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Benefits of Practicum Based Professional Development

In your career development – as with most life issues – there is a direct relationship between effort and reward. The Health and Safety profession is growing rapidly in Canada and beyond, but employers are becoming more discerning about actual qualifications of candidates for staff advisory positions. In our jobs, we literally reap what we sow. Careers are rewarded in relationship to professional development efforts, which directly impacts job performance.

When the Certificate in Health, Safety and Environmental Processes program (CHSEP) was initiated, we followed the example of many current vocational programs and decided to include a Guided Practicum. This is a valid and most reliable assessment of a student's ability to demonstrate practical application of various elements of the curriculum. Generally, graduates of practicum - based vocational programs find employment more readily than non - practicum programs, and come to their job with important and relevant practical workplace skills.

The CHSEP program at the University of Fredericton is – to the best of our knowledge – the only University, web-based Professional Development program that requires graduates to complete a Guided Practicum as the final component of their Advanced studies. It was – still is – seen as an excellent learning assessment tool, and helps ensure graduates have actual skills directly related to competent health and safety practice.

There are several major advantages for students completing a Guided Practicum:

- 1) Demonstration of practical application of studies:** CHSEP students have an advantage over graduates of non – Practicum programs in that they are guided through a process of actually demonstrating practical application of various elements of their course studies. From an academic perspective, this means CHSEP graduates may be more readily accepted in to higher level studies if they so choose. It also means they build important research/writing skills for their current or future employers.
- 2) Development of deeper skills in the selected research area:** GP students invariably select a topic of personal interest, and 'drill down' in to that topic to levels they would not otherwise have done. Almost without exception, GP students discover they have developed valuable and relevant expertise in their selected topic, and are much better able to support safety operations for current or future employers.
- 3) Increases employability:** CHSEP students completing their GP demonstrate actual practical knowledge in their research area. Graduates of non – practicum programs are only able to point to exam results, which is not particularly helpful to potential employers. The higher level skills acquired through GP completion are particularly valuable to those entering the OSHE discipline for the first time.

Students completing a GP-based OSHE professional development program will have a distinct employment advantage over those who choose other professional development routes. As well, they are much better equipped to contribute directly to current employer needs, and will be more readily accepted as candidates for higher level OSHE education programs as their careers move forward.

Of the hundreds of Guided Practica completed to date by CHSEP students, many were concerned about expectations when beginning the GP, but almost all are grateful for the exercise, and all are considerably more confident and competent in their topic area upon completion.

For more information on University of Fredericton's original, award-winning Certificate in Health, Safety and Environmental Processes program, go to

<http://www.universityfredericton.ca/chsep.html>

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