

ADVISING INTERNATIONALLY
TRAINED IMMIGRANTS
AT ONTARIO COLLEGES:
DATA AND KEY FINDINGS

*Results From the Colleges Integrating Immigrants
to Employment Advisement Project Pilot*

Foreword

Colleges Integrating Immigrants to Employment (CIITE) is a multi-phased project funded by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration with a mandate to address barriers for internationally trained immigrants (ITIs) in the Ontario college system. For the purposes of CIITE an internationally trained immigrant is defined as “an immigrant who has received post-secondary level credentials and/or training in a country outside of Canada.” The key objective of CIITE is to make systemic changes within colleges to improve service levels and provide pathways that better meet the needs of ITIs. CIITE Phase One (2004–2005) was largely comprised of consultations with various stakeholders. CIITE Phase Two (2005–2008) is comprised of seven project pilots: Admissions, Advisement, Competency Assessment Models, Credential Assessment, Data Collection in Continuing Education and Part-Time Studies, Language Proficiency (Assessment), and Employment Preparation. The recommendations that emanate from these seven project pilots will inform the direction for CIITE Phase Three.

This report presents findings from CIITE’s Advisement Project Pilot. To learn more about CIITE or to view this report online visit www.collegeconnect.on.ca/ciite.

Acknowledgments

The CIITE Advisement Project Team would like to recognize the gracious participation of the internationally trained immigrants who agreed to contribute their experiences to the Advisement Project Pilot.

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1. Advising Services for Internationally Trained Immigrants in Ontario Colleges

The number of internationally trained immigrants (ITIs) arriving in Ontario continues to increase exponentially and within five years labour force net growth will rely exclusively on immigration. Many ITIs come to Ontario with prior credentials and yet encounter barriers in finding employment in their field. Research indicates that increasing numbers of ITIs are contacting Ontario colleges to access advice, programs, and services in their search for employment commensurate with their skills and knowledge. College Advisors are often the first point of contact for ITIs and as immigration to Ontario continues to increase, the ability to advise ITIs will become an increasingly valuable skill.

ITIs have distinct needs that require a more complex level of advising compared to the needs of domestic students. As ITIs often arrive in Canada with various foreign credentials, training, and work experience, ITI Advisors must assume the task of reconciling ITIs' foreign portfolios with suitable college programs and career selection that will lead to employment in Ontario. Finding employment is complicated for ITIs as their credentials and work experience are often unrecognized or undervalued in Canada. The role of the ITI Advisor is to determine how best to overcome these and other barriers that immigrants often face, including language and lack of Canadian experience.

2. Advisement Project Pilot

The Advisement Project Pilot took place in CIITE Phase II with the participation of four colleges: Algonquin, Centennial, George Brown, and St. Clair. The Advisement Project Team developed a job description for the ITI Advisor role (see Appendix 1) and piloted the role in the participating colleges. ITI Advisors were hired from existing staff at each pilot college and each had previous advisement, or similar experience. ITI Advisor training took place over the course of two all-day workshops. ITI Advisors were trained with specialized knowledge and skills to be able to respond to the complex advising situations which ITIs often present.

Key components of the ITI Advisor role include:

- Cross-cultural communication and assistance with culture shock
- Contextual understanding of immigration in Ontario, Canada, and globally
- Self-awareness of one's own cultural bias
- Knowledge of credential assessment practices in Ontario

2.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PROJECT PILOT

The Advisement Project Pilot resulted in two key recommendations. The first recommendation is to develop, design, and implement Advising Services for ITIs in the Ontario college system, using *Advising Internationally Trained Immigrants: A Guide for Ontario Colleges* as a resource. The second recommendation is to develop, design, and conduct system-wide research that addresses the barriers and challenges that ITIs face in Ontario. CIITE notes that further research should be undertaken to address the flexibility of college program delivery for ITI students and applicants; re-certification processes in Ontario and their impact on ITIs in Ontario colleges; and availability and access to financial aid for ITIs in Ontario colleges. CIITE also recommends that Ontario colleges create an ITI Advisor Network to enable the communication of best practices (see Appendix 2 for details).

3. Research Methods

3.1 RECRUITMENT AND ETHICS

The ITIs who participated in the study were selected through the existing client pool of the pilot colleges' regular Advising Services. To identify participants, clients were asked about their educational history outside of Canada. Eligibility to participate in the pilot was determined by individuals' self-identification as an internationally trained immigrant (i.e. no documentation was necessary).

In preparation for the pilot launch, ITI Advisors engaged in outreach activities in order to notify college departments and local community organizations about the Advisement Project Pilot. Outreach activities included sharing information about ITI Advising Services at career fairs, college open houses, orientation sessions, college information fairs, ESL classes, settlement agencies, and employment agencies (see Appendix 3 for sample outreach posters).

All of the pilot colleges received clearance from their college-based ethics review offices to participate in the

Advisement Project Pilot and participants were required to sign a consent form.

3.2 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection took place through each pilot site's existing Advising Services department. All the pilot colleges' existing Advising Services are located in a centralized department and are open to all potential college applicants and current students.

Data was collected at each pilot site through a custom-designed online data entry form that linked to a central database (see Appendix 4 for a full list of data fields). The database and online data entry form was designed and developed by the Advisement Project Team and external Information Technology consultants. The ITI Advisors at each pilot college site used the online data entry form to feed data directly into a central database. The database was a web-based application that was built with asp.net and connected to a sql 2000 server database.

The online data entry form had three sections: Background Information; Education and Employment History; and Appointments. The first two sections were designed to capture a demographic profile of the participants, including country of origin, language(s) spoken, level of education, and previous field of employment.

The Education and Employment History section of the form was intended to capture details about the ITI's education and work experience obtained internationally and in Canada. The Appointments section of the form was designed to state the nature of the advising appointment, including the purpose of the appointment, referrals made, and appointment length. In addition to the online data entry form, a voluntary online Feedback Form was designed so that ITIs could evaluate their advising appointments.

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Primary data analysis was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, each pilot college analyzed their own college-specific data set using a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods, including frequency distributions, cross-tabulations, and line-by-line coding. The second phase of data analysis was conducted by an external Data Analyst, who examined the data from all the pilot sites as a single data set. The same quantitative and qualitative methods mentioned above were used to analyze this data set.

3.4 LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH METHODS

There were some limitations in research design that may have limited the quality of data collection and analysis in the Advisement Project Pilot. The key limitations identified were the timeframe allotted for database design,

participant recruitment and eligibility criteria, and qualitative data collection. These are described in detail below.

3.4.1 TIMEFRAME

The time required to design, develop, and test the online database exceeded the time allotted. Therefore, the database launch did not directly align with the launch of the pilot. The Advisement Project Team was flexible and patient in response to this, as demonstrated by the ITI Advisors who began collecting data on hard copy forms. Later, they manually entered the information into the electronic database. The delayed launch of the database is attributed to a combination of the unanticipated amount of work necessary to build and test the database, as well as a lack of technical expertise on the part of the Advisement Project Team.

3.4.2 RECRUITMENT AND ELIGIBILITY

At times, ITI Advisors experienced difficulty recruiting ITIs to participate in the pilot. ITIs were often hesitant and reluctant to participate in this pilot, frequently due to their unfamiliarity with social research. The fear that revealing personal information would somehow threaten their eligibility for college admissions or status in Canada was also a contributing factor.

3.4.3 QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

Individual interviews or focus group sessions would have enhanced the quantitative data analysis. Pilot research methods did not include a process for collecting qualitative data from ITIs or from ITI Advisors. As qualitative data collection methods often capture details and stories that are not taken into consideration through quantitative data collection, a mixed-method (qualitative and quantitative) data collection design would have enhanced the quality of data analysis.

4. Findings

The following sections summarize key findings from the data collected through advising appointments with ITI clients at each college pilot site. Data Analysts from the Workforce & Business Development Division at Niagara College conducted an in-depth analysis of the Advisement Project Pilot data.

4.1 GENERAL PROFILE OF SAMPLE

For the Advisement Project Pilot, a total of 1165 ITIs were advised across the four participating college pilot sites (Algonquin, Centennial, George Brown, and St. Clair).

Of this sample, 57% were women and 31% were men. The distribution of the ITI sample across the colleges was relatively consistent. The number of ITIs advised breaks down as follows: Algonquin 223, Centennial 348, George Brown 300, and St. Clair 294.

The Advisement Project Team anticipated that Algonquin and St. Clair would advise significantly lower numbers of ITIs, compared to the colleges in Toronto (Centennial and George Brown). However, the Advisement Pilot findings suggest that the level of need for an ITI Advisor is college-specific. Since immigration trends indicate a growing influx of highly skilled immigrants, and as more individuals choose to settle in Ontario, it is likely colleges located in more remote regions (relative to urban centers) will need some level of ITI Advising capacity.

4.2 EMPLOYMENT PROFILE

The “current status of employment” of the ITI sample varied across the four college pilot sites. The percentage of ITIs who reported they were “currently employed” from George Brown (48.4%) exceeded the percentages at Algonquin (40.4%), St. Clair (37.2%), and Centennial (22.9%).

An interesting correlation was found between career aspirations and the length of time in Canada. At one to six months in Canada, 65.4% of the sample’s participants aspired to continue working in the same field/area. However, by seven to 11 months in Canada, the percentage

dropped to 45.6%, a decrease of almost 20%. This data points towards a general trend that sees ITIs gravitating towards different fields as their time in Canada increases.

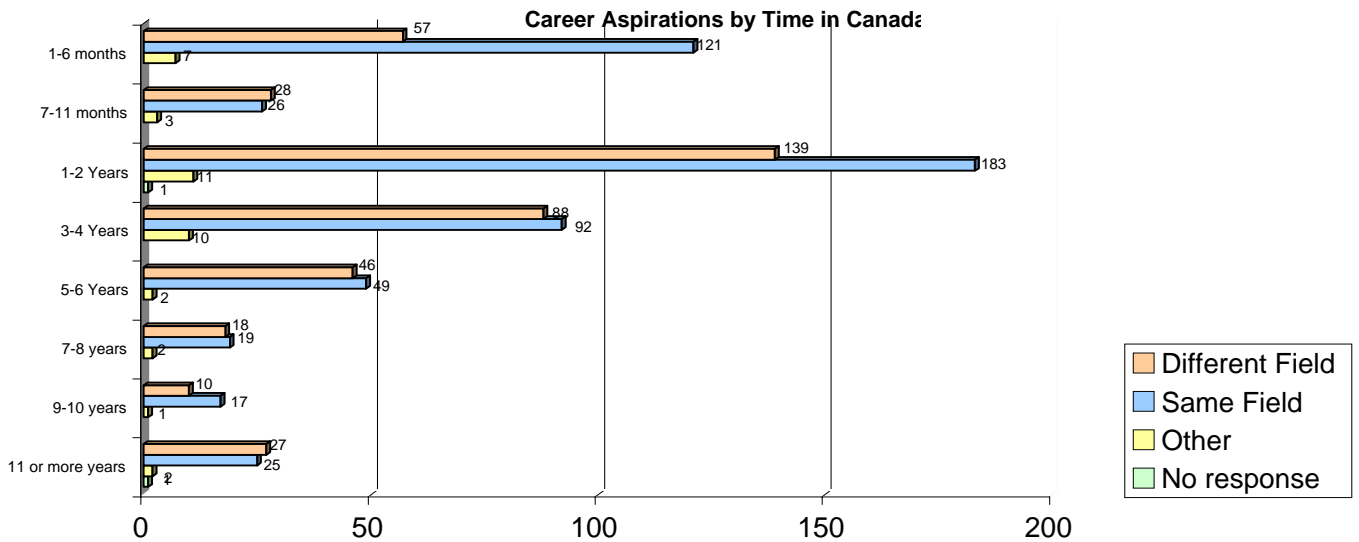
4.3 EDUCATIONAL PROFILE

The ITI sample was highly educated. More than half of the sample indicated they had completed post-secondary level education at the university level outside of Canada. There were 96 countries of education cited by the ITI sample. As expected, the countries of education closely aligned with the countries of origin. The ten most frequently cited countries of education were People’s Republic of China, India, Philippines, Pakistan, Iran, Bangladesh, Colombia, Iraq, Romania, and Sri Lanka.

Over half the sample (57%) indicated they had pursued or completed some form of education in Canada. This education was largely comprised of English language training such as Language Instruction for Newcomers programs (LINC), English as Second Language (ESL) courses, and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) preparatory courses.

4.4. WORK EXPERIENCE PROFILE

Many of the ITIs in the sample had significant foreign work experience. The three most frequently cited occupational areas for foreign work experience were business (19.3%),

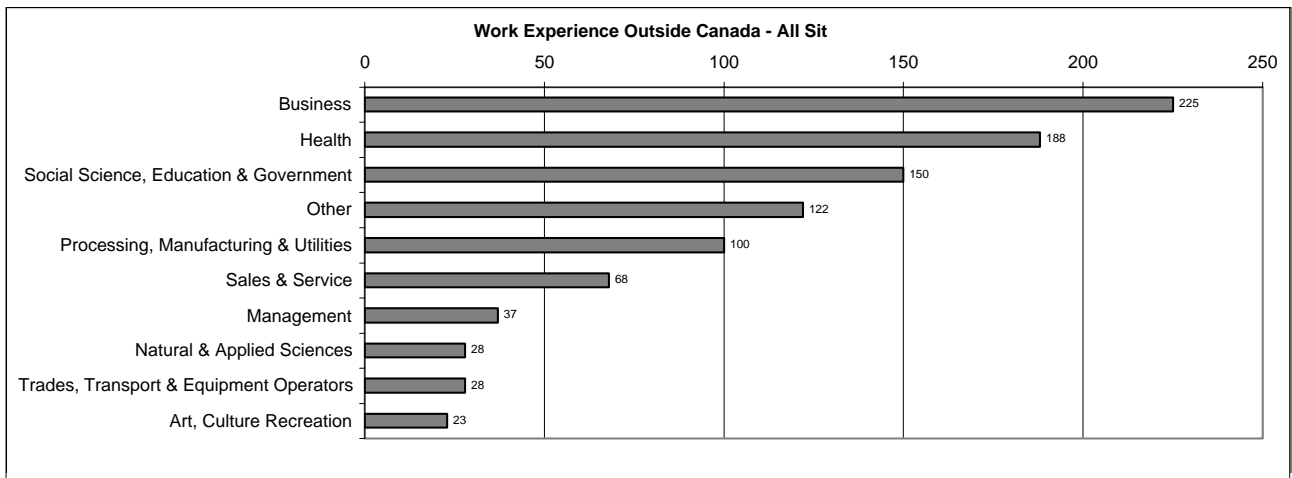
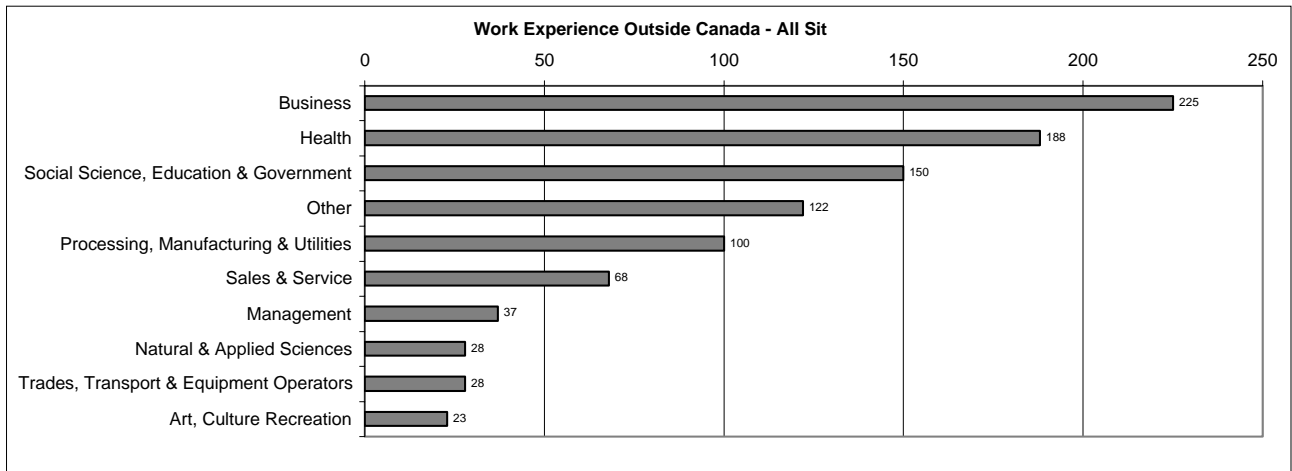


health (16.1%), and social science (12.9%). The findings on foreign work experience were relatively consistent across the four college pilot sites.

Overall, approximately 56% of ITIs in the sample reported having work experience in Canada. The three most frequently cited occupational areas for work experience in Canada were sales and service (19.6%), manufacturing (8.8%), and health (7.7%). The findings on work experience in Canada varied across the four college pilot sites. At George Brown, over 75% of the ITI clients reported having some Canadian work experience. In the other three college pilot sites the percentage of ITIs who reported having Canadian work experience was lower: St. Clair 60.2%, Algonquin 47.5%, and Centennial 41.4%.

4.6. ADVISING APPOINTMENTS

A total of 1570 advising appointments were conducted during the course of the pilot. The total number of appointments exceeded the number of client records, as many clients had multiple appointments during the course of the pilot. The advising appointments break down by college as follows: Algonquin 270, Centennial 262, George Brown 324, and St. Clair 714. There were three modes of communication for these advising appointments: in person, telephone, and email. More than 75% of all appointments in the pilot took place in person, followed by telephone, and email.



4.5 ACCESSING ADVISING SERVICES

ITIs in the sample were asked how they decided to access the college’s Advising Services. Almost 25% indicated they heard of Advising Services through friends. The second and third most frequently cited responses were by walk-in and the college website.

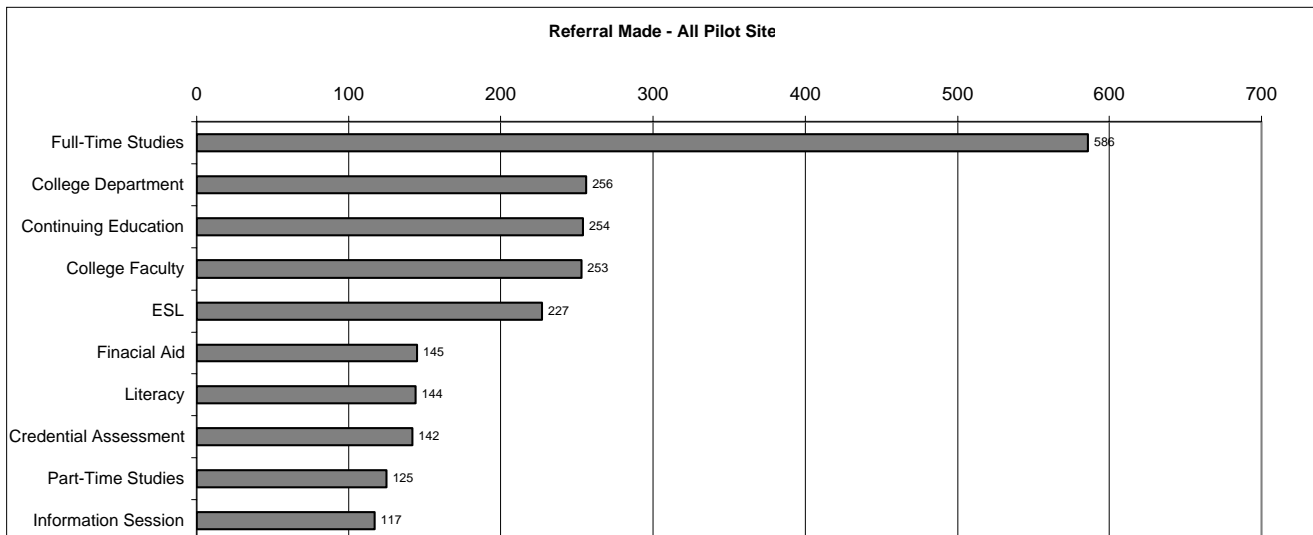
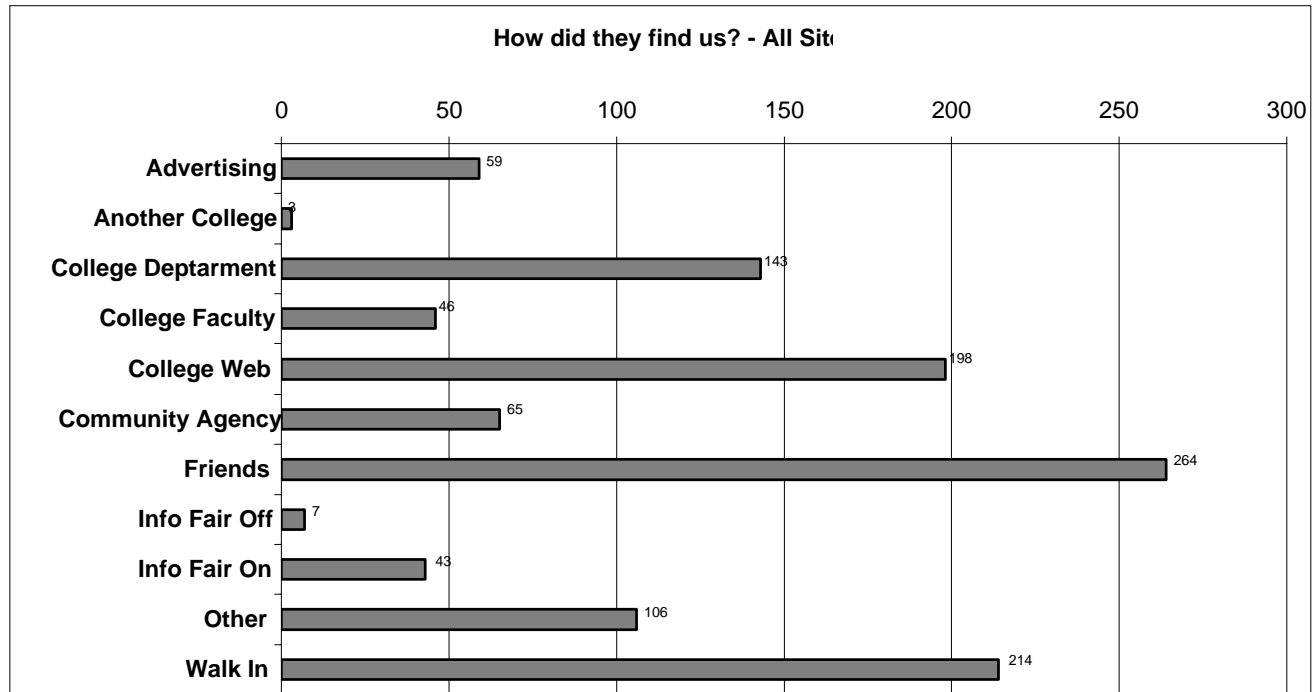
In terms of appointment length, ITI Advisors indicated most advising appointments were 30 to 60 minutes long (40.6%), followed by 15 to 30 minutes (27.2%), and 15 minutes or less (17.3%). The most frequently cited responses for the purpose of the appointment were fairly consistent across the four college pilot sites. They were college admissions, education guidance, career guidance,

and exemptions.

ITI Advisors made a total of 4156 referrals, from which over 20 categories of referrals were identified. The seven most frequently cited referrals were to college admissions (79.1%), full-time studies (50.3%), OCAS application (40.4%), college department (22.0%), continuing education (21.8%), college faculty (21.7%), and English as a Second Language (12.2%). The findings on referrals were consistent across the four college pilot sites.

with respect to labour market integration. Four key themes were identified among these barriers: financial, language, information, and credential recognition.

- Financial barriers refer to the high cost of services and programs such as post-secondary level course fees, Prior Learning and Recognition (PLAR) courses, translations of official documents, and credential assessment reports.



4.7. FREQUENTLY CITED BARRIERS FACED BY INTERNATIONALLY TRAINED IMMIGRANTS

ITI Advisors recorded the barriers that ITI clients faced

- Language barriers refer to workplace English language proficiency levels that prevent ITIs from accessing meaningful employment.

- Information barriers refer to an ITI's lack of access to accurate information about various processes that would otherwise assist them in labour market integration. The advising appointment was often the ITI's first opportunity to access accurate information about applications, financial aid options, and regulatory bodies.
- Credential recognition barriers refer to the lack of consistent processes around recognition and (professional, or work) earned outside of Canada.

4.8. POST-APPOINTMENT FEEDBACK SURVEYS

An online feedback survey was created in order for ITIs to provide comments about their advising experience. In total, 129 feedback surveys were completed (an 11% response rate). The optional nature of the survey was identified as the reason for this low response rate. More than 75% of feedback survey respondents indicated the Advising Services were useful, and 89% agreed they would recommend the Advising Services to other ITIs. The respondents reported positive feedback regarding the Advisor's skills and the types of advice received. For examples of ITI feedback please see Appendix 5.

5. Discussion

The Advisement Pilot research was unique in its exploration of Advising Services for ITIs in Ontario colleges. To date, very few research studies have been conducted in Ontario colleges, particularly in regard to the ITI population. Pilot findings raised important questions about the role of ITI Advising Services and the implications for future research and program planning in Ontario colleges. The pilot findings emphasized the necessity to further explore potential solutions to the issues that impede meaningful labour market integration for ITIs. These issues include foreign credential recognition, competency assessments, Canadian employer outreach, workplace-specific language training, and access to financial assistance.

5.1 ITI ADVISOR ROLE

ITI Advisors can be valuable sources of knowledge on the labour market integration issues facing ITIs and, as such, Advisors can play a proactive role in assisting ITIs. The ITI Advisors in the pilot developed a keen understanding about the employment-related barriers that ITIs face, and as a result, their advising capacity was enhanced. Ontario colleges are well positioned to fulfill a key role in the integration of immigrants into the labour market through

employment-targeted training and education.

Advising Services for ITIs are essential for ITI applicants and students. Pilot findings showed that ITI Advising Services were useful (see section 4.8). Future longitudinal research that follows ITIs from the point of advising to an outcome such as college graduation or employment would be informative. However, it was beyond the scope of this pilot to study longitudinal trends.

5.2 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection and data management is an extremely important aspect of an ITI Advisor's role. Tracking the common barriers faced by ITIs is a valuable resource for Ontario colleges. However, Ontario colleges currently do not have system-wide data collection practices in place to capture the presence of ITI service users, applicants, or students. Data collected and tracked by ITI Advisors can be used to support college program and policy changes, and provide Ontario colleges with an accurate picture of the ITIs using Advising Services.

5.3 REGIONAL CONCENTRATIONS OF ITIS

At the beginning of the pilot, there was speculation that the two Toronto college pilot sites would represent significantly higher numbers of ITIs in this sample. This was not the case; in fact, at Algonquin College (Ottawa) ITIs identified 65 countries of origin, the most diverse in the pilot. Data from across the four college pilot sites was comparable in terms of sample size and diversity.

5.4 ITI EMPLOYMENT

The three most frequently cited occupational areas for foreign work experience were business, health, and social science, whereas the respective areas for work experience in Canada were sales, manufacturing, and health. This contrast is indicative of a general decline in the type of employment accessible to ITIs after they immigrate to Canada since ITI Advisors noted that, for most of their ITI clients, sales jobs referred to low-paying positions in the retail and service industry, and manufacturing referred to factory jobs.

The percentage of underemployment in the ITI sample was significant. ITI Advisors noted that many ITI clients were extremely frustrated by the lack of progress in their efforts to make a living in Canada. Canadian educational credentials may be only one of many individual and/or systemic barriers that constrain an ITI's economic integration. Individual barriers include limited English language, and/or occupation and workplace-specific language skills, while systemic barriers include the devaluation of internationally acquired credentials and work experiences.

5.5 REFERRALS

A large proportion (79.1%) of ITIs in the pilot were referred to college admissions by the ITI Advisors. This is not surprising, considering the role that Advising Services play at Ontario colleges. However, these findings raise the question of whether Advisors should be obligated to recommend an educational pathway at their particular college. In other words, should Advising Services meet the actual needs of ITI clients, or should they emphasize the option of pursuing further education in the college? The critical question centers on the potential role that Ontario colleges can play in providing Advising Services for ITIs. In other words, should Ontario colleges go beyond simply retraining ITIs in college programs to assisting them in finding the most efficient path to suitable employment, even if it is not through the college system?

Findings indicated that credential assessments represented only 12.2% of all referrals made by ITI Advisors. This number was relatively low compared to other referrals such as college admissions (79.1%). This finding is remarkable considering that 86% of the ITI sample completed post-secondary education outside of Canada and that when asked the purpose of their appointment exemptions was the third highest response.

5.6 ADVISING APPOINTMENTS

Much of the advising appointments was spent discussing career pathway options to meet the ITI clients' educational and career goals. The four key types of pathway options discussed were career updating, career shifting (the option of a related or similar career), career changing, and career exploration. Only career updating is related to applying the ITIs' existing skills and qualifications to training or employment in Canada. The other three types are related to pursuing alternate career options. The ITIs in the sample had not found employment in fields aligned with their existing qualifications; this highlights a disconnect between Canada's recruitment of skilled immigrants and the actual employment outcomes within the ITI sample.

5.7 FEEDBACK

Overall, the pilot findings clearly demonstrate that there is a significant demand for Advising Services that focus upon the unique labour market integration needs of ITIs. The ITIs in the sample gave positive feedback about the benefits of the Advising Services they received. The feedback component of this pilot could have been enhanced by longitudinal research methods that would have enabled Ontario colleges to track and identify the direct impact of the advising appointment on the ITIs over a longer period of time. This would have identified some of the individual outcomes such as college enrolment or employment.

Appendix 1. ITI Advisor Job Description

The following is based on the ITI Advisor Job Description used at St. Clair College for the Advisement Project pilot.

A) POSITION SUMMARY:

This position is part of a pilot project funded by the government to assist internationally trained immigrants to access education and career planning in transition to their life in Canada. The incumbent will identify barriers and design and implement services to assist the potential clients to access appropriate program and career choices.

More specifically, it is the incumbent’s responsibility:

- To provide consistent, complete and accurate information to internationally trained immigrants
- To design, implement, and co-ordinate college activities and services including advisement services, credential evaluations, PLAR, learning plans, and career planning, including internal liaison between college Chairs, Co-coordinators/Faculty regarding program information and access to education
- To co-ordinate and implement recruitment and orientation events for this target audience
- To provide workshops for potential students as determined by need (e.g., Career Planning)
- To produce reports as directed.

B) DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Liaison: Develops, plans, co-ordinates, and delivers off-campus information presentations to promote the college to internationally trained immigrants in a variety of ways, including cultural groups and agencies. Communicates with appropriate groups through a variety of mediums including websites, emails, and newsletters. (35%)

2.. Advisement/Workshops/Information Sessions: Conducts on-campus Admissions Information sessions on college programs for individuals/groups seeking entry into the College. Refers clients to college resource people or to community agencies as appropriate. Provides up-to-date Admissions Information on an individual basis as needed after workshops, by request or on phone. Develops, markets, and presents Career Planning and Education Planning according to demand. (44%)

3. Identifies Barriers, Designs and Implements Services with appropriate departments, Administrators, Faculty Co-coordinators, and other staff. (15%)

4. Reports, Recommendations: Makes recommendations for recruitment strategies, writes summary and statistical reports of liaison, recruitment, and admissions information activities. (6%)

Appendix 2. ITI Advisor Network

The establishment of an ITI Advisor Network across the Ontario college system would enable communication between colleges about ITI Advising Services. An ITI Advisors Network could create a forum for an annual conference where ITI Advisor training and professional development could take place and ITI Advising expertise could be shared in a community of practice. This appendix suggests how individual colleges can work together to create a system-wide ITI Advisor Network.

CIITE suggests that a Committee of ITI Advisors be formed and comprised of representatives from Ontario colleges. The mandate of the Committee would be to establish and uphold guiding principles and standards of excellence for ITI advising practices. The Committee would be responsible for setting specific goals and objectives, coordinating the establishment of the ITI Advisor Network across the Ontario College system, and organizing an annual conference for ITI Advisors.

ITI ADVISOR CONFERENCE

An annual ITI Advisor Conference would enable ITI Advisors to remain up to date on available resources and the issues facing ITIs in Ontario colleges. An ITI Advisor Conference would allow Advisors to share resources and best practices. These resources could be compiled in a document or published on the web so that they are accessible to all ITI Advisors. The conference would allow ITI Advisors the opportunity to share tools, policies, and practices with which they have had success. These experiences could then be adapted by the other colleges to suit their own unique needs.

An ITI Advising Conference would also be the venue for annual training sessions. The following workshops could be included:

- ITI Advisor Training (topics may include diversity and cultural awareness, cross-cultural communications, data management systems, and case management skills)
- Best Practices and Valuable Resources for ITI Advising
- Developing a Policy and Procedures Manual
- How to Conduct Effective Outreach and Promotions

Appendix 3. Sample Outreach Posters



Are you internationally trained and yearning to interact with others to share similar experiences?



Launch of the Sheridan ITPs Network and Website

Saturday, April 28, 2007
at 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning
Room B311,
7899 McLaughlin Road
Brampton, ON L6V 1G6



Participants of Sheridan's Career Planning for the Internationally Trained program are forming a network. It's opened to all ITPs. Our vision is to share real world solutions to help ITPs effectively and efficiently to settle into the Canadian labor market by linking them with established ITPs who can provide support and understanding, and can share their first-hand experiences.

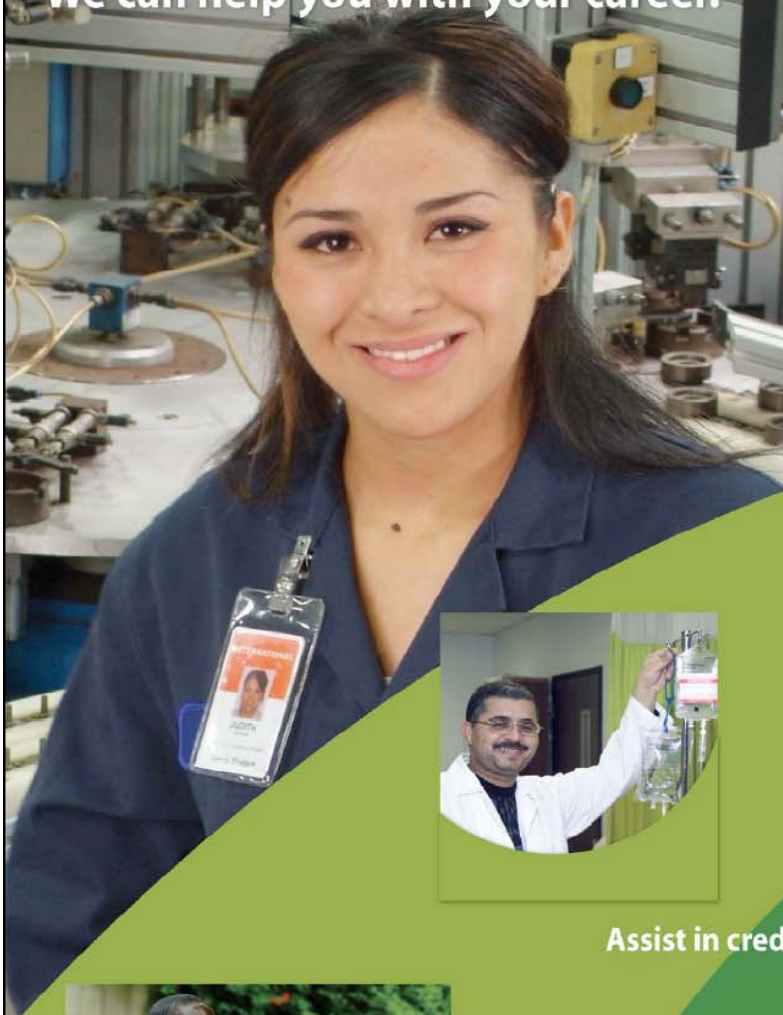
Sheridan ITPs,
1 Bartley Bull Pkwy, Unit 12,
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Appendix 4. Database Fields

Data Fields in the Advisement Project Pilot Research Database:

Background Information	Education and Employment History	Appointments
College	Education obtained outside Canada	Record created
Informed consent	Country of education attained	ITI Advisor
First and last name	Education obtained in Canada	Date of appointments
Gender	Work experience outside Canada	Mode of communication
Mailing address	Work experience in Canada	Referrals made by ITI Advisor
Phone number(s)	Current employment status	Purpose of visit
Email Address	Current field of employment	Appointment notes
Current status	Aspired career/educational path	Length of appointment time
Student ID		
Country of origin		
First language and other languages spoken		
Other languages spoken		
Status in Canada		
Dependents		
Length of time in Canada		
Length of time in Ontario		
How did you find us?		

Appendix 5. ITI Feedback

The following list summarizes the key points made by ITIs in the Project Pilot Feedback Survey.

- Advisors should have a wide breadth of knowledge. For example, knowledge about relevant Canadian and Provincial (immigrant-related) laws.
- Hours of operation for Advising Services should be extended into the evening to accommodate people who are employed during regular business hours.
- ITI Advisors should follow up with clients to make sure the information shared during the advising appointment was well-understood and utilized.
- Advising Services for ITIs should be better advertised to ensure more people are aware they have access to this service.
- One respondent noted, “Yes, they help me to know ‘what I have to do next?’ In beginning I’m nervous but after I met Advisor, I felt relaxed.”

