

Flexibility a benefit to certificate programs

These courses can help upgrade your skills, career

By **RAFAEL BRUSILOW**
for Metro Toronto

Feeling stuck at work and hoping to upgrade your career? It may be time to think about taking a certificate program to increase your skill set and better your chances of advancing at your job.

A staple of most college and university continuing education repertoires, certificate programs let you obtain valuable credentials and skills in your industry without having to invest a disproportionate amount of time and money doing another whole degree or diploma.

"The advantage is that you can obtain a credential much more quickly than you can obtain a diploma," said Janis Miller, a dean of corporate and continuing education at the Humber Institute of

Technology and Advanced Learning.

Courses typically run 240 hours or more of curriculum and can be taken during flexible times or even via the Internet, allowing people to complete certificates for credentials while still working at a full-time job.

Humber College alone registers about 30,000 people annually, 70 per cent of which already have previous college or degree experience. More than three-quarters stay employed full time while taking classes, a fact testament to the flexibility of certificate programs like Humber's.

Still, Miller says even though certificate courses try to be convenient, don't let

yourself think they're easy pickings.

"Be aware there is a time commitment. These are courses that come with formal examinations. You've got to build in time for homework and tests. There's more to it than just showing up for class," she said.

Since most continuing education programs offer Internet-based learning options, options abound in programs all across Canada for any particular certificate program you might be interested in. If you are in a heavily-regulated field like nursing, however, check with program directors to make sure the certification they offer is applicable to the province you work in.

Beyond the tangible bene-

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Janis Miller, Humber Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning



Instructor Wally Kowal lectures in his business communications class at Ryerson University. These classes can offer a great opportunity to network with other students.

fits of obtaining a certificate, Miller says such courses often tend to be great places to make connections with other people in your field.

"People in your class often will have similar interests to yours and be in a similar industry. It's an opportunity to network," Miller said.

Many employers can be

convinced to cover tuition costs for a certificate course if the skills taught directly impact your job, so don't be afraid to shop the idea around to your boss.

"Check with your employer — if you're taking courses that will improve you at your job, employers will often give tuition reim-

bursement," Miller said.

Skilled immigrants who can't find work in their primary field might want to find out if a particular program could help them get certified in Canada.

"For new Canadians, a certificate could be a quick way to obtain a Canadian credential," Miller said.

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