

Experiential Learning Opportunities at Seneca Polytechnic: Empowering Students and Transforming Communities

Seneca Polytechnic is committed to providing students with experiential learning opportunities that bridge the gap between theory and practice, preparing them for successful careers. One such initiative, the I-Care Project, has not only enriched the educational experience of Seneca's Opticianry students but also made a profound impact on the community. This article explores the transformative power of experiential learning at Seneca Polytechnic, with a focus on the I-Care Project and its significant outcomes.

Through the I-Care Project, Seneca's Opticianry students have gained valuable experiential learning opportunities, directly applying their classroom knowledge in real-world settings. This initiative has provided crucial vision care services to the Seneca Yorkgate Campus community. To date, 181 Seneca Yorkgate Campus students have received free vision screenings, eye exams, and prescription glasses, making a tangible difference in their lives. These experiences have not only benefited the students but also fostered empathy and compassion, instilling a sense of social responsibility.

The impact of the I-Care Project extends beyond the campus community. More than 5.5 million Canadians live with uncorrected poor vision, and it can be assumed that a significant percentage of Seneca students share this challenge. According to a survey conducted by Seneca's I-Care Project scheduling tool, 42% of students do not wear corrective eyewear. Additionally, 79% rated their vision as needing improvement or poor, highlighting the importance of vision care services. Through the I-Care Project, Seneca Polytechnic is addressing this crucial need and providing students with access to essential eye care.

The impact of the I-Care Project on Seneca's Opticianry students has been profound. After going through the project, 83% of students required a new prescription, emphasizing the significance of regular eye exams and the role of experiential learning in identifying and addressing vision needs. Participating students have gained practical experience, developed confidence in their abilities, and strengthened their skills in serving clients effectively. This real-world exposure enhances their professional growth and prepares them for future success in the opticianry field.

Experiential learning opportunities at Seneca Polytechnic, exemplified by the impactful I-Care Project, provide students with valuable hands-on experiences and also address the vision care needs of the community. With 10 Seneca Opticianry students gaining practical learning opportunities and 181 Seneca Yorkgate Campus students benefiting from vision screenings and eye care services, Seneca Polytechnic is making a positive difference in the lives of its students and the community. By emphasizing social responsibility and empowering students for real-world success, Seneca Polytechnic sets a remarkable standard for experiential learning in higher education.

Brittney Mitchell, a second-year Opticianry student and the I-Care Project Coordinator, shared her experience, "As students, our exposure to real-life situations is often limited, and it is only during co-op work terms that we encounter the complexities of customer service. Transitioning to a workplace environment can be challenging, as the fast-paced nature of the job often leaves little time for mentors

to guide the students through every step. However, through the I-Care Project, we were able to actively engage with individuals in need, understanding their struggles and making a profound impact on their lives. It has been an eye-opening experience, both professionally and personally, and I am grateful for the opportunity to give back while gaining practical skills that will benefit my future career."

Brittney's testimony exemplifies how the I-Care Project equips students with real-world skills while also instilling a sense of empathy and compassion. Their dedication to addressing vision care needs and making a positive impact on the community reflects Seneca Polytechnic's commitment to experiential learning and creating well-rounded professionals.

About the I-Care Project:

In 2022, Seneca Polytechnic launched the I-Care Project in collaboration with EssilorLuxottica and the ONESIGHT EssilorLuxottica Foundation. This initiative aims to educate the Seneca community about preventing sight loss and prioritizing vision health. It provides accessible vision screening and comprehensive eye exams to the Seneca community, led by staff and faculty from the Opticianry program. The project offers valuable experiential learning opportunities for Opticianry students and addresses the issue of uncorrected poor vision in Canada. Thanks to generous donors, the I-Care Project ensures barrier-free access to healthcare for Seneca students.

To learn more about the I-Care Project, visit senecacollege.ca/givingback