



The AQEIPS newsletter
HERMES

**Quebec Association of Postsecondary
Students with Disabilities**

A WORD FROM OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dear readers,

With the new year upon us we thought it fitting to kick things off with the Winter 2010 edition of Hermes, our biannual newsletter.

This past year has been a busy one at AQEIPS with many on-going projects and activities geared towards the promotion of rights for post-secondary students living with disabilities across Quebec. You will learn about some of these initiatives here and we hope that what you read inspires you to act in the defense of your rights, as well as the rights of other students who may be facing similar obstacles in their pursuit of post-secondary studies. Collectively, we can make a difference!

Despite the efforts of the Quebec government to improve the quality of life for persons with disabilities in this province, equalization of opportunities remains a goal to be achieved in post-secondary education and in everyday life. ⇒

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A WORD FROM OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS (...)

As we shape our priorities for 2010 we invite you to contribute your thoughts and opinions on the subject: What do you expect from us as the organization that represents *your rights* as a post-secondary student living with a disability? What priorities would you like us to focus on throughout the upcoming year?

AQEIPS exists to address your needs and we remain committed to this goal as we plan for the upcoming year. Come join us on this journey!



We wish you a bright and successful New Year,
The AQEIPS Board of Directors, 2009-2010

MOBILIZATION PROJECT: ACT NOW!

What better way to bring disability issues to the forefront of local politics than through the municipal elections in Quebec. This year, we encouraged our members to challenge electoral candidates to address their plans for including disability in their campaigns. What concrete plans do they have for improving the quality of life for persons with disabilities, especially students, in the city they represent?

For too long now there has been systemic silence surrounding questions of access, care, and opportunity for persons with disabilities in the speeches, promises and actions of our politicians. This flagrant lack of representation and consideration for the experiences and perspectives of a significant number of individuals in our community is unacceptable.

To put an end to this silence it is necessary to use the power of the vote. Pressuring candidates to account for their plans regarding disability is a not only important but essential. A demand for inclusion at this level of governmental politics is an important step towards a truly democratic and accessible society. Your vote matters....take advantage of it!



In October AQEIPS mailed letters addressed to 15 candidates in ridings throughout Montreal, Laval, and Longueuil. At the time of printing this newsletter we had only received **2** response. What does this lack of interest say about the place of disability in local politics?

MOBILIZATION PROJECT: ACT NOW! (...)

Recent Changes to the Allowance For Special Needs Program

In October we joined forces with the Association des étudiant(e)s handicapé(e)s de l'Université du Québec à Montréal (ADEHUQAM) to let Aide financière aux études (AFE) know that not all post-secondary students are happy with recent changes made to the Allowance for Special Needs Program. In a letter addressed to the AFE we noted the following to be among the most disconcerting obstacles identified by student applicants to date:

- The new application processes is considerably more complex than the previous procedure requiring more time and energy of a student population that is, in many cases, already overburdened with bureaucratic obstacles and obligations.
- Only on-line submissions of the application are permitted. Not all students have access to personal computers that would ensure the privacy and protection of personal information required for the application. Additionally, filling out an on-line application is in itself problematic for many students, mainly those with learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders. The availability of alternative formats is essential.
- The application is not compatible with software programs used commonly by students with visual impairments. As an example, students using Jaws (the principle software covered by RAMQ) note the impossibility of reading menus on the application.

If the new application procedure has significantly complicated your access to specialized services we encourage you to act now.

**YOUR OPINION MATTERS!
WRITE TO THE AFE WITH
YOUR COMMENTS AND
SUGGESTIONS:**

Ministère de l'éducation, des loisirs et du sport
Aide Financière aux Études
1035, rue De La Chevrotière
Québec, Québec
G1R 5A5



MOBILIZATION PROJECT: ACT NOW! (...)



H1N1 Campaign and Persons with Disabilities

There were many problems with the Quebec wide H1N1 vaccination campaign. Conflicts of information, media inspired panic about the shortage of supplies, overcrowded vaccination centers, perceived injustices about the priority groups and the list goes on. You may have encountered stories about these problems in the newspapers or on the radio but, did you read or hear anything about the obstacles faced by some persons with disabilities in accessing the vaccine? We did and we decided to do something about it.

We wrote a letter outlining the most important obstacles identified by post-secondary students with disabilities and sent it to Yves Bolduc, the Quebec Health and Services Minister, as well as 18 health and social services centers across Quebec. The problems we identified:

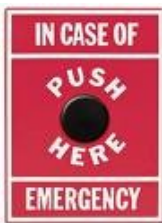
1. Adapted transport is not equipped to schedule rides within a 24 hour time frame. Thus, it is impossible to reserve a ride to pick up a coupon and then, reserve another ride in order to get vaccinated that same day or within 24 hours.
2. The question of whether or not vaccination centers are accessible for persons with reduced mobility is not addressed in pamphlets or web sites.
3. Long line ups, outdoors in some instances, do not take into consideration the physical and psychological problems faced by some persons with disabilities.
4. The possibility of getting vaccinated at home if one qualifies for home care is nowhere publicized.
5. Vaccination services offered at home occur at a later, undetermined date even if patients are considered among those most at risk for the virus.
6. The absence of sign language interpreters at the vaccination centres.

To improve future vaccination campaigns write to Mr. Yves Bolduc with your suggestions! Your opinion matters!

Mr. Yves Bolduc
Quebec Health and Social Services Minister
Édifice Catherine-de-Longpré
1075, chemin Sainte-Foy, 15e étage
Québec (Québec) G1S 2M1



MOBILIZATION PROJECT: ACT NOW! (...)



Emergency Evacuation Procedures – Your Voice Matters!

On October 6, 2009 The Gazette published an interesting article about the situation of persons with disabilities in emergency situations. According to one expert: “It’s important that disabled people know what to do and that they wait in places that have been coordinated with firefighters.”

Inspired by this suggestion, we at AQEIPS want to know about the evacuation procedures at your school and the measures that have been taken to ensure your safety and that of other students with disabilities during an emergency situation. If there were a fire or a threat of violence, for example, would you know what to do?

Have you participated in an emergency evacuation drill at your school?

Were your special needs accommodated during this drill?

Do you feel confident that there are measures in place to ensure your safety during an emergency evacuation of your school?

This information will be included in a report on emergency evacuation procedures and their accommodation of post-secondary students with disabilities throughout Quebec. We respect your right to privacy—all contributions will remain anonymous in our report. Share your experiences with us. Your voice matters!

To read the full article visit: <http://www.montrealgazette.com/health/Looking/2069995/story.html>

WHAT IS AQEIPS ANYWAYS?

AQEIPS is a bilingual, non-profit organization which was created on April 21, 1991 by students with disabilities.

We advocate for the rights and interests of post-secondary students with disabilities across Quebec. Education is a right! Let`s make it accessible to all!

★ HOW TO BECOME A MEMBER ★

VISIT [www. aqeips.qc.ca](http://www.aqeips.qc.ca)

CALL 514-499-9451 OR TOLL FREE 1-866-959-9451



AQEIPS SURVEY



THE PRELIMINARY RESULTS ARE IN!

This summer we conducted a pilot survey to get a sense of some of most important challenges faced by students with disabilities at all levels of post-secondary study. Our plan is to put the information collected to use in the development of future mobilization and sensitization projects. **Let us know where to begin! What problems do you think need to be tackled most urgently?**

From your responses to the 51 closed and open-ended questions addressed in our survey we were able to make the following preliminary observations:

1. Respondents remain largely unaware of the many resources and services available to them as students with disabilities.

A lack of information regarding the following subjects was apparent: Eligibility for the Allowance for Special Needs Program despite ones financial situation and/or eligibility for the AFE Loans and Bursaries Program; the possibility of having ones loans converted into bursaries for those with major functional disabilities; technological resources and aides available to students with disabilities on campus; the existence of accessible social activities on campus; the existence of independent job placement services for persons with disabilities; the existence of community-based organizations servicing persons with disabilities; the existence of AQEIPS.

2. The consequences of not having ones special needs accommodated throughout the course of ones post-secondary studies can be severe.

Among the most severe of these consequences: dropped or failed courses; program change or withdrawal; loss of self confidence; frustration; persistent physical and/or mental health problems; feelings of rejection and discrimination.

3. Few student associations --run *by* students *for* students --exist to represent students with disabilities at individual post-secondary institutions.

Further to this, student participation in non-disability related associations and activities is minimal. ⇒

AQEIPS SURVEY (...)

4. Prejudices about persons with disabilities continue to exist at the post-secondary level.

Students report some professors, councillors, and/or peers to: have misconceptions regarding their intellectual and physical capacities; not include them in discussions regarding their own needs and accommodations; lack an understanding of their unique circumstances and disabilities.

5. Inaccessible buildings/classrooms/offices, as well as financial restraints remain among the principle obstacles for post-secondary students with disabilities.

The use of secondary entrances to campus buildings and limited access to student services, lecture rooms, and the offices of professors is not uncommon. Students report being over-burdened with supplementary expenses related to their disabilities (the cost of medications, technical supports, accessible transport, etc.)

6. Recognition of learning disabilities and chronic illnesses remains problematic, as does negotiating accommodation for these conditions at the post-secondary level.

The legitimacy of these conditions and/or their disabling affects are often challenged or unrecognized. Refusal for accommodation on these grounds is not uncommon. What is more, students report not knowing they are eligible for special accommodations on the basis of their unique circumstances.

If you did not get a chance to participate in our survey we still welcome your feedback. Rank the abovementioned points (1-6) in the order of which ones impact your life most severely and send us your responses!

AQEIPS
info @ aqeips.qc.ca
514-499-9451
OR TOLL FREE
1-866-959-9451

We sincerely thank all of those who took the time and energy to participate in our survey. A special congratulations goes out to **Anthony Tibbs** who was the winner of our \$25 cash draw for participants.



LEARN ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS!

What are reasonable accommodations?

By **Émilie Desgagnes** and **Marie-Eve Veilleux**

The Quebec Association of Postsecondary Students with Disabilities (AQEIPS) is proud to have organized for its members a workshop on reasonable accommodations on October 24th and 31st. This workshop was given in French by Mrs. Johanne Magloire and in English by Mrs. Shirley Sarna from the *Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse*. Magloire and Sarna presented a few articles from the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and discussed the rights and responsibilities of each citizen, as well as the limits of accommodation. They described several types of discrimination that we may be subject to, accommodations for different disabilities, and services available to persons with disabilities.

The mission of the Commission is to promote the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and ensure that the rights addressed therein are respected. Concerning disability, the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms forbids any discrimination, harassment and abuse related to any individual limitation. The Commission is an independent entity from the government.

- **Direct discrimination** occurs, for example, when the parent of a child with Down syndrome tries to integrate his or her child into a regular school and the local school board insists that the child be placed in a specialized school.
- **Indirect discrimination** may be experienced when a person of colour is refused a certain job on the grounds that the employer already found a better-qualified applicant. A few days later, however, it is discovered that the position has not yet been filled.
- **Systemic discrimination** occurs “when diverse practices, decisions or behaviors are combined with other practices in an organization or other social institutions to produce discrimination”.¹ For example, a Cegep without ramps to facilitate the entrance (and thus participation) of persons in wheelchairs.

Many measures exist to overcome discriminatory situations. Some are completely free of charge and require only a change in mentality. For example, a student may be allotted additional time to write an exam in an adapted room. ⇒

¹ Québec intercultural – What are racism and discrimination?, page consulted on November 13, 2009, online: <http://www.quebecinterculturel.gouv.qc.ca/fr/lutte-discrimination/discrimination-racisme.html>

LEARN ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS! (...)

In the same way that rights come with responsibilities, accommodations also have their limits. "Reasonable accommodations" are those which must respect certain codes to avoid what are referred to as "excessive constraints." Among these: elevated costs, impact on the proper functioning of an institution, and infringement of the rights of others. It is important to mention that when a complaint is made to the Commission, it is the denounced person or institution who has the burden of proof, and thus has to prove that the requested accommodation(s) represents an excessive constraint.

If you think you are a victim of discrimination, you can make a grievance to the Commission. The latter accepts complaints over the phone, mail, or in person at an office near you. Qualified employees will guide you in this process while respecting your abilities/disabilities. The Commission also offers interpreters for those who need this service.

AQEIPS is here to guide students towards the appropriate resources needed to lodge complaints of discrimination. By informing us about the problems you are facing, we can help denounce discrimination to governments and other concerned authorities.

Making a complaint to the *Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse* is **free of charge**. The delay between the beginning of the process and the closing of the file can take around six months. Rest assured that in lodging a complaint you will be protected of all harm.

For more information regarding this issue contact AQEIPS at info@aqeips.qc.ca or 514-499-9521. You can also reach a representative from the *Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse* at webmestre@cdpdj.qc.ca or at the following telephone numbers:

Montreal 514-873-5146 or 1-800-361-6477
Gatineau 819-772-3681 or 1-888-386-6712
Longueuil 450-448-3739 or 1-877-226-7221
Quebec 418-643-1872 or 1-800-463-5621
Rimouski 418-727-3655 or 1-888-386-6713
Saguenay 418-698-3636 or 1-888-386-6710
Saint-Jérôme 450-569-3219 or 1-877-226-7224
Sept-Îles 418-962-4405 or 1-888-386-6715
Sherbrooke 819-820-3855 or 1-888-386-6711
Trois-Rivières 819-371-6197 or 1-877-371-6196
Val-d'Or 819-354-4400 or 1-877-886-4400



JOIN THE AQEIPS BOARD OF DIRECTORS!

At our Annual General Assembly (AGA) on April 10, 2010 AQEIPS members will elect individuals for the 2010-2011 AQEIPS Board of Directors. In order to vote, to present your candidature for a position on the board, and to be elected as a board member you need to be an active member of AQEIPS prior to the commencement of the AGA.¹

How many positions are available on the board of directors?

There are 6 positions available on the board of directors this year. Four of these positions are for a two year term. Two of these positions are for a one year term.

If elected, what position will I occupy on the board of directors?

At the first board meeting, a president, two vice-presidents (internal and external), a treasurer, and a secretary will be elected from among the board members. The remaining board members (including those from the previous year who are completing their second year term) will act as directors to the board.

What are my responsibilities as a board member?

The board is *collectively* responsible for the proper functioning of AQEIPS. Each board member must contribute to associational projects and activities that advance the priorities and goals set forth during the annual general meeting.

What time commitment is involved in being a board member?

Board members are expected to contribute *at least* one day per month of their time to AQEIPS activities. This includes board meetings. In special circumstances, contributions may be made by phone and/or the internet.

What are the benefits of being a board member?

As a board member you will gain invaluable experience in the areas of management, leadership and advocacy, contribute to the disability rights movement locally and nationally, and position yourself to make a difference in the lives of students with disabilities across Quebec.

I WANT TO
MAKE A
DIFFERENCE!



¹ Any student with a functional limitation enrolled — now or in the last two years—in at least one course in a post-secondary institution, public, private, technical or professional program (DEP) whose membership dues (\$5) are paid to date.

NEW GOVERNMENTAL POLICY ON DISABILITY

New Governmental Policy on Disability

À part entière : pour un véritable exercice du droit à l'égalité

The Quebec government launched a new policy on disability rights called *À part entière: pour un véritable exercice du droit à l'égalité* on June 4th 2009. The goal of this policy, introduced during *la semaine québécoise des personnes handicapés*, is to increase the social participation of persons with disabilities over the course of the next 10 years. This goal will be achieved by:

1) improving the quality of life for persons with disabilities

This goal addresses the need for improved incomes, health, and levels of education, as well as the need to combat social isolation.

2) responding to the basic needs of persons with disabilities

This goal addresses the need for accessible and independent living options, as well as alternative means of communication and transportation

3) ensuring equality between persons with disabilities and other citizens in various social contexts

This goal addresses the need to increase the participation of persons with disabilities at all levels of study (from day care to university), in the workforce, in all leisure, sports, tourist, and cultural activities, and in their communities more broadly

The guidelines outlined in the policy are intended to support the preexisting federal law on disability rights (modified and then adopted in December 2004) and also to remind ministries and the public of their obligation regarding the integration of persons with disabilities in our society. The policy underscores the importance of collaboration among stakeholders in order to ensure that disability becomes a mainstream issue.

Along with other organizations for persons with disabilities, AQEIPS is committed to following up on the application of this policy in practice. Join us in this endeavor! What potential impacts will this policy have on you as a person living with a disability?

Join our forum and tell us what you think!

<http://aqeips.forumactif.net/forum.htm>

For a copy of the policy please visit:

www.ophq.gouv.qc.ca/apartentiere

Office des personnes
handicapées
Québec 

RESEARCH UPDATE



Update from the Adaptech Research Network By Jennison Asuncion, Catherine Fichten, Maria Barile

We wanted to provide an update of our ongoing research as well as our latest projects. None of these activities would be possible without the participation and support of AQEIPS members, so thank you.

Accessibility of Social Media: New Research

Our study of the accessibility of social media to students with various disabilities is well underway at the time of publication of this article. We are looking at the use and accessibility of different types of social media such as Facebook, blogs, instant messaging services, and YouTube by students and recent graduates with disabilities at Canadian colleges and universities. The goal of this research is to increase the awareness of schools, employers, and others who use or develop social media so that they take into account the needs and concerns of users with disabilities. This study is carried out in collaboration between the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) and the Adaptech Research Network. AQEIPS has been assisting us in spreading the word about the study. By the time you read this, we will be finished gathering the data, but will not yet have the results analyzed. Look at the Adaptech Research Network home page toward mid-summer 2010 for a report on the findings.

Information and Computer Technologies for Cegep Students with Learning Disabilities: New Research

In a second ongoing study we are focusing on Cegep students with learning disabilities and investigating the computer and information technologies they are likely to find helpful. We are especially interested in Francophone students because, in general, there seems to be more limited use of computer technologies that can help students with learning disabilities among French than among English speaking students. Once we find out what technologies students are using successfully, we can publicize these and make recommendations to Cegeps to provide these to their students. This study is being carried out in collaboration between Dawson College, Collège Montmorency, and Cégep André Laurendeau. AQEIPS is an active partner of this research.

www.adaptech.org



RESEARCH UPDATE (...)

Graduation from College and University: New Research

What are the factors that help students with disabilities succeed in college or university? What causes these students to stop pursuing their postsecondary education? What are individuals who recently graduated or who have stopped pursuing their postsecondary education doing? We are currently in the process of investigating these questions. To do this we are looking at three groups of current and recent students: those who are presently enrolled in a Canadian college, Cegep or university; those who graduated from a postsecondary institution within the last three years and are no longer in school; and those individuals who, for whatever reason, stopped their program of study and left school altogether.

If you are currently a student at a college, Cegep or university, if you have graduated within the last three years, or if you completely stopped your program of studies and left school within the last three years, then we would like to hear from you. If you are willing to complete an online survey and share your experiences, we will send you \$20.00 as a token of our appreciation. Please go to www.adaptech.org/gradswd for more details and to complete the survey.

The POSITIVES Scale: Completed Research

We are excited to report that we recently developed and validated the Post-secondary Information Technology Initiative (POSITIVES) Scale. This is thanks to 1354 postsecondary students with disabilities from across the country who participated in the research behind the Scale's development. What is POSITIVES? In short, it is a brief survey designed so that colleges and universities can quickly and easily find out, directly from students with disabilities themselves, about how accessible information and communication technologies (ICTs) are at school, at home, and in e-learning contexts. We made it easy for schools to understand the data and to use it to make decisions that will result in a more accessible learning experience for all students.

Our findings show that students often have more than one disability or impairment which can affect how easily they are able to use ICTs. Students' disabilities also influence the specialized ICTs they use and how well their ICT related needs are being met. While the findings indicate that, overall, students' ICT related needs are generally well met, students had concerns in a number of areas. These include: inadequate availability of adapted computers in the school's specialized computer laboratories, ⇒

RESEARCH UPDATE (...)

poor loans of equipment by the school when their own technologies were not available, lack of training on ICTs both on and off campus, and technical support when students are not at school. Students' favorable perceptions concerned: their school's web pages, which were generally accessible; their own ability to effectively use the ICTs they need; the availability of electronic format course materials; and the accessibility of their school's interactive academic online services as well as the library's computer systems.

If you would like to learn more about the POSITIVES Scale and the findings go to <http://www.adaptech.org> and search for "POSITIVES Scale". While you are on our web site you may also want to check out our Free and Inexpensive Computer Technologies Videos as well as the Resources section. These provide information about free and relatively inexpensive ICTs that students with disabilities may find helpful.

THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT DISABILITY

In the Fall 2009 edition of *Hermes* we introduced you to the exciting field of Critical Disability Studies. We also mentioned that there are currently only three Canadian graduate programs dedicated to making disability the subject of social critique: York University, Ryerson University, and the University of Manitoba.

With no Quebec University being among these we thought it appropriate to call attention to some local scholars who have nevertheless taken it upon themselves to think critically about disability. J. Paige MacDougall, a PhD candidate in the McGill Department of Anthropology is one of such scholars. Learn more about her exciting research here.

Being Deaf/Being Maya: Sign Language and Social Experience

J. Paige MacDougall

My research investigates the role that sign language plays in the social experiences of indigenous peoples living in rural Yucatan. Specifically, I concentrate on understanding the phenomenon of sign language use among both deaf and hearing people in a Yucatec Maya community called Chican, which is located in the municipality of Tixmehuac in the state of Yucatan, Mexico. To contextualize, I explore attitudes towards deafness and communication more generally, and take into consideration the influence that colonial social history has on local models of self-definition. I explain the complexity of identity in my field site by comparing \implies

THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT DISABILITY (...)

local self-understandings to external labels of social classification.

The situation for deaf people in Chican presents exceptional circumstances for investigating the relationship between communication and social integration. The ratio of deaf to hearing people in this community is approximately 30 in 1000 whereas elsewhere in the world deafness typically occurs at a rate of 1 in 1000.¹ Intriguingly residents of Chican have developed an elaborate sign language – independent of Mexican Sign Language – that is used by both deaf and hearing people. In this context, where sign language use is widespread among the hearing population, deaf people are not ostracized from the larger hearing society. Rather, they participate freely in social life. This situation contrasts with the experience of deaf signers elsewhere in the world who consider themselves members of a distinct cultural group called Deaf culture.²



A deaf mother and her baby



Two men communicating in sign language

In cases where sign language use is widespread, it appears to form part of a wider system of communication, acting to enhance rather than detract from social integration. For example, hearing people in Chican sometimes use sign language to communicate even when no deaf person is present.

Findings of an eighteen-month ethnographic fieldwork study are couched in broader discussions of context, colonialism, indigenous studies, identity, deafness, sign language, communication, sensory experience (perception/expression), embodiment, and social constructions of difference and disability. By investigating daily life activities in Chican, paying special attention to the interplay of signed and spoken language, I explore local attitudes towards deafness and discuss the implications that a multi-modal model of language holds for individual wellbeing and group cohesion. In Chican, social life is inclusive and the terms “Maya” or “deaf” do not operate as labels of identity classification.



A deaf woman signing to a hearing woman, in a casual encounter on the street.

¹ The population of Chican is six hundred and there are eighteen deaf people.
² In the United States and Canada members of Deaf culture refer to themselves using a capital “D” and communicate using American Sign Language.

NOTES FROM YOUR VP EXTERNAL

Travelling Shapes Your Youth !!

By Geneviève Vanier



Greetings, fellow travellers! Allow me to introduce myself: My name is Geneviève Vanier. I am a junior engineer who graduated last year from the Polytechnique Montréal, and who also spent a short time at the *Universidad politecnica de Valencia* (Valencia Polytechnic School) and the Czech Technical University in Prague. Oh yes, I almost forgot to mention that I am in a wheelchair as a result of neuropathy (CMT disease). What follows is a short excerpt from my experience as an exchange student, which I hope will, in turn, excite and inspire some of you.

When travelling, being disabled is definitely not for the fainthearted! Well, neither is being disabled at home, but we can forget about it, at times, since our surroundings have been adapted so that we can feel as comfortable and autonomous as possible. Then suddenly, the craving to see the world takes us by surprise! We foresee the potential problems, but say to ourselves that it must be possible! This is where my story begins.

On September 11, 2004, I took off on the wings of Czech Airlines from Montréal to Prague, where I would be living for the next three months. Actually, the adventure really began a year earlier when a friend and I were shopping around for the ideal location where we could spend some time. The university we were attending offered the opportunity to leave to study for a year at a school with which it has a bilateral agreement - about thirty different institutions in all. This meant that we would be able to go to any one of these institutions to study for a year (30 credits) without really hampering our academic progress. After hearing the comments of other students who had already participated in such exchanges, we finally decided upon Prague, in the Czech Republic in Central Europe. Our classes at the Czech Technical University in Prague (CTU) would all be in English, even though almost all the citizens speak only Czech. In the fall of 2003, I approached the CTU department of international relations to find out about wheelchair accessibility. I basically only received little tidbits of information, and was even told something to the effect that the whole issue of wheelchair accessibility is slightly uncomfortable. I did learn, however, that there was already a student in the faculty I hoped to join who was also in a wheelchair and that he lived in the university residence. ⇒



NOTES FROM YOUR VP EXTERNAL (...)

There was no way for me to get in touch with him though, because he only spoke Czech! A few weeks later, the CTU department of international relations sent me a small file containing photos that the student had prepared for me and that had also been translated, which reviewed the wheelchair accessible campus facilities. This reassured me somewhat, so I submitted my application for the student exchange program (my application was submitted in January for departure in September). At the same time, I was also trying to get in touch with fellow Czechs who were wheelchair



bound to find out about the accessibility of the city. This was no easy matter since the Czech web is typically in the Czech language! I ended up getting in touch with the captain of the Czech national wheelchair rugby team, as I myself also play rugby here in Montréal. He was an enormous help, *djekuji* David! (thank-you!) He provided me with information before I left, welcomed me at the

airport, and let me stay with him the first three nights after my arrival, due to the fact that my adapted room at the university residence was unavailable – a slight misunderstanding!!

I ended up registering for the exchange program alone: Polytechnique Montréal only awards a limited number of student mobility bursaries, awarded according to a student's grade point average (my application was accepted, but my friend's wasn't!) I figured that too many arrangements had been made to let everything fall through – so off I went, all alone!

My experience as an exchange student in Prague was absolutely wonderful. It was a trip during which I set off to discover the world, one in which I discovered myself, met other young people from different areas, and realized that, on some level, we are all alike.

Prague is a city that is more or less wheelchair accessible. It is one of the oldest cities in Europe and as it wasn't bombed during the last wars, the city has been able to keep its architecture and cobblestone streets that date back several centuries, making it a living museum of great beauty. Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, Prague has experienced a wave of modernization. Some metro stations have since been adapted with elevators, specifically one located downtown, as well as all of the new stations; about two out of three street corners have slanted sidewalks which allow wheelchair access; ⇒



NOTES FROM YOUR VP EXTERNAL (...)

unfortunately, no streetcars are accessible (which is very sad, because the network is very extensive); one out of every three buses are low-floor buses, with a manually-controlled retractable ramp. Passersby kindly helped me get onto the buses that weren't wheelchair accessible and onto the escalators in the various stations that had no elevators, which really made my outings a lot easier. The small trips organized for students enabled me to have the help I needed to get around the steep streets and old buildings that we visited.

I so much enjoyed my student exchange in Prague that I reserved my spot to travel to sunny Valencia during my last semester of university! I spent the winter months of 2007-2008 in Spain, studying in Spanish and in English. Valencia is a somewhat accessible city: it is relatively level, most buses are low-floor buses, most metro stations are equipped with elevators, and all tramway stops are accessible. As Valencia is located on the Mediterranean coast, about three hours south of Barcelona, the weather is 15 degrees celcius under the sun during the winter! It is really so different from what we experience at home! European life promotes short excursions, since the points of interest are so close to one another. I had the opportunity to see Paris, Dresden, and Amsterdam, as well as a few cities in the Czech Republic, Spain, Morocco, and Turkey. What is my next destination? Scandinavia, West Africa, South-East Asia, and the list goes on. Are you on board?



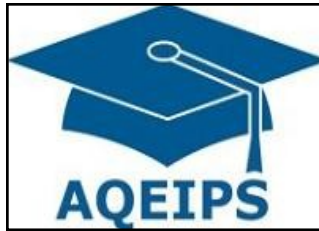
N.B. : During student exchanges, tuition fees are paid to the Quebec university as per usual, without any additional costs. The loans and bursaries that are awarded remain the same as they are in Quebec. It is possible to apply for the Special Needs Program, even in the event of an exchange abroad. The application for the student exchange program is made to the international affairs office of the university in Quebec where the student is enrolled before the month of February, for the following academic year.

For more information about international student exchange programs, please see www.crepuq.qc.ca .

The CouchSurfing Project is a worldwide network of travellers looking for and offering free housing: www.couchsurfing.com (It is possible to do a search for wheelchair accessible hosts-travellers.)



GET INVOLVED!



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

April 10th, 2010
UQÀM

see our website for more details:
www.aqeips.qc.ca

**CRITICAL DISABILITY DISCOURSE
GRADUATE STUDNET JOURNAL
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***CANADIAN DISABILITY STUDIES ASSOCIATION-ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES
ÉTUDES SUR L'INCAPACITÉ 7TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE
JUNE 2, 3, AND 4, 2010
CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL, QUEBEC
IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE ANNUAL CONGRESS OF THE CANADIAN FEDERATION
FOR THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
Check out <http://www.cdsa-acei.ca/2010cfp.html> for more information***



Bursary Program 2009-2010

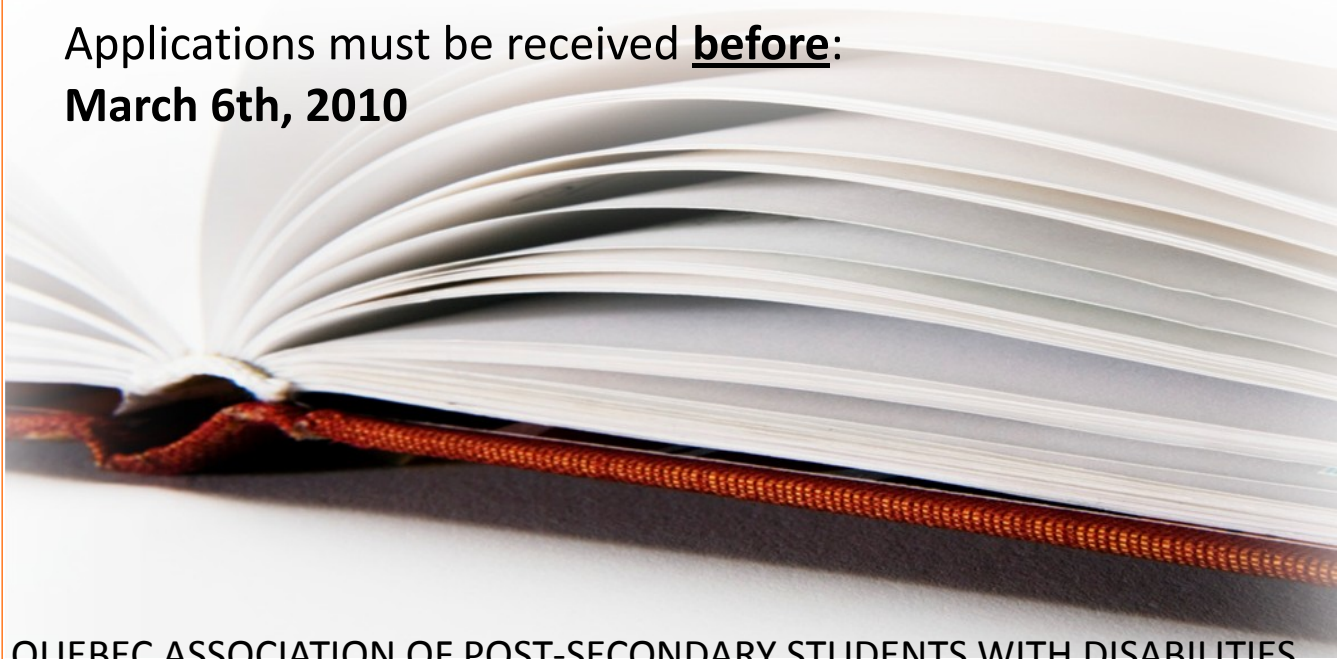
Quebec Association of Post-Secondary Students with Disabilities

At least 5 bursaries of at least \$500 each will be awarded to post-secondary students living with disabilities¹



To learn more visit: <http://www.aqeips.qc.ca/>

Applications must be received **before**:
March 6th, 2010



QUEBEC ASSOCIATION OF POST-SECONDARY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
425, Sherbrooke St. East, suite 06, Montréal (Québec) H2L 1J9
514-499-9451 or TOLL FREE 1-866-959-9451 or info@aqeips.qc.ca

¹ Certain restrictions apply. All applications are reviewed by a committee selected by AQEIPS.

