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[Home \(/en\)](#) » [Publications \(/en/publications\)](#) » [Articles \(/en/publications/articles\)](#) » Making the Grade: College Students with Disabilities and Academic Success

Publications

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Making the Grade: College Students with Disabilities and Academic Success



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The [Adaptech Research Network \(http://www.adaptech.org/en/about\)](http://www.adaptech.org/en/about) consists of [a team \(http://www.adaptech.org/en/team\)](http://www.adaptech.org/en/team) of academics, students and stakeholders. Since 1996, we have been conducting bilingual research on postsecondary students with and without disabilities by examining factors which contribute to academic success. For example, in [a six-year archival study](#)

<http://www.adaptech.org/sites/default/files/abAcademicPerformanceOfCollegeFT.pdf> , the key facilitator for 192 college graduates with disabilities was being registered for campus disability related services. When 633 college students with various disabilities were compared to 40,262 students without disabilities, we found that the 2 groups graduated at the same rate, although students with disabilities took a little longer.

In, 2010, [we conducted a cross-Canada study](http://www.adaptech.org/en/research/gradswd) (<http://www.adaptech.org/en/research/gradswd>) that examined what aspects contribute to higher grades and to intention to graduate among 611 postsecondary students with various disabilities. The best predictors of intention to graduate were the absence of social alienation on campus, [strong course self-efficacy](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042814011513/pdf?md5=6e6fef30257b3cab8e07b1c9ee1f431b&pid=1-s2.0-S1877042814011513-main.pdf) (<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042814011513/pdf?md5=6e6fef30257b3cab8e07b1c9ee1f431b&pid=1-s2.0-S1877042814011513-main.pdf>) (e.g., confidence in being able to successfully research a term paper, take good class notes), and a variety of school environment related facilitators (e.g., a good course schedule, positive attitudes of professors) as well as personal situation facilitators (e.g., having friends, high levels of personal motivation). In addition, students who had registered for campus disability-related services were more likely to intend to graduate as were full-time students. Intention to graduate and grades were only weakly related, although grades were best predicted by course self-efficacy. Results also showed that colleges are more “friendly” to students with disabilities than were universities (i.e., students felt less alienated and experience more school environment related facilitators).

Recently, we focused specifically on students with mental-health issues because there are a growing number of students at the postsecondary level presenting with these concerns. Our key findings¹ showed that students with mental health problems were less likely to intend to graduate than students with learning disabilities (LD). They were also less likely to register for campus disability-related services than students with LD.

Since we know that many college students with disabilities are not registered for campus disability related services, we created an on-line database of free and inexpensive assistive technologies and a set of demonstration videos that are

accessible to students and faculty, regardless of their individual differences. [Our database \(http://www.adaptech.org/en/downloads\)](http://www.adaptech.org/en/downloads) provides a listing of useful and affordable software on different operating systems (e.g., Windows, Mac, OS, Android) and a number of devices (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones). Software is categorized based on function: for example, adapted keyboards, dictionary/reference, organization/productivity, dictation, scanning, screen reading and writing.

Adaptech also does research on information and communication technologies (ICTs) used by college instructors. In fact, our current research compares [student and instructor perspectives on ICTs used in the colleges \(http://www.adaptech.org/sites/default/files/abWhatDoCollegeStudentsReallyWant.pdf\)](http://www.adaptech.org/sites/default/files/abWhatDoCollegeStudentsReallyWant.pdf).

By examining ICT-use, exploring facilitators and barriers to academic success, and providing free and inexpensive information to the college network, we are offering practical, research-based solutions which are likely to be useful not only for students with disabilities but also for the diversity of the college population, such as second language learners and immigrants.

Resources suggested by the author

Examples of disabilities include learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, mental-health disorders, autism spectrum disorder, low vision, hearing impairment, visual impairment, mobility impairment.

¹ Jorgensen, M., Budd, J., Fichten, C. S., Nguyen, M. N., & Havel, A. (2016). *Graduation of Canadian college students with learning disabilities and students with mental health related disabilities*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

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