move laterally into a new position. Strong applicants who were currently working full-time and seeking to 'climb the ladder' of their current organization were deferred and offered alternative resources for upskilling their current skill set with their existing employer.

Students were additionally rated under the following bullet points:

- Demonstrated initiative in professional development, e.g.: volunteer, internship, work experience, etc.
- Demonstrated interpersonal and team work skills, e.g.: experience engaging with, supporting, or facilitating a group of people through volunteer, work, or internship experience

These qualities were evaluated to help identify the most competitive applicants from amongst those who submitted a completed application. Details on the number of applications received for this program are outlined in the table below.

¹⁰ OECD Data. (2017). *Unemployment rate*. Available for viewing at: <https://data.oecd.org/unemp/unemployment-rate.htm#indicator-chart>

¹¹ Statistics Canada. (2017). *Labour market report, September 2017*. Available for viewing at: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/labour-market-report-september-2017>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Statistics Canada (April 2016). *Perspectives on the Youth Labour Market in Canada*. Available for viewing at: <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2016002-eng.htm>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Statistics Canada. (2017). *Labour market report, September 2017*. Available for viewing at: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/labour-market-report-september-2017>

Metric	Date Counted	Final Count
Number of Youth Applications to Program	September 30 th 2017	575 Applications
Number of Youth in Attendance at Information Sessions	September 30 th 2017	280 Attendees
Number of Youth Interviewed for the Program	September 30 th 2017	120 Interviewed
Number of Participants Selected for Program	September 30 th 2017	60 Participants

5.0 SMALL BUSINESS: PROFILE

As of December 2015, the number of Small and Medium-Sized Businesses (SMEs) in Ontario was 407,175¹⁶. More than half of Canada’s small employer businesses are concentrated in Ontario and Quebec, with the majority being service oriented (e.g.: retail trade, construction, professional)¹⁷.

SMEs employed a staggering 87.3% of the private sector workforce in Ontario as of 2015, despite the predominance of large manufacturing firms in Ontario¹⁸. Small firms of between one and 99 employees account for 97.9% of the employer businesses in Canada; with a substantial portion of that being firms with between one and four employees (632, 460)¹⁹.

Small businesses struggled in 2009, with net job losses of over 219,300, but regained traction between 2010 and 2015 with net job gains of more than 847,400 new jobs²⁰. In this new reality of limited resources and the potential for economic disruption, SMEs must remain innovative by acting upon operational optimizations and technological inventions²¹. Survey data from a 2014 report shows that over 41.7% of small businesses and 58.3% of medium-sized enterprises implemented at least one type of innovation across their product, process, organizational, or marketing categories²².

¹⁶ Statistics Canada (June 2016). *Key Small Business Statistics*. Available for viewing at: https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/eng/h_03018.html

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Statistics Canada (June 2016). *Key Small Business Statistics*. Available for viewing at: https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/eng/h_03018.html

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Statistics Canada (June 2016). *Key Small Business Statistics*. Available for viewing at: https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/eng/h_03018.html

²² Ibid.

The DISC program sought to give service-oriented SMEs a competitive advantage by allowing them to innovate internally. SMEs were equipped with subsidized access to local Digital Marketing Agencies offering strategic expertise to a group of young professionals able to execute on an ecommerce store and a host of digital marketing assets (e.g. Facebook Ads, Email Marketing Tools), to help drive revenues and growth for these small businesses.

Businesses brought into both cohorts had been in operation for between three to ten years, had under 99 employees, an Annual Recurring Revenue of over \$500,000. From the business applicants who applied to the program, they were further evaluated for their ability to hire a graduate from the program, along with their state of digital readiness. This was rated under the following bullet points:

- One/some digital channel(s) are active
- Limited/no use of data toward marketing initiatives
- Business owner has demonstrated a growth mindset/willingness to learn (e.g.: through past participations in courses and workshops)
- Evidence of budget/planning for digital marketing initiatives
- Business owner/marketing contact is highly engaged
- Business has steady, yet stagnant revenue
- Business is such that it translates seamlessly to e-commerce
- SME is a candidate for a full ecommerce rebuild

Metric	Date Counted	Final Count
Number of Business Applications to the Program	September 30 th 2017	101 Applications
Number of Employers Reached	September 30 th 2017	398 Employers
Number of Businesses Interviewed for the Program	September 30 th 2017	22 Interviewed
Number of Business Participants Selected for Program	September 30 th 2017	10 Participants

6.0 DESIGN FEATURES OF DISC: PARTNERS AND CURRICULUM

6.a. DISC Partners and Curriculum

DISC was a 10-week graduate certificate program (80 hours) that provided experiential training across three course modules: **Digital Marketing, Ecommerce and Project Management**. The program employed a 70/20/10 experiential learning model, which allowed students to build essential digital skills through real work experience.

This model leveraged a network of industry partners in the creation of this experiential learning environment. These strategic partnerships were the crux of the program. DISC leveraged the idle, expert-created content from industry leaders like Hubspot and Shopify, harnessed the expert knowledge and experience of local digital marketing agencies as in-class coaches and coalesced a refined curriculum from these separate components through a partnership with Wilfrid Laurier University.

Within this framework, 70% of the course was dedicated to experiential learning. This manifested as a four-week intensive group project, where students applied key concepts and skills to execute a marketing or ecommerce initiative for a local small business.

The definition and scope of this project was completed during a consultation with the small business Owner, facilitated by the Program Leader. Key outcomes from this consultation included: project scope, objective(s) and key results. The projects had real impact on the growth of participating businesses and provided students with valuable real-world experience executing key course concepts and skills. The completion of the project also allowed students to employ their new knowledge and skills in project management (PM), which was acquired by leveraging existing content through a key strategic partnership, an example of which could be Conestoga College's online PM course offerings.

This experiential learning was supported by Expert Coaching, provided by industry experts from local digital marketing agencies Echosisms, OnlyGrowth, and Stryve Marketing Group. 20% of course time was dedicated to Expert Coaching, which played a crucial role in guiding students as they first engage with course content, and then work to complete their summative project.

Finally, 10% of the program was dedicated to student coursework. A blended approach was applied within this segment of the program. Students had in-class opportunities to complete defined coursework to demonstrate proficiency in key skills, where they were supported by both the Program Leader and Expert Coaches. This was complimented by online learning in the form of course modules and other resources provided by both Hubspot and Shopify.

6.b. Tracking and Monitoring Systems

The DISC program integrated iterative feedback and tracking mechanisms over the course of both cohorts. Specifically, surveys were run with all 30 students at the end of each module of the program training and after the final Capstone Project. Business owners participating in the program were also solicited with a survey at the end of the cohort.

The Program Coordinator hosted had weekly Office Hours for students during the training portion of the program, and a mechanism of weekly phone call Health Checks with students, coaches, and business owners over the course of the Capstone Project. Results from these Health Checks were tracked in a file shared amongst the DISC team to help correct and realign challenges and barriers as they were encountered.

6.c. Roles and Responsibilities

The Program Coordinator was responsible for the recruitment, processing and assessment of suitable students, industry partners, and employers for the program. This role also delivered the course content, evaluated the student individual projects, as well as the monitoring and successful completion of the Capstone Projects. Additional high-level duties, such as Partner Meetings, also become the realm of this role.

In the second cohort, a support role for the Program Coordinator was created to contribute to the timely delivery of the above-outlined duties.

The Marketing and Communications Coordinator was responsible for the recruitment of new participants in the cohort, as well as the social media, website, email, photography, and videography assets created to support the ongoing public communications related to the program. This role additionally sought to communicate with students and other stakeholders to gain community support for the program.

7.0 PROGRAM OUTCOMES

7.a. Outcomes for Youth

Out of 35 survey responses to the economic impact questions delivered to student's post-cohort, the cohorts were primarily female (20 students), with a lower proportion of male students (15 students). Almost all (91%, or 32 people) agreed that, due to their participation in the DISC program, they are better able to articulate their desired career path.

Before the DISC program, these individuals reported an average salary of \$19.10 as their hourly salary. After the DISC program, this reported average salary goes up to \$21.19 as an hourly wage. Of these, the bulk of new jobs obtained were in 'Wholesale and Retail Services' industry.

Some anonymous testimonials from student alumni of the program:

- "I wish that my entire schooling experience was like this. I love how real this program is, even from day 1!"
- "I am so grateful to be in the DISC program. I really believe this is helping me to differentiate my skill set."

Please refer to [Appendix A](#) to review the educational attainment and final job title of the 60 DISC alumni.

7.b. Outcomes for Small Businesses

At a high level, small business participants involved in the DISC program were able to look bigger online through the work of their Capstone Projects. Looking bigger online, for these small businesses, will result in long-term growth for their business and vastly increased brand visibility.

Small business owners also individually benefited from the close working relationship maintained with their student teams. Working one-on-one with skilled youth greatly increased the access that small businesses have to unique and innovative ideas for growing their business. Expert Coaches working in tandem with the Capstone Project student teams created transparency and co-learning throughout the process, allowing the small business owners to trust marketers more in future for one-off projects, as well as greater understanding on how to manage a digital marketing role within their business.

Some testimonials from small business owners include:

- “I’ve worked with lots of agencies before, and none of them have taken this level of sincerity and interest to get to know my business” – Chris – Hearing Testing and Appliances
- “The energy and diversity of these students is incredible. I want to hire the best student the program has to offer. And, down the road, I’d like to hire a dream team from DISC” – Byron, Furniture Manufacturer and Retail

Please refer to [Appendix B](#) to review the pre- and post-DISC program details for these individual small businesses.



Click the image above to view the video testimonial for DISC from Jessica, Natural Skin Product mfg, wholesale and retail.

7.c. Quality of Life Findings

Out of the 35 surveys completed by DISC alumni, 100% of respondents provided a rating on how they felt their quality of life had improved as a direct result of the DISC program. The chart below has bolded the highest-volume responses; illustrating that the students saw an **Improved** situation in their ‘Educational Credentials’ (18), ‘Daily Productivity’ (13), ‘Confidence and Self-Esteem’ (12), and ‘Happiness’ (12).

Those categories under which students felt that their situation had remained the **Same** after the DISC program included ‘Personal Living Conditions’ (26), ‘Standard of Living’ (23), ‘Overall Health/ Wellbeing’ (18), and ‘Leisure and Social Interaction’ (18).

Graduates responded that their ‘Economic Outlook’ (15) had **Somewhat Improved**, with only six people indicating that their economic outlook remained the Same. The ‘Connection to the Community’ rating was equivalently divided between **Improved** (11) and **Somewhat Improved** (11).

	Educational Credentials	Personal Living Conditions	Standard of Living	Daily Productivity	Overall Health/ Wellbeing	Economic Outlook	Leisure & Social Interactions	Connection to Community	Confidence & Self-Esteem	Happiness
Same	3	26	23	8	18	6	18	9	5	9
Somewhat Improved	7	5	7	6	4	15	5	11	8	7
Improved	18	2	4	13	12	9	7	11	12	12
Greatly Improved	7	2	1	8	1	5	5	4	10	7
TOTAL	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35

8.0 PROGRAM BARRIERS

8.a. Implementation

From the perspective of the students, one of the most substantial barriers to implementation was the time commitment to physically attend classes twice a week in Waterloo at the Wilfrid Laurier University campus. Feedback on this barrier was provided to Program Leaders over the course of the first cohort. The project-based nature of the DISC program also created a substantial amount of group work and required direct, in-person contact with local small business owners.

To overcome the barrier of travel time on top of full- or part-time work commitments and DISC group work expectations, we decided to move ~60% of the DISC program experience online using Adobe Connect and Slack to facilitate online learning sessions and group breakouts.

This tactic immediately resolved the barrier without sacrificing the program value or relationships with small business owners. In fact, this program iteration created the opportunity to better equip students with the capabilities to work remotely and complete team based projects online – both highly sought-after skills.

For small business owners involved in the project, one of the barriers to implementation was the matter of managing project scope. Small business owners were required to actively engage in the creation of the Capstone Projects, and this required a consistent consulting framework to define the project scope while maintaining uniform learning outcomes across teams.

To address this barrier, the DISC leadership team constructed a project catalogue after the pilot program to streamline this process moving forward. This project catalogue allowed for clear and manageable expectations between the small business owners and teams executing on the project.

8.b. Roles and Responsibilities of Partners, Coaches, and Academic Faculty

Partners

One of the most unique and valuable elements of the DISC program was the large volume of partnerships between government, private industry, and post-secondary institutions.

In the early days of DISC, the leadership team feared that it might be a challenge to manage the diverse partners involved in the program. However, these fears were quickly proven to be groundless, as applying the business design process early on allowed for the creation of effective win-win opportunities.

Expert Coaches

Expert Coaches involved in the program were selected because of their position as thought leaders within the industry, as well as their extensive practical experience both in executing digital marketing projects and running full-time businesses.

Consequently, coaches were constrained by finite amounts of time and often conflicting priorities. The DISC leadership team responded to this challenge by strictly defining the number of hours available with each coach for both formal and informal student learning opportunities. This forced a high level of efficiency into the process of engaging coaches, which would be an important consideration when scaling similar programs.

Additionally, each coach came to the program with varying degrees of expertise. This created the potential for over-reliance on a single coach. To respond to this challenge, Program Leaders were forced to balance the load of informal learning between coaches to create a consistent learning and engagement experience for all parties.

Academic Faculty

Lastly, the DISC program was founded in work-integrated and experiential learning practices. To achieve this mission, we had to construct a curriculum that was heavily influenced by industry needs. Due to this design principle, the success of DISC students and small businesses was heavily dependent on the formal learning from industry partners such as Hubspot and Shopify, along with the coaching from industry experts.

We found it was very difficult to meaningfully engage academic faculty members to deliver the curriculum or contribute personal experiences applying best practices.

8.c. Value Added & Sustainability

Overall, the DISC program exceeded expectations for executing on the proposed value proposition and making a significant impact for all stakeholders. We successfully helped students to gain new, more meaningful employment; small business owners to grow their presence online; Canadian tech companies to commercialize their products; post-secondary schools to create meaningful industry-driven experiential learning programs; and, lastly, helped the City of Kitchener to stimulate economic development and growth in the Region of Waterloo.

However, there were also challenges to the long-term sustainability and growth of the program due to subsidizing tuition for students and overreliance on one or two Expert Coaches.

Subsidized Tuition

The funding from the Youth Skills Connections (YSC) Industry Partnership grant was instrumental in helping us pilot the DISC program. However, by fully subsidizing the student tuition, we were unable to directly validate whether, and how much, students would pay for this experiential learning program.

While we proved that business owners have an appetite to pay for Capstone Projects to be completed by DISC students and their supporting industry experts, the sustainability of this program is dependent on student tuition and still in question as a result.

Coaching Fatigue

Creating access to industry experts was a core value proposition of the DISC program for both students and small businesses. As we already outlined, however, industry experts face competing priorities. Avoiding fatigue and burnout for these experts by finding fresh support to coach different cohorts is an important step for scaling this program to other regions.

We are confident there is enough depth and breadth of coaches available in the major cities, but acknowledge that this is a potential barrier to program consistency and scale.

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Moving forward, we believe that the YSC grant should subsidize operational expenses, but program participants should pay a fee for program participation to help validate the long-term sustainability of the program. This would help Program Leadership to test the market appetite and appropriate pricing models.

Secondly, we believe that this 'eco-system' learning model should continue to be applied across industries to address talent shortages. We believe in the value of continuing to find opportunities to create win-win-win; a program of this sort allows talent and businesses to meet and this is a fantastic arena in which employers can test drive talent before hiring. This additionally helps business owners to solve pressing challenges and Canadian tech companies to commercialize their products and services. Through DISC, we have illustrated how this is possible.

Lastly, we recommend continued focus on the ['last mile of education'](#) to help refine the skills of recent graduates and connect them with meaningful work-integrated experiences. It is also important to leverage continuing education departments to help undergraduate students get the referenceable skills to gain employment.

We found that recruiters and personal growth coaches were important for providing students with one-to-one support during their journey of finding more meaningful employment. This allowed students to role-play and identify what roles and skills they should be focusing on. We recommend that programs focused of employment for youth evaluate how best they can allow students to better understand themselves.

APPENDIX A: PROFILE OF DISC PARTICIPANTS

Degrees Attained – Cohort 1	Job Title Obtained – End of Cohort 1	Degrees Attained – Cohort 2	Job Title Obtained – End of Cohort 1
B.A. Media Information and Technoculture at Western University; Diploma in Interactive Media at Fanshawe College	Graphic Designer	B.A. Double Major in History and Media from The University of Western Ontario; Diploma in Public Relations from Conestoga College	Content Marketing Specialist
B.A. Speech Communication at the University of Waterloo	Freelance Digital Marketer	Diploma, Journalism from Conestoga College; Bachelor's Degree, Public Relations from Conestoga College	Marketing Coordinator
B.A. Communication Studies, Global Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University; Diploma Business Administration and Management at McMaster University	*Same Position	B.A. Comprehensive Psychology and Film Studies from Wilfrid Laurier University	Freelance Digital Marketer
Bachelor's degree, Sociology from the University of Waterloo	Digital Marketing Specialist	B.A. Recreation and Sports Business from University of Waterloo	Freelance Digital Marketer
B.A. English Specialist from the University of Toronto	Educator	Bachelor's Degree, Inclusive and Therapeutic Recreation from Brock University; Certificate, Serving Leadership from Conestoga College	Apprentice Instructor
B.A. Literature and Rhetorical Studies at the University of Waterloo, M.A. Rhetoric and Communication Design	Communications and Project Coordinator	Culinary Arts/Chef Training from Stratford Chefs School	Freelance Digital Marketer
B.A. International/Global Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University	Client Service Representative	Bachelor of Education from Queen's University; Honours Bachelor of Arts from University of Toronto	Freelance Digital Marketer
B.Tech, Electrical and Electronics Engineering at Ladoke Akintola University of Technology; Associate's Degree, Human Resources Management at Lambton College	Photographer and Social Media Lead	B.A. Psychology from Wilfrid Laurier University	Freelance Digital Marketer
Bachelor's degree, Environment and Resource Studies at University of Waterloo; Diploma in Broadcast - Television from Conestoga College	Digital Projects Coordinator	Business Administration, Marketing from Conestoga College; Diploma, Advertising and Marketing Communications from Conestoga College	Marketing Specialist

Degrees Attained – Cohort 1	Job Title Obtained – End of Cohort 1	Degrees Attained – Cohort 2	Job Title Obtained – End of Cohort 1
B.A. Communication Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University; Diploma in Media Foundations at Conestoga College	Social Media Coordinator	Bachelor's Degree, Speech Communication from University of Waterloo; Master's Degree in Digital Experience Innovation from University of Waterloo	Freelance Digital Marketer
Diploma in Recreation and Leisure Services from Fanshawe College	Freelance Digital Marketer	Bachelor's Degree, Honours Digital Arts Communication & Fine Arts from University of Waterloo	Graphic Designer
Associate's Degree, Hospitality and Tourism Management at Conestoga College	Digital Marketing Manager	B.A. Honours Psychology from University of Waterloo	*Same Position
Public Relations at Conestoga College, Journalism, Communication and Media Studies at Carleton University	Business Development Assistant	Bachelor's Degree, Political Science and Business from University of Waterloo	Freelance Digital Marketer
B.A. International Development at Wilfrid Laurier University; Interaction Design from University of California San Diego	Freelance Digital Marketer	Bachelor's Degree, Communications from Wilfrid Laurier University	Freelance Digital Marketer
Broadcast - Television, Media & Design at Conestoga College	Freelance Digital Marketer	B.A. Communication Studies from Wilfrid Laurier University	Insurance Operations Assistant
B.A. English Literature and Rhetoric at the University of Waterloo; M.A. Rhetoric and Communication Design at the University of Waterloo	Content Writer	B.Sc. Biology from Wilfrid Laurier University	Freelance Digital Marketer
B.A. Global Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University	Social Media and Digital Marketing Consultant	Honours Psychology and Science from University of Waterloo	Associate Product Owner
Bachelor of Public Relations at Conestoga College	Marketing Specialist	Honours Bachelor of Arts, Journalism from Wilfrid Laurier University	Digital Marketing Specialist
B.A. Biological and Biomedical Sciences at the University of Guelph; M.A. Human Health and Nutritional Sciences at University of Guelph	Freelance Digital Marketer	Bachelor's Degree, Music, Sociology from Memorial University of Newfoundland; Master's Degree, Music Therapy/Therapist from Wilfrid Laurier University	*Same Position
B.A. Studio Art and French Studies at University of Guelph; Post-Degree Diploma Arts Management at Western University	Fellow & Mentor	Bachelor's Degree, Information Technology from Gujarat Technological University; Post-Graduate Diploma in Computer Applications Development and Mobile Solutions Development from Conestoga College	Freelance Digital Marketer

Degrees Attained – Cohort 1	Job Title Obtained – End of Cohort 1	Degrees Attained – Cohort 2	Job Title Obtained – End of Cohort 1
M.A. English Language and Literature at the University of Waterloo	University Marker	Bachelor's Degree, Honours Biology from University of Waterloo; Graduate Certificate in French Studies from Conestoga College	Marketing Coordinator
Bachelor's Degree, General Arts at Wilfrid Laurier University	Freelance Digital Marketer	Honours Diploma, Hospitality and Tourism Management from Conestoga College; Graduate Certificate in Event Management from Conestoga College	Special Event Assistant
B.A. Communications, Pyschology and Business at Wilfrid Laurier University	*Same Position	B.A. Major in Communication and Media Studies from Concordia University; Certificate in Advanced Digital and Professional Training from Ryerson University	Freelance Digital Marketer
B.A. Political Science and Government from Queen's University	Digital Marketing Intern	Bachelor's Degree, Political Studies, Kwame Nkrumah' University of Science and Technology, Kumasi	Freelance Digital Marketer
B.Sc, Neuroscience and Cognitive Science from University of Toronto	Research Assistant	Bachelor's Degree, Sociology from Wilfrid Laurier University	*Same Position
Honours Bachelor of Music Degree from Humber College	*Same Position	Bachelor's Degree, English from Wilfrid Laurier University; Post Graduate Program in Sports and Event Marketing from George Brown College	Administrative Assistant
B.A. Speech Communication from University of Waterloo; Journalism and New Media from Sheridan College	Public Relations Coordinator and Digital Media Consultant	Bachelor of Engineering, Chemical Engineering from Birla Institute of Technology and Science; M.Sc in Sustainability Management from University of Toronto	MaRS Fellow
Pre-Nursing and Personal Support Worker, St. Clair College; Hearing Instrument Specialist at Conestoga College	Manager	B.A. Communication and Media Studies from Wilfrid Laurier University; Graduate Certificate in Social Media Marketing from Conestoga College; Diploma, Public Relations from Conestoga College	Digital Marketing Coordinator
B.A. Religion and Culture Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University; Post-Graduate Certificate, Integrated Marketing Communications at Conestoga College	Marketing Specialist	B.A. Financial Mathematics from Wilfrid Laurier University	Customer Success Manager
Bachelor's of Environment and Resource Studies at University of Waterloo; M.E.S in Tourism Policy and Planning at University of Waterloo	Freelance Digital Marketer	B.A Psychology, Brescia University College	Project Support and Administration

APPENDIX B: PROFILE OF BUSINESS PARTICIPANTS

Industry Sector	Number of Years in Business	Financial Impact (CDN \$)
Retail (Baby Bedding & Décor)	40 Years (Business) 0 – 1 Years (Current Owners)	Pre-DISC Annual Revenue: \$300 – 400,000/ year
Retail (Gift, Fashion, and Home Décor)	5+ Years	Pre-DISC Annual Revenue: \$805,000/year
Food and Beverage Wholesale and Retail (Fresh, Live, and Frozen Seafood)	30+ Years	Pre-DISC Annual Revenue: \$1.1 Million
Mfg, wholesale and retail Oral & Dental Hygiene	7+ Years	Pre-DISC Annual Revenue: <i>Not provided</i>
Mfg, Commercial and Retail Sales Custom Reclaimed Wood & Metal Furniture	5+ Years	Pre-DISC Annual Revenue: \$519,000/year
Food and Beverage Retail (Coffee and Giftware)	10+ Years	Pre-DISC Annual Revenue: \$272,000/year

Industry Sector	Number of Years in Business	Financial Impact (CDN \$)
Mft wholesale and Retail Sales Custom Reclaimed Wood & Metal Furniture	30+ Years	Pre-DISC Annual Revenue: <i>Not provided</i>
Wholesale and Retail sales Natural Skin Care	7+ Years	Pre-DISC Annual Revenue: \$336,000/year
Professional Service and Retail Hearing Clinic and Retail Hearing Aids	65+ Years	Pre-DISC Annual Revenue: \$1.2 Million/Year
Food and Beverage Retail and Giftware (Gourmet Snacks and Confectionary)	10+ Years	Pre-DISC Annual Revenue: \$1.2 Million/Year