

**Members:**

Catherine Fichten (Theme Leader), Rhonda Amsel, Phil Abrami, Richard Schmid, Sylvia d'Apollonia, Maria Barile, Jennison Asuncion, Alice Havel, Shirley Jorgensen, Rajesh Malik

# Accessibility and Students with Disabilities

## L'accessibilité et les élèves handicapés

*Afin de faciliter l'apprentissage des élèves handicapés, notre projet présente une analyse des facteurs obstacles et des facteurs facilitateurs, détermine les bonnes pratiques et aborde le problème de l'universalité des stratégies de mise en forme dans le domaine de l'éducation. Ensuite, nous divulguons les résultats de notre recherche aux utilisateurs finaux : éducateurs, élèves, dispensateurs de service aux élèves handicapés des campus, décisionnaires politiques, facultés, et autres. Une grande part de notre engagement consiste à faire savoir que les élèves handicapés peuvent obtenir le même taux de réussite que leurs pairs non handicapés dans leurs études postsecondaires, et qu'ils peuvent utiliser les ordinateurs et les nouvelles technologies de l'information de manière efficace. Nous croyons que ces technologies permettent de mettre en place des conditions d'apprentissage plus équitables pour tous les élèves, qu'ils aient ou non un handicap.*



**C**omputer and information technologies have the potential to greatly enhance the experience of students with disabilities. Considering the increasingly large percentage of postsecondary students who are affected by some form of disability (such as visual, hearing, neurological, mobility, psychiatric, learning or health impairment), we believe it is crucial to examine obstacles and facilitators, determine good practices, and raise the issue of universal instructional design. A large part of our undertaking is to communicate the fact that students with disabilities can succeed

**Shirley Jorgensen, Fichten** and **Alice Havel** were awarded a 2006-2007 PAREA grant for their project, "A comparison of the academic performance of graduates with disabilities who registered to receive disability related services, graduates with disabilities who did not register for services and non-disabled graduates: an archival study".

**Catherine Fichten** was awarded the "2007 Canadian Psychological Association Award for Distinguished Contributions to Public or Community Service".

in postsecondary education at the same rate as their non-disabled peers and can effectively use computers and new information technologies. We believe such technologies make more equitable learning conditions possible. We also believe that greater attention to accessibility and to educational materials and practices will improve education for all learners, whether they have a disability or not.

Using bilingual questionnaires, archival and qualitative methods, structured interviews, and focus groups, researchers in this theme develop appropriate testing instruments for collecting and analysing user data. We then disseminate the research findings to end-users: educators, students, campus disability service providers, policy-makers, faculty, and others. The particular focus of our theme on college and university learner accessibility offers clear collaborative connections with the Postsecondary Education theme, which we aim to develop further in the future.

The past year saw intensive research and progress on four main projects. The first – a study funded by PAREA – explored the standardized college exit grades of graduates with and without disabilities and examined the relationship between exit grades and perceived academic obstacles and facilitators. A second study has the team working on several projects about the accessibility of eLearning and on

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adaptive and assistive technologies for post-secondary learners with disabilities, funded by the SSHRC. Participants include members of the following postsecondary communities: students with disabilities, disability service providers,

professors, eLearning specialists, and e-publishers. In a third project, funded by Heritage Canada, members of the team worked within the context of the CulturAll Network (based at University of Toronto) to develop technologies to aid in the accessible delivery of bilingual cultural content. The fourth area of investigation, funded by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), involves studying the accessibility of campus-based software and hardware; over 1000 Canadian college and university students are participating in this investigation.

Ensuring that CSLP/CEAP researchers are sensitive to the abilities of learners with disabilities, and aware of the tools and accommodations that can assist them, continues to be a vital part of our theme's mandate. To better fulfil this role, our members have participated in CSLP/CEAP meetings, Research Fair activities, and retreats, and have presented at meetings of other themes, such as Second Language Proficiency. In these ways, we strive to alert our colleagues to the importance of representing accessibility issues in their research efforts, and the importance of including participants with disabilities in their research, both as assistants and participants.

### **Our Adaptech Research Network**

updated and redesigned their library of free and inexpensive adaptive and "adaptable" software titles. They added new titles and attempted to make searching for software more user-friendly.