

## Students with and without Disabilities Identify Common Facilitators and Barriers to Success in Cegep

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The Adaptech Research Network explored obstacles and facilitators of academic success as perceived by the following groups: 182 Cegep graduates with and 1304 without disabilities from three large colleges, 57 Cegep based disability service providers, and 300 students with disabilities who were registered to receive disability related services from their Cegep.

The findings show that campus based disability service providers typically had seven years experience devoting an average of one day per week to providing services to students with disabilities. Over half of these service providers had experience providing services to students with learning disabilities and mobility and hearing impairments. However, less than half of them had experience providing services to students with medical and psychological disabilities.

Participants in all student and graduate groups were more likely to be female than male. Cegep graduates with disabilities were, on average, ½ year older than their nondisabled counterparts. The proportion of Cegep students who were registered to receive disability related services has risen slightly since 1999. However, this number remains (at less than 1%) under 1% of the student body.

The actual proportion of Cegep graduates who self-identified as having a disability was approximately 10%, but most of these graduates did not register to receive disability related services. Thus, estimating the rate of disability in the Cegeps using only those students who register significantly under-reports the actual rate. The majority of graduates with disabilities who had not registered for disability related services had medical, psychological, visual or learning disabilities.

### ***What factors make Cegep studies easier? Harder? What should be changed?***

In general, participants indicated more conditions that made academic studies easier than harder. This was especially notable in the case of Cegep based factors, which were generally seen as important and facilitating. Students' personal situations and community and government based services were less so.

Current students and graduates identified good teachers, tutoring services, and the availability of computers both on and off-campus as important facilitators. Friends, good schedules, easy and interesting courses and programs, a good financial situation, good motivation and good study skills were also identified as facilitators.

Students and graduates with disabilities who were registered to receive disability related services from their Cegep overwhelmingly indicated that disability related accommodations were among the most important facilitators, along with sensitization and information dissemination about disabilities to teachers. Specific accommodations seen as helpful were: having a note taker or interpreter in class, extended time for exams and assignments, accessible facilities, as well as Minister of Education and college policies which permit students with disabilities to take a reduced course load and still be considered "full time students." In most cases students and service providers agreed on which factors were important as obstacles and facilitators.

All three groups identified the following factors as obstacles: poor teachers, difficult courses, bad schedules, having to hold a job during the term, transportation problems, a poor financial situation, lack of access to computers, having to take too many courses, poor study skills, demanding and boring programs, lack of motivation, and insufficient time.

Changes suggested by current students with disabilities and by graduates with and without disabilities were similar and were aimed at aspects of the Cegep environment, including better schedules, improving the college system, improving programs and courses in general, having better teachers, more available computer

technologies, support and help as well as improvements to the physical environment of the college.

Disability service providers identified numerous issues related to their functions which they considered important to student success, such as: good collaboration between professors and disability service providers, affordable diagnostic services external to the Cegep, students' ability to express their needs, attitudes of administration toward their services, identification of students' individual needs by the disability service provider, students' awareness of the impact of their disability, the budget allocated for disability services at the Cegep, willingness of students to use suitable accommodations, students' choice of career, and professors' level of knowledge about disability services and accommodations.

Changes suggested by disability service providers focused on improving the accessibility of classrooms and facilities as well as aspects of the services they provide. Promoting collaboration and communication between staff, teachers and students, increased funding for their services, and better availability of tutoring were common suggestions among disability service providers.

#### **Conclusions and recommendations**

Our findings suggest that it may be important for students with disabilities to register with their disability service provider. Graduates with disabilities who registered

reported more facilitators than graduates with disabilities who did not register. Graduates with disabilities who did not register for services generally had the least facilitating scores, especially on Cegep environment related items. The overall score for graduates who had registered for disability related services was similar to that for nondisabled graduates.

Because a very large number of students with disabilities do not seek out or receive disability related services, there is a need for universal instructional design, which involves educational strategies that

are accessible to all students, including those with disabilities.

You can read the Executive Summary of our final report in English at:

<http://adaptech.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/pubs/abExecutiveSummaryCollegeStudentsWithDisabilities.doc> or .pdf.

and French at:

<http://adaptech.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/pubs/abSOMMAIREETUDIANTSAYANTDESINCAPACITESAUCEGEP.doc> or .pdf. The full report is available in English at:

<http://adaptech.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/pubs/abCollegeStudentsWithDisabilitiesTheirFuture.doc> or .pdf.

### Job Search Strategies Forum

Serge Brassard and Louise Blouin

QAPSD is proud of its partnership with NEADS at the Quebec edition of the Job Search Strategies Forum. QAPSD's mandate was to recruit guest speakers for the Montreal forum, and to promote the participation of businesses from different sectors of the Quebec economy and of the Quebec government to increase postsecondary students and graduates with disabilities' participation in the employment market. NEADS is a Canadian association.

The Montreal forum was held on Saturday, March 18, 2006, at the Sheraton Centre. It is part of a series of seven forums held in different geographic regions of Canada. Job Search Strategies Forums will be held from the fall of 2005 to the winter of 2006 in Edmonton, Toronto,

and Victoria. More forums will be held in the fall of 2006 and in the winter of 2007 in Halifax, Ottawa, Winnipeg, and St. John's, Newfoundland. The forums' goal is to give students and graduates with disabilities the opportunity to talk and exchange with guest speakers and career counsellors on the challenges they may face while looking for jobs.

This project is supported with funding from BMO Nesbitt Burns' Equity Through Education Program. It aims at raising the general public's knowledge about the barriers that target groups such as women, First Nations or Aboriginals, visible minorities, and people with disabilities face in accessing employment. Angèle Martineau presented this project to forum participants.