

What Happens After Graduation From Junior/Community College?

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A major recent policy document notes that, “Young people with difficulties ask that we not only show concern for them but also help them achieve success. This is an obligation from which no one can be exempted” (Ministère de l’éducation du Québec, 1999). Why should we be committed to the success of students with disabilities? Why should we support the inclusion of students with disabilities in post-secondary education? You may have heard that “70% of people with disabilities are unemployed” (e.g., Center for an Accessible Society, undated). Although this statement is not really accurate (cf. Houtenville, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2001a), nevertheless, you may be wondering if the investment of resources and energy is worthwhile. Will an education just leave people with disabilities highly educated, unemployed individuals? Does the investment in time, energy, effort and money produce results?

The Adaptech Research Network’s findings provide some answers. In 2005, we conducted a survey of graduates from three of Quebec’s largest junior/community colleges (Cegeps) about 10 months after they obtained their diplomas (see Fichten et al., 2006 for additional details). We asked graduates what they were doing now, and if they were employed, how closely their job was linked to their program of studies.

About 1/3 of the graduates, 1486 individuals, from both career/technical and pre-university

programs completed the survey. Twelve percent (182) of the respondents self-identified as having a disability. Of these, 24 (13%) had registered with their college’s disability service provider while the remaining 158 (87%) did not. Approximately 60% of the graduates who answered the questionnaire both with and without disabilities had been enrolled in a two year pre-university program while the remaining 40% were enrolled in three year career/technical programs, such as nursing, mechanical technology, and graphic design.

What do the results tell us?

Our findings show that over 80% of “pre-university” graduates, both with and without disabilities, continued their studies following graduation. Table 1 provides more detailed information.

The findings on career/technical program graduates again show few differences between graduates with and without disabilities. Approximately half of both groups were working full-time, whether they had a disability or not. An additional fourteen to fifteen percent were working part-time, and almost a third of both groups were continuing their studies.

Of the career/technical program graduates who were employed, over 80% of both groups indicated that their job was at least somewhat related to their studies. The only notable difference we found was that graduates with

disabilities from career/technical programs were less likely than their non-disabled counterparts to have obtained employment in a field “closely” related to the field of study

Summary and conclusions.

Our findings regarding the employment and post-graduation outcomes of individuals with disabilities paint a very positive picture. The majority of junior/community college graduates in “pre-university” programs continue their studies. About half of the graduates of college career/technical programs are working full-time and an additional 14%-15% are working part-time. In addition, approximately 1/3 are continuing their studies. These outcomes are consistent with our findings on graduates without disabilities.

Are our findings unusual in some way? We have all heard the, “70% of individuals with disabilities are unemployed” story. Canadian statistics for the year 2001 also show little difference in the employment rates of adults with and without disabilities (e.g., Statistics Canada 2001b, 2003: 89% vs. 93%, respectively). There is an important caveat, however, because the overall statistics for Canada show a huge difference between the proportions of people with and without disabilities who are not in the labour force (i.e., 51% vs. 21%, respectively). This was not found for our sample of college graduates, as the proportions of graduates with and without

Table 1. Post Graduation Activities – Pre University Graduates

| Pre-University Program Graduates | Sample Size | Working Full Time | Working Part Time | Looking for Work | Studying | Unavailable For Work | Total |
|----------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|----------|----------------------|-------|
| With A Disability | 90 | 10% | 4% | 1% | 83% | 1% | 100% |
| Registered | 12 | 0% | 0% | 0% | 92% | 8% | 100% |
| Not registered | 78 | 12% | 5% | 1% | 82% | 0% | 100% |
| No Disability | 752 | 8% | 5% | 2% | 84% | 2% | 100% |

Table 2. Post Graduation Activities – Career/Technical Program Graduates

| Career / Technical Program Graduates | Sample Size | Working Full Time | Working Part Time | Looking for Work | Studying | Unavailable For Work | Total |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|----------|----------------------|-------|
| With A Disability | 86 | 51% | 15% | 1% | 30% | 2% | 100% |
| Registered | 11 | 36% | 9% | 0% | 55% | 0% | 100% |
| Not registered | 75 | 53% | 16% | 1% | 27% | 3% | 100% |
| No Disability | 540 | 49% | 14% | 3% | 31% | 3% | 100% |

disabilities who were studying, or who were unavailable for work for other reasons, were very similar. Moreover, our findings resemble recent data for university graduates furnished by AQICEBS (2006). This study showed that of 2/3 of university graduates with disabilities who had registered to receive disability related services were employed, with many of the rest pursuing graduate studies such as Master's and doctoral degrees.

The answers to the original questions asked, "Why should we support the inclusion of students with disabilities in post-secondary education? Do these investments produce results?" are pretty a clear cut, "Yes!" Because it is the right thing to do for the students and their parents, because it is the right thing to do for our society, and because it is a truly profitable investment in the future.

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