

criteria that will lead them to their goals. The idea is for first-years to internalize these decision criteria, and then use them at the outset of university, and throughout first year to achieve personal success.

Another key theme in *University Matters* is balance. For some this means little more than an intensive focus on academics, but for others, it means making university a broad growth experience. The key is to think about it up front, and then live accordingly to achieve pre-determined personal goals. The importance of this becomes clear as one reads *University Matters*, which is filled with descriptions of circumstances that typically challenge first-years, and the strategies for coping with them.

First-year university is an exciting and challenging time. A little bit of preparation goes a long way toward making it a rewarding one as well.

*Mike McIntyre is a Faculty member at Carleton University's Eric Sprott School of Business.
mmcintyr@sprott.carleton.ca*

Footnotes

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- 2 Public or Private? University Finances, 2002-2003, CAUT Education Review, Vol. 6, No. 3, p. 1, downloaded from <http://www.caut.ca/en/publications/educationreview/educationreview6-3.pdf>, August 19, 2005.
- 3 Who pursues postsecondary education, who leaves and why: Results from the Youth in Transition Survey. Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 81-595-MIE – No. 026.
- 4 Who pursues postsecondary education, who leaves and why: Results from the Youth in Transition Survey. Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 81-595-MIE – No. 026.
- 5 Survey of Undergraduate University Students: University of Winnipeg, 2002, downloaded from <http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/index/cms-file-system-action?file=pdfs/future/cusc.pdf> on April 6, 2005.
- 6 Who pursues postsecondary education, who leaves and why: Results from the Youth in Transition Survey. Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 81-595-MIE – No. 026.
- 7 Who pursues postsecondary education, who leaves and why: Results from the Youth in Transition Survey. Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 81-595-MIE – No. 026.
- 8 Survey of Undergraduate University Students: University of Winnipeg, 2002, downloaded from <http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/index/cms-file-system-action?file=pdfs/future/cusc.pdf> on April 6, 2005.
- 9 Survey of Undergraduate University Students: University of Winnipeg, 2002, downloaded from <http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/index/cms-file-system-action?file=pdfs/future/cusc.pdf> on April 6, 2005.
- 10 Results of an informal survey conducted by M. McIntyre and S. McIntyre, 2004.
- 11 A Report on Mental Illnesses in Canada, October 2002, Public Health Agency of Canada, Figure 1.2, page 19. Downloaded from http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/miic-mmact/pdf/men_ill_e.pdf on August 22, 2005.

Promoting Academic Success of All Students - Including Those With Disabilities

BY JENNISON V. ASUNCION, MAI N. NGUYEN, MARIE-EVE LANDRY, MARIA BARILE, AND CATHERINE S. FICHTEN

Students with disabilities are increasingly part of the mainstream in colleges and universities across North America. In our studies, virtually every postsecondary institution in Canada, no matter how small, reported enrolling students with disabilities.¹ A recent archival study we conducted at Dawson College in Montreal (the largest junior/community college in Quebec) shows that once enrolled, students with disabilities obtain similar grades and complete their studies at the same rate as their non-disabled counterparts.²

But our findings also show that there are approximately ten times fewer students registered to receive disability related services in the public junior/community college system in Quebec than there are in colleges in the rest of the country (e.g., 0.5% in Quebec versus 5.5% in other provinces).¹ In view of the low enrolment of students with disabilities in Québec it is important to understand their current situation. Identifying and removing some of the obstacles and implementing favorable conditions will: (1) help ensure that students with disabilities have optimal conditions to succeed in advanced studies and (2) help students with disabilities in college thrive.

What are the factors that make college studies easier or more difficult for students with and without disabilities? These are the questions we posed to 70 students with disabilities registered to receive disability related services from the college (excluding students who only reported having a learning disability or attention deficit disorder (ADD)) and to 143 students without disabilities at Dawson College.³ Note that the exclusion of students reporting only a learning disability or attention deficit disorder was a condition of our funding agency. The goal was to identify similarities and differences between the two groups: students with and without disabilities.

We found that 40% of students with disabilities had more than one disability/impairment. The most common disabilities were health/medically related impairments and psychological impairments. The next most common disability was a visual impairment followed by hearing and mobility impairments. It is noteworthy that even though we had to exclude students who indicated that their only impairment was a learning disability or ADD, almost one third of our sample indicated that they also had a learning disability (such as dyslexia)

and/or attention deficit disorder.

Obstacles and facilitators to academic success

Facilitators

About half of the facilitators cited most frequently by students with disabilities were not disability-specific but were shared by students without disabilities. These include: good teachers, the overall college environment, availability of computers on campus, availability of support and help, and the Dawson Learning Centre which provides tutoring and assists with studying, writing, and exam taking skills.

The most important difference between students with and without disabilities concerns disability-related accommodations. Indeed, disability-specific accommodations were the most frequently noted facilitators by students with disabilities. Accommodations included: specialized services for students with disabilities in general, including the opportunity to pre-register for courses, having a quiet place to take exams, extended time for exams and assignments, a note taker in class, and policies which permit students with disabilities to take a reduced number of courses and still be considered “full time students.”

Important items unique to non-disabled students were the facilitating role of: friends, the library, a good schedule, the diversity of course offerings, their financial situation, and good study skills.

Obstacles

Again, most obstacles noted by students with disabilities were also cited by non-disabled students: bad teachers, too many and difficult courses, poor study skills, bad schedules, the college environment, and language issues such as not being sufficiently fluent in the language of

instruction and professors with heavy accents.

For students with disabilities, again, disability related issues also posed important obstacles. For example, they noted that their disability and their health were obstacles, that there were problems related to the accessibility of their courses, and that the nature of accommodations and services for students with disabilities also caused difficulties.

Non-disabled students also noted a variety of obstacles including: difficulties with finances, holding a job, transportation problems, personal issues, high stress, and poor exam and assignment schedules.

Implications of the findings

Can colleges do anything to improve the quality of life and the academic success of their students? Do adapted services in colleges help students with disabilities succeed? Do student services professionals have an active role to play in facilitating these achievements? The answer is, "Yes."

Our studies at Dawson College support the assertion that students see disability-related services and accommodations as absolutely essential to their academic success. Such findings should encourage government agencies to maintain, if not increase, the financing available for these types of accommodations. The large numbers of students with multiple impairments and the high incidence of learning disabilities, even among students who had other impairments, suggests that college services which help students with learning skills and strategies are vital. Our findings show that not only do such services help students with disabilities but also that such services also facilitate success for "multicultural," second language, and foreign students as well as non-disabled students in general.

Jennison V. Asuncion, Mai N. Nguyen, Marie-Eve Landry, Maria Barile, Catherine S. Fichten (catherine.fichten@mcgill.ca) work at the Adapttech Research Network, Dawson College, Montreal.

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- 2 Jorgensen, S., Fichten, C.S., Havel, A., Lamb, D., James, C., & Barile, M. (2005) Academic performance of college students with and without disabilities: An archival study. *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, 39(2), 101-1017.
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The NorQuest Reader

a resource for adults who are deaf

BY FLO BROKOP AND BILL PERSALL

NorQuest College serves approximately 10,000 students in Edmonton and northern Alberta with English as a Second Language (ESL), upgrading, and skills training programs. The Learning Support Services Unit (LSS) provides support to students with physical and learning disabilities who attend courses at the College. With a staff of over thirty committed professionals, it is the largest learning support unit in the province and is well-respected for the diverse services it provides.

Learning to read English is hard, especially when English is not your first language. Students at NorQuest College who are Deaf face that challenge in all their classes. For many of them, English is a language they only use at school or when they need to communicate with the hearing world. In their day-to-day life, they communicate with each other in a visual language – usually American Sign Language (ASL).

The National Secretariat funded the development of an innovative resource for adult literacy students who are Deaf. The NorQuest Reader is a collection of 15 stories written for adults who are comfortable reading English text at approximately grade 5 - grade 10 levels. The book contains 7 non-fiction articles on various topics – from the history of closed captioning to a biography of Mohammed Ali. It also contains fiction – from romance and adventure to mystery.

In addition to the 15 stories, the NorQuest Reader CD also contains pre-reading activities, hypertext links to definitions of words or phrases

in each story, comprehension activities and post-reading activities. The most significant feature of the CD is the ASL video clips that accompany each page in the story. Skilled ASL storytellers bring the English text to life with their ASL interpretations. For struggling readers, this support – an ASL interpretation to accompany English text – acts as a bridge to building reading comprehension skills. The NorQuest Reader has been distributed across Canada to adult literacy programs that serve the Deaf community. There is no charge for the resource.

The active involvement of members of the Deaf community in Alberta, the talents of partners -- including MacEwan College and Kristie Communications -- and the skilled staff of NorQuest College have developed a product that is unique and extremely useful. Alberta Venture magazine recognized the teamwork necessary for such a complex project by awarding the NorQuest the 2004 Most Enterprising Employee – Teamwork Award. The Alberta Colleges & Institutions Faculty



Flo Brokop, Holly Lynes and David Koopman (interpreter) discussing the Reader.