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PCU-WHS hosts virtual Convocation Ceremony for first Bachelor of Disability Management program graduate

On December 14, 2020, Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences (PCU-WHS) hosted the inaugural Convocation Ceremony for the Bachelor of Disability Management, a milestone both for the University and in the life of the very first graduating student.

Shanna Ramm enrolled in the degree program in 2015, and participated in the University's flexible, distance-learning approach. She was able to achieve the Bachelor of Disability Management while living in Saskatchewan and working full-time as a Senior Disability & Wellness Specialist for Mosaic Inc., a major resource extraction company.

The Honourable Wayne Wouters, PC, OC, Chancellor of PCU-WHS, opened the Convocation Ceremony with his words of congratulations. "Shanna, this achievement is even more extraordinary when considering that you are the very first to be awarded this degree, and have accomplished this without a group of peers by your side or alumni from previous years to guide you. Your independent achievement speaks to your resilience, focus and commitment and you have made all of us so very proud."

He reminded the audience of the importance and the impact that Disability Management professionals have right across the country. "The disability rights movement in Canada has evolved over the years, as new legislation has come into force and perceptions have shifted. Today, the importance of diversity and inclusion is becoming more well known; however, people with disabilities are still denied access to many of the employment and socio-economic opportunities of their able bodied peers. We must continue to celebrate the achievements and contributions – as well as increase public awareness, understanding and acceptance – of people with differing abilities. The opportunity to enter into or return to employment is absolutely essential for any individual's dignity, financial independence, fulfillment and self worth – the impacts of Disability Management and Return to Work professionals cannot be overstated, it is truly life changing work."

The urgent need to better protect our workers, and support those suffering from illness and injury was echoed by Ken Neumann, Canadian National Director of the United Steelworkers and PCU-WHS Board of Governors Co-Chair, who offered sobering statistics to help illustrate the importance of trained professionals in this area of work. "7,500 workers die from occupational accidents and diseases around the world every day and, based on the latest ILO data, there are about 187,500 permanent disabilities per day around the globe and, on average, injuries are only about 30% of the total mental and physical health impairments. There are more than 1.4 million Canadians living in poverty. COVID-19 has certainly upended all of our lives, but persons with disabilities have been much more negatively affected. The Globe and Mail recently reported that the number of disabled Canadians contemplating suicide has increased from 14% to 28% during the pandemic."

The Bachelor of Disability Management provides graduates with the underpinning of knowledge, skills and competencies, on the one hand to assist absent workers to return to work and, on the other hand to assist employing organizations, services providers and insurers in the public and private sectors to introduce and operate cost-effective and responsive DM / RTW programs. The Bachelor of Disability Management is the first and only degree of this nature and level internationally.



Prof. Dr. Joachim Breuer, President of the International Social Security Association, a United Nations affiliated organization located in Geneva, acknowledged the international significance of this landmark achievement and added his congratulations to Shanna on her graduation, "This is a great and fascinating moment. Working in Disability Management is a passion and you have it. You are on more than a career path; it is a highway, filled with future possibilities."

Toward the end of the ceremony, Shanna thanked her family and her employer for their support and reflected on the impacts of her studies. "It has been a lot of work, but so worthwhile.....specialized education really benefits everyone."

Lisa Davis, Shanna's Manager at Mosaic Inc., who had joined the ceremony to celebrate Shanna's achievement, emphasized the value of this specialized education, from an employer's perspective. "Shanna, you are an amazing asset to our business. This degree will only take us further with our work on Disability Management."

Chancellor Wouters' closing words to Shanna re-enforced that people with disabilities are still denied access to many of the employment and socio-economic opportunities of their able bodied peers. "Your skills and expertise will allow you to support vulnerable community members and assist them in navigating their own paths forward, so that they too can realize their potential and make their own valued contributions to society."

Congratulations to Shanna Ramm on becoming the first graduate in the Bachelor of Disability Management, a proud day for you and for the University!

About PCU-WHS

Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences (PCU-WHS) is a statutory, not-for-profit, post-secondary, degree granting education and research institution for the special purpose of creating and disseminating new knowledge including applied research in the fields of workplace safety, health promotion, return to work and disability management, comprehensive rehabilitation, and disability leadership studies.

In addition to the Bachelor of Disability Management, the University offers an Advanced Certificate in Return to Work as well as numerous continuing education certificate programs and courses for professionals who are already established in the field. The broad curriculum of courses range from 12 hours in duration for an individual continuing education module, up to four years in total for the full Degree program. All options are offered online attracting students from across Canada and all over the world.

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