

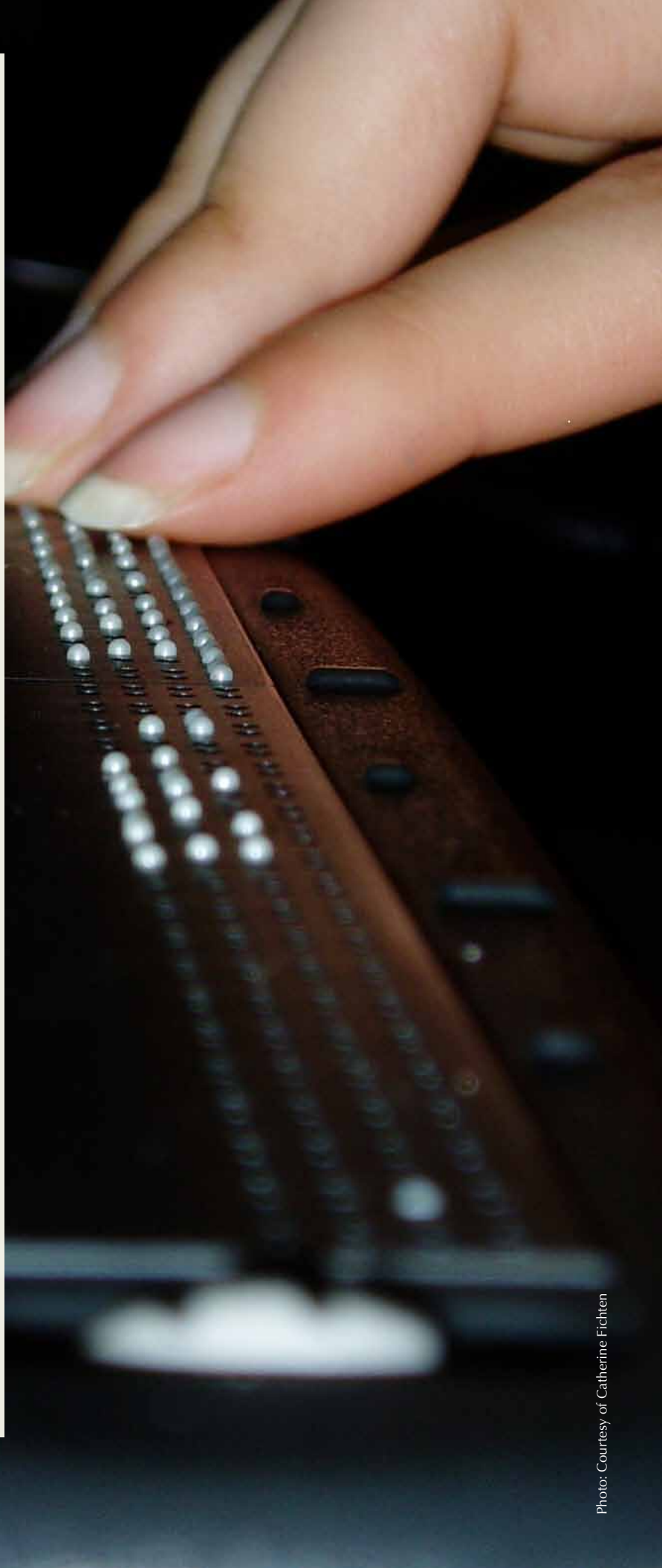
Accessibility and Students with Disabilities

L'accessibilité et les élèves handicapés

Notre thématique examine les moyens d'améliorer l'accessibilité et la réussite scolaire des étudiants qui poursuivent des études supérieures et qui présentent un handicap. Nous croyons que de prêter attention aux facteurs obstacles et aux facteurs facilitants qui influencent l'accessibilité de l'apprentissage — comme la qualité du matériel didactique et les conditions d'apprentissage — accroîtra la sensibilité envers les besoins de tous les apprenants. De plus, étant donné le pourcentage grandissant d'étudiants de niveau postsecondaire qui sont touchés par une forme ou une autre de handicap (visuel, auditif, neurologique, psychiatrique, problèmes de mobilité, d'apprentissage, de santé, etc.), la question de la conception pédagogique universelle n'a jamais été aussi cruciale.

Les technologies de l'information et des communications (TIC) peuvent améliorer de manière significative l'accessibilité des étudiants.

Nous avons découvert que les étudiants de niveau postsecondaire qui présentent des invalidités peuvent utiliser efficacement les TIC et qu'ainsi ils obtiennent le même taux de réussite que leurs pairs sans handicap. Une grande part de notre engagement consiste donc à faire connaître ce potentiel aux diverses parties prenantes.



The Adaptech Research Network has grown substantially.



Accessibility and
Students with
Disabilities

Members: Catherine Fichten (Theme Leader), Rhonda Amsel, Phil Abrami and Richard Schmid

Our theme examines ways to improve accessibility and academic success for students with various disabilities in higher education. We believe that attention to obstacles and facilitators to accessible learning — such as the quality of educational materials and learning conditions — will lead to a greater sensitivity to the needs of all learners.

Considering the growing percentage of postsecondary students who have some form of disability (visual, hearing, neurological, mobility, psychiatric, learning, health, etc.), universal instructional design has never been more critical.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have the potential to significantly enhance accessibility for students: we have found that postsecondary students with disabilities can effectively make use of ICTs and that they succeed and graduate at the same rate as their non-disabled peers. A large part of our undertaking is, therefore, to communicate this potential to the various stakeholders.

Using bilingual questionnaires, archival and qualitative research methods, structured interviews, and focus groups, we have developed appropriate and accessible testing instruments for collecting and analyzing user data. Once we analyze the findings we disseminate these to end-users: educators, students, campus disability service providers, policy-makers, faculty, and others.

In the past year we have been busy with an ongoing study, funded by PAREA, of standardized college exit grades of graduates with and without disabilities; we are examining the relationship between exit grades

and perceived academic obstacles and facilitators. With the help of the Canadian Council on Learning, we have also completed a study of the accessibility of ICTs involving over 1000 Canadian college and university students with disabilities.

Two of our team's students, **Natalie Martiniello** and **Jill Budd** received McGraw-Hill Ryerson Scholarships in connection with their work in our summer internship program. **Martiniello** was accompanied by her guide dog, Sherby. Although Sherby did not receive a scholarship, nevertheless, she was a valuable honorary Adaptech Research Network member.

We have, of course, been actively presenting at scholarly conferences and publishing in both scholarly journals as well as in newsletters for students, professors, and members of the disability community. Our students are co-authors on most of these.

The Adaptech Research Network has grown substantially during the past year and now includes active team members not only from Concordia and McGill Universities but also from the University of Northern British Columbia and the Open University of Israel, as well as from several francophone Québec colleges. In addition, we have just received three new grants (from SSHRC, FQRSC, and PAREA) to continue our research program, with a continuing emphasis on student success and on information and communication technologies. Because we also received funding from Services Canada for two summer students we will be able not only to continue the research but also to update and revamp our bilingual web site <http://www.adaptech.org> to make it even more informative and user friendly.