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New study shows employer perspective plays significant role in hiring people with disabilities

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. — A group of graduate students at the University of St. Thomas' Opus College of Business have released a new study detailing the barriers people with disabilities face when attempting to enter the workforce. The study found that despite recognizing the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities, factors such as implicit bias and difficulties providing social and cultural accommodation deter most companies from hiring individuals with disabilities.

The study was commissioned by MDI, a Minneapolis-based nonprofit manufacturer which employs more than 150 people with disabilities, approximately half its workforce. In Minnesota, the employment rate of working-age people (age 21 to 64) with disabilities is reported at 44%. For the general population it is 84%. Individuals with disabilities are overrepresented in part-time and lower-paying positions.

"We are grateful to the students of the Opus College of Business for exploring this important workforce issue," said Peter McDermott, president and CEO of MDI. "At MDI we evaluate prospective employees based on what they can do, rather than focusing on their limitations. This study reinforces our belief that individuals with disabilities can offer meaningful contributions to the workforce, and we encourage other employers to broaden their mindset when it comes to hiring new employees."

"What a great opportunity it was to learn about a major workforce problem that many regions are facing," said Mackenzie Grutzner, Opus College of Business student who conducted the study. "I was not previously aware of the challenges facing potential employers and individuals with disabilities seeking employment. MDI has taken an innovative approach to dismantling these barriers and I hope other companies follow their lead."

To view the study findings, [click here](#).

About MDI

[MDI](#) is a leader in manufacturing corrugated standard and custom plastic packaging solutions, production assembly, and environmental services. As a non-profit through a Social Enterprise model, MDI creates self-sufficiency by providing meaningful work in an inclusive environment, with nearly half of the workforce comprised of people with disabilities. Headquartered in Minneapolis, with additional locations in Hibbing, Grand Rapids, and Cohasset, MDI offers an unparalleled customer experience, while providing high quality products and services to businesses and organizations.

About the University of St. Thomas

Located in the Twin Cities of Minnesota, the University of St. Thomas is a private, liberal arts university that emphasizes values-based education and career preparation. With approximately 10,000 students, it is Minnesota's largest private, nonprofit college or university. Inspired by Catholic intellectual tradition, the University of St. Thomas educates students to be morally responsible leaders who think critically, act wisely and work skillfully to advance the common good. The university has three campuses: St. Paul, Minneapolis and Rome, Italy. The University of St. Thomas Opus College of Business mission is to develop effective, principled business leaders who think globally, act ethically and create enduring value for society. We are leaders in the business of health care, entrepreneurship and principled leadership.

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