



Fredericton Job Search Strategies Forum

*Fredericton, NB
March 28, 2008*



Introduction

The forum in Fredericton was the twelfth event in a four-year NEADS' Job Search Strategies Forums Project, addressing practical aspects of successful transition from school to the job market. Delegates represented a number of colleges and universities in New Brunswick, mostly from the Fredericton area, but there were also delegates from outside the province. Student participants were attending the following post-secondary institutions: University of New Brunswick, St. Thomas University, Université de Moncton, Center for Arts and Technology, New Brunswick Community College and St. Mary's University.

Altogether about 55 people took part in the day-long employment session at the Delta Fredericton Hotel: students, graduates, employers, career counsellors/professionals and representatives from non-governmental organizations. Approximately 10 audience members participated in the workshop through the online webcast.

The NEADS Fredericton Job Search Strategies Forum included two workshop panels, an exhibit area, and one-on-one resume consultations with career counsellors over the lunch period. The exhibit area included displays and representatives from: Bell Aliant, BMO Financial Group, Canadian Paraplegic Association, Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons, and Service Canada.

Welcome and Overview

Jennifer Dillon - Job Search Strategies Consultant, NEADS

Natalie Fougère - New Brunswick Representative, NEADS

Christyn Allain - Program Officer, Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons

Jennifer Dillon welcomed those present, and those participating through the webcast. She reminded participants to speak clearly since American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters would be interpreting all sessions throughout the day.

The National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) was founded in 1986 and has operated for 22 years. Its mandate is to advocate for full access to education and employment Dillon explained. "NEADS developed the Job Search Strategies Forums with sponsorship from BMO Capital Markets in August 2005," she said. The forums focus on career transition for graduates and post-secondary students with disabilities, offering practical techniques and job search strategies to help them move on to challenging and rewarding careers. NEADS originally planned eight workshops in different locations across Canada, but in the spring of 2007, with extended support from BMO, NEADS developed another two-year initiative to hold workshops until 2009.

Natalie Fougère noted that this is the first time NEADS has held an event in Fredericton. She said she attended a workshop in Halifax in 2006 and came away with some very useful ideas. "NEADS is an organization for students run by students," Fougère said, and in November 2008 NEADS will host a national conference called "Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow". She wished everyone an energizing and informative day. Dillon said that

Fougère the New Brunswick board member and Joel Miller, the Nova Scotia board member of NEADS would be available throughout the day to answer questions and offer information.

Christyn Allain, the Program Officer for the Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons, offered a welcome on behalf of the Council and invited participants to visit their booth and pick up brochures and information on contacts for the organization. The Council's website, www.gnb/0048 also has helpful information.

Dillon encouraged participants to take advantage of opportunities at the forum. The job market is a challenging place, she said, and everyone benefits from sharing experiences. The structure of the day would facilitate discussion, information gathering, and networking. "This is meant to be a safe environment to try things out," she said. Professionals would be on hand to give advice on resumés and offer tips on job searching. She told participants to be open to feedback and different perspectives; "Even if it does not seem helpful now," she said. "It may be useful later on."

Workshop A

Transitioning From School to Work

Nicole Jacksic- Human Resources, Diversity and Workplace Equity
BMO Financial Group (BMO)

Nicole Jacksic said she was proud to have a shared vision for disabled persons through her work at BMO. She has worked in Human Resources at BMO since 1999, primarily on disability issues. Prior to that, she was employed in the not-for-profit sector developing training programs for disabled persons, and at university she worked in the Disabilities office. "I have a disability myself and I wanted to share my experience," she said.

Jacksic told participants that resiliency in career development will require them to manage change, lead their careers, cultivate inner resources, participate in continuous learning, build and sustain relationships through networking, understand themselves as a commodity, nurture their well-being, and create a support network. Of these, she emphasized that leading one's career, nurturing well-being, finding balance in life, and having a strong support network are especially important to empowerment.

"NEADS is an excellent source for meeting many different people who can help with the transition from school to work," she said. "Networking is essential."

Jacksic said there are four stages of "career conversations": assessing oneself, defining career goals, action planning, and finalizing a career plan.

She told participants that when assessing themselves to consider what makes them unique, and determine their professional goals, what they hope to achieve, what their values and strengths are, and their

stage of life. "It is important to use a support network to find out what others see," she said. "This helps validate a sense of self."

Another aspect of self-assessment is the definition of a professional brand: a combination of tangible and intangible characteristics that make up the impression one gives to others. "Individuals have a brand just as much as products and corporations such as Nike," Jacksic said. She added that brand is important because body language, words, and tone all send messages about the individual, how they work with others and even what kind of work they deliver.

"The way we present ourselves, and the perception of us by others, both contribute to brand," she said.

Jacksic identified two steps in defining career goals, reflecting and researching. When reflecting on self-assessment, she encouraged participants to think about where they would like to be in five years, what they are willing to do to achieve their goals, and what it will take to achieve them. She recommended researching those organizations with the best reputations as employers, and finding out as much as possible about the culture of their workplace. This will help to identify specific destinations on a career path.

Job shadowing, volunteer work, co-op programs, internships, and mentoring all give insight into the workplace as well as practical experience. Internships and co-ops may also have some built-in accommodation through partnerships with funding sources and other programs. Mentoring can establish a support network which will offer guidance along a career path.

Action planning requires defining and committing to specific actions to help achieve goals. Job shadowing, conducting information interviews, volunteering, and

networking can all have a place in an action plan. "Commitment, timing and tools are essential components of the job search," she said. For example, one participant in the workshop had already demonstrated the importance of networking by introducing herself and describing her goals. Another participant knew someone in a related area and provided her with contact information. Connections like this can lead to possible interviews and jobs.

"You must put it all together into one plan—the career plan," said Jacksic. She added that creating a professional brand, identifying strengths and opportunities for development, listing specific goals, and developing an action plan will all help determine "how you get from here to there." Jacksic encouraged participants to know themselves, focus on their unique qualities and accomplishments, understand the current employment environment, seek feedback, know their business, and create a plan.

Effective Job Searching

Anne Soucy - Manager, Student Employment Service, University of New Brunswick/St. Thomas University (UNB/STU)

Trina Greer - Employment Counsellor, Student Employment Service, University of New Brunswick/St. Thomas University (UNB/STU)

Anne Soucy told participants that approximately 14,000 students are registered with the Student Employment Services office for UNB/STU. The accessibility centre at UNB has registered 300 students.

The Student Employment Services website offers many resources, and alumni can access it to post job opportunities. The centre works closely with employers; for example, it hosts information sessions where employers speak about their compa-

nies and available opportunities. "These sessions are a two-way street," she said. "Offering an opportunity for both applicant and employer to determine what the other is looking for." The centre also holds fall, summer, and graduate career fairs.

Retirement and a declining work force are changing the demographics of the workplace. Soucy encouraged participants to begin their career building efforts in their first year of university. There are many resources, including career counselling, available to them.

Soucy said students should define their preferences. For example, they should decide whether they would prefer to work with a national corporation or a small company, and whether or not they are willing to relocate for work. Many students are now choosing to seek out international companies, perceiving them to offer greater opportunity.

She advised participants to update their written documentation and references. Developing a professional resumé makes a positive impression. "Share the finished effort with someone else for an objective critique before submitting it to employers," she said. She suggested that participants develop several different resúmes, using the most appropriate for each job application.

A separate reference sheet should include the names, contact information, and place of employment for each reference. Soucy told participants to request permission from all references before using their names. It is not necessary to include this sheet with an application, but applicants should bring it to any interview.

"Prepare a separate cover letter for every application," she said. "Use information from the job description to highlight those skills that are particularly relevant to the position."

Only 20% of available jobs are advertised, which underlines the need for networking. Jobs advertised in the newspaper or through an online search engine see greater competition. While it is important to keep applying, applicants must be prepared to be more competitive and conduct non-traditional job searches as well. "Search on a regular basis," she said: "Looking for a full time job is a full time job."

The remaining 80% of jobs are not advertised because expense, time required to go through an increased number of applications, and desire to know applicants personally all create obstacles. To find these unadvertised jobs, Soucy advised participants to network vigorously, research companies, volunteer, join associations and related organizations, and request information interviews with potential workplaces.

Trina Greer suggested participants begin their company research with the Yellow Pages, the Chamber of Commerce, and business organizations such as Enterprise Fredericton, resource books such as Who's Hiring and the The Career Directory, and career exploration websites. She recommended www.careercruising.com and told participants to enter the user name 'career', and 'resources' when prompted for the password. This site features self-assessment tools and detailed job descriptions as well as links to other resources for related work. Greer also suggested a search for potential employers www.labourmarketinformation.ca under potential employers, and at Industry Canada's website, www.ic.gc.ca.

Job seekers should get help from as many people as possible and read newspapers not only for job opportunities, but to stay current about events within the community. Joining professional associations and societies can also be helpful, she said, but the most important job searching tool is networking.

“Connecting and building relationships is an essential process,” she said, adding that when someone says “I don’t know anyone—I’m too shy,” this is a myth. Networking can begin early in a school career and can include people from a wide range of associations: parents, relatives, classmates, friends, teachers, past and current employers, administrators, guest speakers, volunteers, recent graduates, members of professional organizations, neighbours, and community members. Networking can occur in almost any circumstance and Greer said job seekers should always be open-minded and think outside conventional connections.

The initial contact is an important aspect of networking. Greer encouraged participants to have a 30-second “elevator speech” to ensure they are always ready to make an introduction and give a strong, brief summary of who they are. Follow-up is important. If initial contact is made by e-mail, follow-up should be by phone.

“It is important to be respectful of another’s time,” Greer said. Remain positive and upbeat. She said participants should consider advice when it is given and get permission to use a network contact’s name. “Do not assume people know what you want; do not take rejection personally,” she said.

In preparing for interviews, Greer said it is important for participants to learn about the company, decide what information they want, think about questions they might have, dress professionally, thank the interviewer or interviewers for their time, and always follow up. She encouraged them to keep a record of contacts, set goals, and monitor progress.

What You Need to Know About Disclosure and Job Accommodations

Manon Nadeau - Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW)

Manon Nadeau introduced the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW), a national non-profit organization established in 1976. Its service comprises several core programs such as Job Accommodation Services (JAS), WORKInc, a virtual employment centre, and Disabilities Awareness Services (DAS), which offers online resource training.

Nadeau defined accommodation as “something supplied for convenience or to satisfy need.” In the workplace, accommodation equalizes the field for employees with disabilities. There are two categories: hard accommodation—which includes physical, tangible things such as desks, microphones, and keyboards, and soft accommodation—such as flexible hours, access to training and information, and alternate job placement. Studies have found that two-thirds of all accommodations cost less than \$500 to implement, while many cost nothing at all. Accommodation is a legal obligation of the employer. Nadeau referred participants to the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission website at <http://www.gnb.ca/hrc-cdp/e/> for more detailed information. Any employer must make an effort to accommodate unless it causes undue hardship on the company in the form of excessive cost, which the company is unable to bear, or causes a violation of health and safety requirements resulting in unsafe work conditions.

For the vision impaired, accommodations might include large print or Braille documents, magnifiers, notes, and refreshers. For hearing impaired workers, accommodations could be interpreters, flashing alarms, written instructions, a buddy sys-

tem, or teletypewriter (TTY) phones. Mobility accommodations could include special keyboards, mouth sticks, adjustable desks, speech recognition software, or modified hours. Learning disability accommodations might take the form of tutors, note-takers, electronic organizers, day planners, or software.

“Even hidden disabilities, such as environmental sensitivities, chronic fatigue syndrome, irritable bowel syndrome, or other medical conditions not obviously visible may require accommodation,” she said.

There is no legal obligation to accommodate a disability unless it is disclosed to the employer. There are several reasons for an employee to choose not to disclose a disability. The disability may not affect job performance, there may be fear of discrimination, the employee may be unsure how best to address the situation, or the employee may have had a bad experience with disclosure in the past.

Employees would choose to disclose a disability if accommodation is required at the interview stage, if a work space adjustment is required, if there is a high level of comfort with the disability, or if the employee feels confident in assuring the employer that the job can be done.

“It is up to the individual to decide if and when to disclose a disability to the employer,” Nadeau said. It might be done before applying, at the interview stage, on acceptance of the job, or if there is a change in an employee’s situation such as, a condition developing after employment. If an employee does choose to disclose, Nadeau said they must have knowledge of what the job entails and a discussion of relevant information with the employer without revealing any unnecessary information. The necessary accommodations must also be identified.

Both the employee and the employer must accept certain roles and responsibilities.

Employees must participate in determining needs and be willing to use solution trials. Employers should be notified if the accommodations change, and the accommodations must enable the employee to fulfill the job performance requirements.

The employer must accept the request, get expert advice, and arrange accommodation in a timely manner, bearing all costs unless it causes undue hardship. The request should be recorded, along with the action taken. Confidentiality should be maintained.

Discussion

A participant asked the panel for suggestions on establishing personal brand in a resumé. Jacksic said that brand will come through by highlighting skills, accomplishments, awards, and achievements. Highlighting skills that are particular to what the applicant does will also establish brand.

Students often feel they have to focus on work experience, Greer said, but they should highlight anything, paid or unpaid, that is of particular relevance. They should also include anything that is unique. “There is a certain amount of flexibility in creating a resumé,” she said.

A participant asked whether an applicant should call an employer to ask why he or she had not been selected for an interview, and Greer suggested that follow-up can be useful. The applicant may learn that sheer numbers made it impossible to interview all qualified candidates. A candidate could follow up if interviewed but not hired and request feedback. If the feedback is positive and the contact is maintained, it could lead to consideration for other possible positions.

Because online competition is so steep, the process could be discouraging. Soucy said pursuing the hidden job market may be better. Greer suggested contacting the

employer to ask questions when a job ad appears to establish some personal contact beforehand, and give the applicant an advantage.

Another participant asked how honest people are likely to be when they are participating in an information interview. Soucy said she is always as honest as possible. While no one is going to give away company secrets, a conversation with the incumbent who is leaving the position can provide a broad overview. Greer said that it is possible to get a sense if someone is happy in their job. If one person gives a very negative or extreme impression, it might be helpful to ask to speak to someone with a similar position.

A participant asked if New Brunswick employers were becoming more receptive to hiring people with disabilities. Nadeau said in the past few months, she has been contacted by employers looking to hire people with disabilities. Employers are starting to use the very qualified pool of employees available to them.

Soucy said that she contacts the Disability Centre when employers call, and the Human Resources Association has invited speakers to come to their sessions to raise the profile of people with disabilities as potential employees. "The demographics are changing, she said. "Employers are not getting the candidates they used to get."

Jacksic said that a great deal of work has been done in a number of BMO branches to accommodate disabilities. BMO taps into community resources as well. The banks are working hard in Ontario to bring in candidates and conduct management awareness training. Jacksic recommended the www.gnb/0048 website as a reference for awareness.

Greer noted that money is set aside for persons with disabilities through the Student Employment Experience Development Program (SEED), which

offers employers a financial break; many students also go through the Equal Employment Opportunity Program (EEO).

A participant asked whether it is necessary to state an objective on a resumé. Greer said that this is unnecessary since it is the function of the cover letter. Jacksic said if there is no opportunity to include a cover letter—for example, when applying online—it is important to customize the resumé with an objective. Greer said that in the case of online applications, participants should include as many key words from the job description as possible. Some companies use a scan screening process to search for key words.

Another participant asked if functional and chronological resumé are still in vogue. A modified chronological resumé still works well, Greer said. When students are getting more relevant experience through volunteer work, she suggested that applicants use more targeted headings. For example, if applying for a leadership position, 'leadership experience' would be a more effective heading than 'work experience.' This makes it easier for the employer to scan for relevant information.

Greer suggested when applicants list a degree, they also list the skills acquired through study or related projects. Research, presentation, and teamwork skills would all be relevant. Job seekers should list less relevant work experience, but there is no need to highlight it. Resumés will change according to the job description, she said.

Soucy advised participants to limit their resumé to two pages. For students coming out of school, employers want to see a timeline, but the focus should be on skills and not just on duties. They want to see some demonstration of skills that are transferable to other jobs.

A participant asked how much humour could be included in a resumé. Greer sug-

gested that humour is more appropriate in the cover letter, and it can be worked into a description of skills. The use of humour would depend on the job, Soucy said. For example, one job applicant printed her resumé and cover letter on denim-like paper when applying for a marketing position with a jeans company. There is a certain amount of latitude with creativity and inventiveness if it is tailored to the job.

Soucy reminded participants to dress appropriately when dropping off an application in person, and be mindful of the impression they are creating. “Don’t discount anyone; the secretary, the receptionist, other employees are all part of the workplace team and you never know who will be taking note of you.”

A participant asked what place portfolio development has in the interview. The Nova Scotia Community College has a full portfolio development program, Soucy said. Employers are asking for it in Ontario, as well, but she has seen little in New Brunswick. Student Employment Services at UNB/STU has been trying to introduce it at the university, but the demand for it is not yet significant. If applicants do use a portfolio, it will certainly set them apart. “Use it to highlight you,” she said.

Another participant asked for clarification on what a resumé portfolio involved. Portfolios should be targeted to the job, just like a resumé. They should include evidence of competencies, such as samples of work, certificates, degrees, samples of writing skills, and even spreadsheets, in the case of a business position—anything that will showcase a talent or skill the applicant has demonstrated. The portfolio should include copies, she said, not original documents.

Workshop B

Equal Employment Opportunity Program

Michelle Anne Duguay - Manager; Official Languages & Workplace Equity, Office of Human Resources, New Brunswick Government

The Equal Employment Opportunity Program (EEO) was established in 1984 and is administered by the Official Languages and Workplace Equity Branch of the Office of Human Resources, in partnership with individual government departments. It aims to create a more balanced workforce that reflects the province’s diversity by providing aboriginals, people with disabilities, and visible minorities with job seeking services.

Michelle Anne Duguay said the EEO created a database of targeted clients for government departments to use in filling contract, temporary, and regular positions. Registered users of the EEO database can apply for both open and in-service competitions. Since the beginning of the service, 565 people have found contract positions within the government. Of those, 253 were appointed to full-time positions at the end of their contract.

Duguay emphasized that members must be residents of New Brunswick and identify themselves as a member of one of the three designated groups to register for the service. Registration can be completed either online or in paper form. Online registrants can upload an e-resumé to be included in a database. The applicant’s e-resumé shows the date of initial registration with the EEO, and this information is provided to employers when EEO members apply for competitions. “It’s better to register online,” Duguay said. “Changes to your e-resumé can be made right on the site. It saves you lots of time.”

Duguay directed interested participants to the EEO website at www.gnb.ca/eoo. Questions about the program can be e-mailed directly to her office at eoo-eae@gnb.ca.

Once registered for the service, members receive a letter of confirmation, as well as e-mails advertising both open and in-service job competitions. New members also receive a list of government department coordinators and a candidate checklist.

Even with EEO's assistance, Duguay said, "it's your responsibility to market yourself." Members must ensure that their resumés are updated, and monitor job competitions. Duguay advised participants to research the government departments that interest them.

While some applicants prefer to send mass mailings of their resumés and cover letters to government departments, Duguay recommended tailoring the resumé for each potential job. She suggested that participants seek assistance from employment counsellors, who are well-equipped to provide assistance for job-hunters.

Duguay told participants the EEO-SEED program is similar to SEED, with positions reserved for EEO's targeted groups.

Participants in EEO-SEED must be full-time, returning post-secondary students who identify themselves as an aboriginal person, a permanently disabled person, or a visible minority. Students send their applications for employment directly to the employer, then inform EEO, which makes the relevant match. Duguay directed interested participants to contact Gail Prince at eoo-eae@gnb.ca.

First-Hand Employment Experience

Stephanie Berry - Student, Saint Thomas University

Berry said that while she is visually impaired, she is not an expert on visual impairment. Even within her own family, her visually impaired sister's experience is different from her own. Berry's visual impairment "is only one dimension of who I am, but it can't be ignored because it affects my life and my employment opportunities."

During the last two years of her high school career, she said, a transition worker helped her prepare for university and encouraged her to do volunteer work. Berry said she was hesitant, preferring to do paid work, but she did volunteer at the Moncton Hospital. She enjoyed her work and said it allowed her to gain familiarity with a workplace environment.

At 15, Berry acquired a Student Employment Experience Development (SEED) application and received a summer position working at a local Boys and Girls Club. "It felt like being in kindergarten again," Berry said. "There was lots of chaos everywhere." She had to learn how to make herself and the children she worked with comfortable with her disability. To ensure that both she and the children were comfortable, she explained her visual impairment and asked that they say their names before approaching her. She made a Braille book and crafted Braille Bingo cards to serve as an accessible activity, and taught a few children to read Braille.

At 17, Berry received another SEED grant to work for the Town of Riverview's Parks and Recreation Department. This time, many of the children she worked with were autistic. Finding activities to connect with other disabled people interested her, she said.

The following summer, she worked for CCRW in her first office position. At 19, she worked at the YWCA Women's Abuse Resource Centre. Berry told participants this job allowed her to meet new people and learn about important community issues to which she had no previous exposure.

"One of the biggest things for me is trying to find a job," Berry said. She relied on the internet and said interviews were nerve-racking.

She told participants that she preferred to disclose her disability sooner rather than later, to ensure people felt prepared for their meeting. "People can be nervous if they've never had exposure to someone with a disability," she said, and encouraged participants to make a consistent effort to help others feel comfortable. Even at job interviews, people often asked her questions about the types of assistive technology that could benefit her. "You must not be afraid to have people ask you questions," she said. "Sometimes people ask me questions that I'm quite shocked about but you must answer them in a professional manner."

Berry said she benefited from a strong support network and available advocacy programs. During high school, she had the opportunity to participate in a job-shadowing program. The journalist she shadowed asked Berry how she could do a journalist's job with her disability and, though disappointed, Berry said she realized that the question was not merely blunt and mean, but valid.

When Berry shadowed a social worker, she realized how important a driver's license is in this line of work and what an obstacle her inability to drive would be. "Employers should learn to be flexible," Berry said. "They shouldn't be afraid to alter their position—not to make them easier, but to better accommodate people with disabili-

ties." She added employers must also realize that everyone has potential. "There is a lot we can bring to society," she said.

NEADS Student Awards Programs and Mentorship Program

Julia Munk - Project Consultant, Equity through Education Awards Program and Mentorship Program, NEADS

Funded by BMO Capital Markets, NEADS offers both individual student awards, and campus group awards said Julia Munk. These awards are intended to encourage the students with disabilities to participate in their communities.

To be considered for an award, applicants must be either a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident, and have a permanent disability. They must be full-time students, which NEADS defines as any student having a course load of 40% or higher in any Canadian university/college.

The awards are not merit-based, Munk said. Applicants must show commitment to their academic discipline, a record of volunteerism or employment, and the potential to be an outstanding member of the community in order to be considered for the available money. Up to four awards of \$3,000 are given annually to undergraduate students, graduate students, and community college students.

"Scott St. Louis won the award in this year's college category," Munk said. He attends Sir Sanford Fleming College in Peterborough, Ontario and is working toward a degree in Human Nutrition and a diploma in massage therapy. Undergraduate scholarships were awarded to Michael Jensen, who is undertaking a Bachelor of Science at the University of Alberta, Allan Kehler, who is working on a Bachelor of Physical Education and Education from the University of Alberta,

and Stephanie Spooner, who is finishing her honours degree in kinesiology at the University of Waterloo. J. Paige MacDougall and Carolina Pineada, both doctoral students of anthropology at McGill University, received the graduate awards.

NEADS created the student group award to support innovative programs and initiatives to improve campus life for students with disabilities. Campus and faculty-recognized student groups and access committees can apply for the award. Applications must have a clear mandate, references, and documentation of recognition from the host institution. NEADS grants one award of \$5,000 annually.

Munk encouraged participants to apply for the awards by visiting www.neads.ca and clicking on the Equity through Education link. Application materials are available to download from the site.

NEADS is also in the process of creating a mentorship program and developing an online membership database, Munk said. "This is an exciting new initiative. We're trying to develop an innovative program." Ideally, the mentorship program will allow students the opportunity to develop networks that will improve their employment prospects. Munk invited interested participants to talk with her at the end of the presentations.

Since August 2005, NEADS has presented eight job search strategy forums; in partnership with BMO Capital Markets, the second phase of the forums will be held over the next three years. "We are really excited to continue our work for next year," Munk said.

NEADS Web-Based Employment Resources

Natalie Fougère - New Brunswick Representative, NEADS

NEADS was founded in 1986, and is a consumer-based cross-disability organization that advocates for post-secondary education and employment opportunities for its members. A 12 person board governs NEADS and each province and territory has its own representative. The remaining board member has no regional affiliation, but is a person who believes in the NEADS objective.

NEADS members include college and university students with disabilities, recent graduates with disabilities, professionals who provide support services on campus, and employers.

NEADS conducts research, provides information on financial aid and specialized funding, maintains a website and a listserv, and holds a bi-annual national conference.

"Speaking of conferences," said Fougère. "The twelfth bi-annual NEADS National Conference, entitled 'Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow', will be held this year in Ottawa November 14-16." She strongly encouraged everyone to attend.

Since 1994, NEADS has begun a number of employment initiatives, including the creation of the Employer Advisory Council, a mentorship project, Student Leadership and Employment Forums -- a federal government funded initiative, and the Job Search Strategies Forums project.

NEADS' publications include *Employment Connections* and *Access to Success*. NEADS launched its most comprehensive and accessible employment resource—the NEADS Online Work System (NOWS)—in 2003. Available at www.nows.ca, this free

website relies on users to disclose their disability or impairment.

Once students have disclosed they can post their resumés and cover letters online. They can also search for jobs within certain provinces or certain academic fields. “The website is not like Workopolis.com or Monster.com. It is specifically for people with disabilities,” said Fougere. There are 1,800 students registered on NOWS, as well as 100 registered employers representing 25 different industries in every province and territory. Of the registered users, 160 graduates and students are from the Maritimes.

Jobs in government, administrative services, human resources, information technology, arts and entertainment, and health-care are of the greatest interest to NOWS’ job seekers. Some of the employers registered with the site are BMO Financial Group, Canada Post, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Canada Revenue Agency, Canadian Security and Intelligence Service, Casino Nova Scotia, CTV, Export Development Canada, GE Canada, IBM Canada, Imperial Oil, Lockheed Martin, and RBC Financial Group to name a few.

She advised participants to contact Frank Smith with questions at frank.smith@neads.ca, or to visit the website.

Discussion

A participant asked Munk if universities could apply for the student group award offered by NEADS, or if NEADS allocates the money only for student organizations. Munk said on campus access committees could apply for the award to host conferences or other events but students must be on the committee.

Another participant expressed interest in the developing mentorship program, and asked for more detail. Munk described the program’s two-pronged component, designed to allow users to choose mentors by region or by academic discipline. Users could then ask their mentors questions in many different areas and find the best person to answer their question. “But the program is still under development,” Munk said. She suggested the participant put his name on the list-serv to receive regular updates and news. The program is intended to be launched at NEADS’ national conference in November.

A participant asked Duguay what kind of proof of disability is required by EEO. Duguay told participants registering for the service “to click on the EO section. Once you check that you have a disability, the computer will ask you a series of questions.” The EEO program tends to be more inclusive rather than exclusive, she said.

“You don’t require any type of documentation?” the participant asked. Duguay said that EEO reserves the right to ask for documentation if doubts about the user’s disability arise.

Another participant noted that students run NEADS, and asked the NEADS’ panelists to talk about their experiences as students. Having finished a degree in Environmental Studies, Dillon said she is currently working on a Certificate in Project Management. She said she had many networking opportunities as a

NEADS consultant. Dillon said she wanted to maintain employment while at university, working part-time throughout her degree but knows this course of action is not for everyone. She said she believes she succeeded because she managed school like work. "I treated it like a job and scheduled my life around it."

Munk said her experience differs greatly from Dillon's. She hopes to graduate in the near future from the University of Toronto with a degree in Political Science. A part-time student, Munk works full-time at the University of Toronto's Access Centre and sometimes participates in student politics. Munk scheduled school around her work. Life balance has been the key to her success.

A participant asked about the earlier statement that 80% of jobs were not publicized. He wanted to know if this lack of publicity could be perceived as a failure, and how participants could access the hidden job market. Duguay, speaking on behalf of EEO, suggested that participants could market themselves directly with the program coordinator to uncover the hidden job market.

Another participant said that when she went to school, she found it hard to find a suitable tutor who could work with her disability. The participant asked the panellists whether they could give any tips in finding tutors who understand disabilities. Dillon said this was a great question and suggested she ask it on the NEADS list-serv, where it might be better answered. Munk advised the participant to research her disability and contact an organization outside of the academic setting that deals with it specifically.

A participant asked how other universities accommodate students with disabilities, particularly with regard to note-taking. Fougère said she employed a note-taker from the beginning of her course, advertis-

ing for the position by circulating a job description through the university e-mail system. Although Fougère takes notes with a Braille machine, she said she compares her notes with that of her note-taker. At the University of Toronto, Munk said, the professor announced at the beginning of class that a note-taker was needed. Students would then volunteer to take notes. The University of Victoria followed the same system, but the university paid the note-taker a small stipend. Fougère said that she paid her note-taker with the money she received from her Canada Study Grant. "What do you do when you can't find a note-taker?" the participant asked. Fougère said she met with her professors at the beginning of the semester and asked for their notes. Munk said she did use the volunteer note-taking service, but ultimately made friends who took notes for her.

Another participant asked if any panel members had ever encountered someone who denied that they had a disability, and how they handled it. Munk said that her disability impacts her motor skills, which makes writing difficult and creates barriers when she writes papers. She acknowledged that the denial of parts of one's disability can be frustrating, "But it's not what they think I can do that matters." Dillon advised the participant to contact her university's Accessibility Centre to communicate with the professor for her. She encouraged the participant to be patient and persistent.

A participant asked if the panel could offer any suggestions for students who attend institutions without Access Centres. Dillon suggested that he reach out to community services to arrange accommodation or advocacy. Munk said many community organizations have advocates who can provide support.

Final Remarks

Jennifer Dillon, NEADS

Dillon thanked the panellists and the participants for attending the forum, encouraging those who are seeking employment to develop career goals. "If you have a purpose in mind and a goal, the process will be more rewarding and less stressful," she said.

She also encouraged participants to help other people when networking, as well as pursuing their own goals. Participants should organize their job search, research the accommodations they need, and explore what disclosure means to them. Participants could role-play disclosing their disability to an employer with a friend, she said. "My disability is obvious, but I have had telephone interviews and needed to decide how to word my disclosure." She recommended that participants become aware of the services and the resources available on the NOWS website. If an interesting employer has no positions posted, Dillon suggested contacting the company to ask about the possibility of job shadowing.

"It is up to you to move forward in the next step of your career development," Dillon said. She invited participants to have an open mind - though some days will be a challenge -- and to enjoy the rewards that come with their job searches. "Career development is an ongoing journey, if you are truly committed to continuous learning and self growth than you are equipped for the journey and we wish you all the very best in your pursuits."