

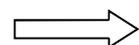
Fact of life

Return to university studies

By Mai Nhu Nguyen, The Adaptech Research Network

Since I finished high school, I have been using an FM system (a microphone worn by the professor which transmits sound directly to my hearing aid while reducing the ambient noise.) I cannot not imagine what my years of schooling would have been like without this precious, but little known, tool. When I began my studies at Université de Montréal, I was not surprised that I had to explain to my professors (and at times justify!) how my FM system works. I was tolerant, and I thought to myself that they had probably never had much experience dealing with students with disabilities. The same thing happened with professors from the various departments for my elective classes (film, history of Japan, linguistics, photography): I faced this same lack of understanding and/or distrust. Some professors preferred to leave my FM system on the desk, even though I told them that the sound clarity would suffer. I was tolerant; who wants to get off on the wrong foot with his or her professors at the beginning of each semester? Since I had registered with the Office for Students With Disabilities (the SESH) at Université de Montréal, I was able to have note takers for the classes which were hard for me to follow. In 2005, the fruits of my labour resulted in a Bachelor's in psychology.

Seven years later, when I returned to university to obtain a certificate in translation, I was surprised to learn that teaching methods had not changed. I was amazed that attitudes of professors had not changed. It was obvious that these professors had never heard of the FM system. So, I willingly resumed the game: I explained my situation to them, each time with a little sadness. I wish I could stop feeling uncomfortable about bothering the professors.



A study conducted by the Adaptech Research Network shows that one of the major concerns of post-secondary students and graduates with disabilities has to do with everything relating to accommodations, the attitude of the professors, to the lack of equipment or training of student services staff, then the inaccessibility of course material, and so on.

We have to address this lack of knowledge and awareness about disabilities on campuses, particularly by promoting adapted services, such as the SESH. Without their assistance, I never would have been able to complete my prior (and current) studies with such success, and I would like other students to have access to the assistance to which they are entitled, but also to the respect and understanding of their professors.

When will real information and awareness campaigns be held, not only intended for students with disabilities, but in particular for college and university faculties?