

Support staff make a difference for students

Support staff in Ontario's colleges are dedicated to one common goal: to make sure students get the best education possible. Here are just a few of the jobs support staff perform to help students:

Technicians and technologists run labs and assist students with equipment so that computer hardware and software work the way they are supposed to. But the work of technicians and technologists is about much more than computers. In culinary labs, for example, technicians and technologists work with students to make sure student work stations have the right ingredients available for chef or culinary management courses.

In Early Childhood Education, support staff work directly with students and the children, showing students how to set up day programs for children and evaluating students' performance in lab settings.

Library Technicians help students with research skills and help them find the

information they need for courses and assignments.

Reproduction Equipment Operators provide students with copies of course materials they need. This includes specialized copying such as blueprints for architectural students.

Learning Support Service Staff work one-on-one with students with and without learning disabilities. These workers include notetakers, invigilators, tutors, educational assistants and learning strategists.

Co-op Officers match employers to students and students to employers in co-op programs. The officers visit workplaces and evaluate students' on-the-job learning.

Placement Officers help students find jobs after graduation.

The work of **Clerks and Secretaries** forms the backbone of every student's college experience. Financial Aid Officers work with students to help them get financial aid from the Ontario Student Assistance Plan.

Admissions clerks help students get into classes, pay their fees, drop out of courses, and get refunds. Secretaries help students understand the full range of college policies and procedures, e.g., how to appeal a low grade.

College support staff who work 24 hours a week or less are doing their jobs under less-than-ideal conditions. Part-time support staff have lower pay than their full-time counterparts, no benefits*, and zero job security. As a result, many skilled and knowledgeable people quit their college jobs at the first opportunity.

The full-time staff spend too much of their time training new part-timers instead of doing their own work and helping students succeed.

Original article by Jean Fordyce, chair of the OPSEU full-time support staff division. This version is prepared in consultation with Candy Lindsay, vice-president of OPSECAAT (support staff).

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*Part-time college workers work under approximately 48 different sets of working conditions (faculty and support in 24 colleges). Job descriptions also vary. If this does not apply in your case, count yourself fortunate and let's work together so we can eventually bargain a fair contract for all part-time college workers.