

Enhancing Accessibility in Post-Secondary Education Institutions

A Guide for Disability Service Providers

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INTRODUCTION

Access to post-secondary education is an integral component of achieving income security, yet people with disabilities are less likely to attend and complete post-secondary education (PSE) than those without disabilities. Students with disabilities have the potential to be successful in PSE and the support they receive from their institution can play a large role in this success.

All publicly funded post-secondary institutions have offices that provide or coordinate services and supports for students with disabilities. However, service delivery models and standards are variable as no specific federal or provincial governmental standards exist. However, it is clear that professional organizations like the Canadian Association of Disability Service Providers (CADSPPE) nationally, the Post-Secondary Service Providers for Students with Disability (PSPSD) in Alberta, l'association québécoise inter-universitaire qui regroupent les conseillers aux étudiants en situation de handicap in Quebec, the Inter-University Disability Issues Association (IDIA) and the College Committee on Disability Issues in Ontario are working to ensure standards. In Alberta, the PSPSD has published papers to reflect this work, one being Alberta Guidelines for Accommodating Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Studies. In Ontario, the Accessibility for Ontarians With Disabilities Act (AODA) legislation is having critical impact on colleges and universities in terms of their reporting on disability services, accommodations and physical accessibility to facilities.

Between January and May, 2010, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada's Office for Disability Issues (ODI) carried out a scan of select PSE policies and programs on how they enable access for students with disabilities. Twenty universities and ten colleges/universities were selected for review based on their size and location. Following this review, consultations were conducted with PSE disability service providers and student groups to gather best practices and identify potential knowledge gaps on access to PSE for students with disabilities. Thirty colleges/universities as well as six student groups were contacted to participate in the consultations; of those contacted, twelve colleges/universities and one student group participated.

Based on information gathered through the review and consultations, this document presents recommendations and best practices on increasing accessibility to PSE for students with disabilities. Once approved, this document will be shared for feedback with an informal network of university and college disability service providers and student disability groups. Once this feedback has been gathered, the revised document will form the basis of a web-based accessibility guide for PSE disability service providers that will be developed (though funding from ODI) by the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) in 2011/2012.

The purpose of the website will be to build awareness of disability issues within Canadian PSE institutions and to share best practices in accessibility and accommodation practices and procedures.

PSE INSTITUTIONAL DISABILITY POLICIES

Many PSE institutions have formal policies for the accommodation of students with disabilities, to ensure compliance with provincial and federal human rights legislation, and understand the benefit of ensuring that these students have barrier-free access to PSE. These formal disability policies can help solidify an institution's commitment to programs, services, and an overall academic community accessible to people with disabilities.

In consultation with a sample of Canadian PSE institutions, the following best practices in the design and content of formal disability policies were identified.

Designing PSE Institutional Disability Policies

Canadian PSE institutions have identified the following best practices to create disability policies responsive to the needs of their students, staff and stakeholders.

- Create an Accessibility Committee with formal roles and responsibilities to research, draft and propose policies on accessibility for people with disabilities. It is important that any developed committee include people with disabilities and people with a strong knowledge of disability issues such as disability service providers, counseling or mental health providers, students with disabilities, etc. The committee could also include representatives from various sectors of the college or university such as faculty members, deans, administration staff, legal staff, library staff, etc. These different representatives have allowed for different perspectives and insight into disability issues in specific areas. As well, it is important that any developed Disability Committee have on-going mandate as the committee could be useful in the implementation and review of disability policies and other activities.
- Provide Disability Committees with other tasks such as coordinating hearings for student or faculty appeals, promoting accessibility and accommodation to the college/university community, addressing accessibility issues on campus, reporting to the senate, etc.
- Carry out consultations with disability organizations and students with disabilities when drafting disability policies.
- Review the policies of other Canadian PSE institutions of similar size and type.
- Use disability-related policy templates and guidelines already developed by professional organizations, researchers, or government bodies.
- Separate formal disability policies from formal disability procedures, as procedures are more likely to require updates. This split will allow for a quicker turnaround on amendments.
- Write policies using plain language to ensure maximum clarity, understanding, and transparency.
- Ensure that policies are broad in scope as policies that are too specific or narrow can quickly become outdated or not allow for individualized accommodation.
- Have the draft policies reviewed by other on-campus committees and groups who work on related topics (such as housing, built environment, safety, privacy, etc.), to help ensure that the policy is in accordance with other on-campus policies and procedures.
- Ensure that the policies receive high-level approval within the PSE institution's governance structure and are reviewed by the office for Policy Development or the institution's equivalent.
- Once finalized, the policies should be easily accessible and widely distributed.

- Once policies are in effect, they should be periodically reviewed (ideally, this review would be mandatory) to help ensure their continued relevance. As an example, all policies could be reviewed after 1 year with subsequent reviews occurring every 2 to 5 years thereafter depending on the policy type.

Guiding Principles

In the creation of disability policies within PSE institutions, a number of institutions have highlighted the importance of developing guiding principles which help direct and structure the policies and procedures as well as affirm the institution's policy goals. Some key guiding principles are listed below:

Full Participation

- Commit to ensuring full access for students with disabilities in academic pursuits as well as in campus and in community life; people with disabilities should not be discriminated against or denied access on the basis of their disability.
- Commit to removing barriers to participation for students with disabilities such as physical, attitudinal, financial, and systemic barriers.

Self Advocacy

- Encourage students with disabilities to be knowledgeable about their needs, effectively communicate those needs, and be proactive in having their needs met. This can be done by outlining student responsibilities in relation to their own disability such as self-identifying to the institution and adopting a cooperative role in requesting and utilizing programs and accommodations. Provide training and/or skill development on compensatory strategies and the use of assistive technology.
- In this context, self-identification of a disability does not necessarily mean disclosing specifics to the registrar, for example, but simply indicating that there is a disability that requires supports. More in-depth disclosure happens in the disability service provider's office.
- Part of self-advocacy is being involved with the decisions that have a direct impact on students. Consult and encourage the participation of students with disabilities and people with disabilities in the broader community in the development of any relevant policy, program or procedure.

Flexibility

- Disability issues are complex, multifaceted and require flexibility and creativity to effectively accommodate students with disabilities. What works for one student may not be appropriate for another. Flexibility means following guidelines while taking in to consideration individual circumstances and differences.

Awareness

- Promote an awareness of disability issues and acceptance of people with disabilities to faculty, staff and students and educate them about the PSE institution's disability policies, programs, and procedures.

Leadership Among Institutions

- Act as a leader and innovator among PSE institutions in relation to accessibility and disability issues.

Content for PSE Institutional Disability Policies

While there are many important topics to include, the following topics have been highlighted by various PSE institutions as being vital components of disability policies. Though it is not an exhaustive list, each issue below should be considered during the policy development.

Legislation

- It is important to take into consideration relevant legislation as well as other PSE institutional policies when drafting and implementing specific disability policies. This includes provincial human rights acts, privacy acts, and disability standards; institutional policies on privacy, access to information or student rights; federal acts such as the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*; and international conventions such as the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

Application

- To whom should disability policies apply? Policies and procedures should apply equally to everyone at a PSE institution; however, accessibility for faculty and staff with disabilities is often treated as a separate policy from accessibility for students with disabilities.
- Policies and procedures should clearly identify the target population such as undergraduate students or graduate students (some institutions have a separate disability policy for graduate students).
- Policies and procedures must clearly indicate how they apply to part-time and full-time students and provide clear definitions of part-time and full-time status. This is important as many students with disabilities are able to take a reduced course load while maintaining full-time status.
- Policies and procedures may extend to students who have been accepted to the PSE institution as prospective students and, in some cases, students who have applied to the institution.
- Policies and procedures may also cover students enrolled in distance education and on-line courses.

Definition of Disability

- Avoid defining disability in rigid terms and avoid limiting policies to people with permanent disabilities as some disabilities – like chronic conditions and mental illnesses – are episodic in nature. While disabilities may not be present at all times, they may require accommodations.
- Extend the definition of disability to people with temporary disabilities such as those who temporarily require crutches, a wheelchair, or other mobility device.
- Definitions from organizations such as the World Health Organization, Human Rights Code, or the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* can provide a good foundation for PSE institutions in the development of their own definitions.
- It may be useful too, for the definition, to also discuss how a disability may limit or interfere with a person's academic pursuits and how these limitations could be due to environmental, attitudinal, systemic, or procedural barriers.

Definition of Accommodation

- Clearly define the objective of disability accommodation and how it will be achieved. The definition could also include wording that references the provision of reasonable accommodations and modifications to ensure equal access to education.
- Reference the fact that accommodations are meant to eliminate barriers for students with disabilities and are not to provide an unfair academic advantage over students without disabilities. Maintaining academic standards and the integrity of programs is a priority.
- Broad, open-ended definitions of accommodations should reflect that it is not a

“one size fits all” process and should not be constrained by rigid definitions.

- Expand the definition to include non-academic accommodation such as activities and services that are not specific to academic success but enable full participation in campus life.

Defining Roles and Responsibilities

- Formalize the specific roles and responsibilities of the various administrative and academic units within the PSE institution as it may strengthen the idea that accessibility is a collaborative effort between staff, students, faculty and administration.
- Requesting and approving accommodations is a large part of PSE accessibility, so it is important to clearly state each person’s responsibilities in this process. Identify who is responsible for submitting requests, approving requests, administering accommodations, handling appeals, etc.
- While it may seem beneficial to leave roles broad and general, it is important to delineate the roles clearly so there is no confusion as to the breadth of each person’s responsibility. For example, a faculty member’s primary role is to assist with the process of implementing accommodations. While they may refuse to provide an accommodation, it would be important to state that this judgment must be based on retaining academic integrity and not on a personal judgment of the person’s abilities.
- There will undoubtedly be roles and responsibilities that are not easily designated to one person or department. Responsibilities which are shared jointly should be stated as such. In particular, it might be worthwhile to note that the creation of a supportive and accessible on campus environment is a collaborative effort and the responsibility of the entire PSE institution.

Admission

- Commit to accommodate people with disabilities during the application process and

to not deny admission on the basis of a disability.

- Clearly indicate that students with disabilities are expected to satisfy the same admission requirements as other applicants and, like all other applicants, they can appeal any admission decision.
- Encourage students to voluntarily self identify during the application process in order to expedite the accommodation process. However, clearly state that this decision is ultimately that of the student.
- Include a statement in the policy and procedures which ensure Admissions staff refer people who identify during the admission process to the Disability Office.

Accommodations

- Provide examples of potential accommodations such as adaptations to evaluation and testing methods, use of alternate formats or assistive technology, etc. As accommodations will undoubtedly vary depending on the situation, keep statements general and broad with a focus on individual needs.
- Establish a timeline for registering and submitting accommodation requests and establish service benchmarks for responding to accommodation requests.
- While it is important to have specific dates and deadlines for accommodation requests, allow for some flexibility to account for extenuating circumstances, especially when the service centre is dealing with recently registered students with disabilities.
- If an accommodation cannot be made, commit to provide a clear, written explanation to the student and outline the reasons for the decision.
- State the process for appealing accommodation decisions or refer to a separate policy that addresses this issue.
- Discuss the provision of non-academic accommodations for students with

disabilities, including in the social, recreational and living environments.

- Include a statement on the institution's dedication to ensuring fully accessible facilities for students with physical disabilities. This should include class rooms, buildings, social environments, residences, parking, etc.
- Include ideals of universal design and accessible teaching practices and encourage instructors to be aware of course components that could discriminate against students with disabilities.

Assessments and Documentation

- As documentation of a disability is paramount to receiving accommodations, it is important to provide clear instructions on what exactly is required. It is also important to provide clear instructions on when documentation needs to be submitted.
- While it is important to have concrete and standardized requirements for documentation, provide students who experience extenuating circumstances the opportunity to consult with appropriate representatives and discuss alternatives.

Appeals

- Provide details on how students should handle complaints about on-campus accessibility and disagreements regarding accommodations. Usually students are encouraged to exhaust all informal channels, including discussion and mediation, before making a formal appeal.
- Clearly state the procedure for making a formal appeal and include information on eligibility to make an appeal, the process for making an appeal, how an appeal is decided and by whom, how the results will be delivered, and any recourse the student may have through external agencies, such as an appropriate Human Rights Commission.
- Where appropriate, reference a separate policy or document which contains the official appeal process.

Confidentiality

- Affirm the institution's commitment to respecting the privacy of students and their right to self disclose a disability but clarify that certain information about a disability is needed in order to provide accommodations.
- Matters of privacy, confidentiality and the handling of personal information should be handled in accordance with relevant legislation and institutional policies. Clearly outline or provide references to these procedures.
- Identify the procedures for maintaining and handling confidential information, including the length of time information is held and the disposal mechanisms.
- Identify who is authorized to access confidential information and describe how students may authorize other parties to access or share their information.
- Explain all situations where students' information may be disclosed without their consent.

Financial Assistance

- It is common to establish fee structures for specific disability related services, particularly services that need to be contracted out or require technology that is not already available to the school. In many cases, funding through grants and bursaries is available. State where these fees apply and that assistance is available for students with applications for funding.
- If a student is unsuccessful in obtaining funding for support services, consider committing to providing these services, within reason, to students in need.
- Mention any financial considerations that are specific to students with disabilities such as exemption from certain minimum course load requirements for certain scholarships and bursaries as well as tuition reductions to students who are taking a reduced course load as an accommodation.

Training/Promotion

- Commit to provide training and consultation services to faculty, staff and students regarding disability policy and related disability issues.
- Ensure that the policy is readily available and widely distributed to staff, faculty and students.
- State that all faculty, staff and students must comply with the policy and state any actions that may be taken as a result of non-compliance.
- Designate an independent individual, committee or office that is directly responsible for ensuring that the policies of the institution are enforced and that accessibility standards are met. They could coordinate awareness, advocacy, and expertise on social, physical, legal and policy matters across the campus.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Providing accommodations for students with disabilities is a large part of ensuring equal access to education and providing an enjoyable post-secondary education experience.

Accommodations refer to any service, adaptation or support mechanism that enables students with disabilities to participate fully in academic, campus and community life. In particular, academic accommodations provide students with disabilities an equal opportunity to master the essentials of a post-secondary education. Accommodations are intended to level the playing field so that students with disabilities have the chance to develop the same skills and abilities expected of all students.

Appropriate accommodation undoubtedly varies for each student dependent on their disability and their academic requirements. A number of Canadian PSE institutions have successfully utilized the following accommodation processes and practices.

Academic Accommodation Process

For many students with disabilities, access to effective and timely academic accommodations is integral to their educational success. PSE institutions have successfully utilized the following processes to provide access to and deliver these accommodations.

- As it is important that students with disabilities register early with disability services, allow new students to register at the same time they are applying to the college/university. Encourage students with disabilities to register with disability services even if they do not feel they need accommodations.
- Have applications direct students to a disability service website, or to the disability service office, where they can obtain information regarding available services and eligibility criteria. Ensure detailed guidelines are provided on what documentation is required and how to submit it. When assessments are required, provide information on funding options.
- Instruct students to contact the disability office as soon as they receive their acceptance letter and include a brief reference to this in all acceptance letters.
- It is important to continue outreach to the student population so that those who may not have self-identified as having a disability during the application process are still aware of available services.
- All students registered with disability services should meet with an advisor to discuss their accommodation needs; this is typically done once students receive their course schedule. Provide early registration services to students who require more time to arrange for accommodations.
- Students and their advisors will develop an appropriate Accommodation Plan that specifies the services and equipment required to fulfill the necessary in-class, testing, instructional, and out-of-class accommodations.
- Advisors will help students fill out the necessary forms to obtain accommodations and assist them in applying for any funding the student may require.
- Provide comprehensive forms for students to complete when requesting specific services and consider developing “packages” on common accommodations for particular disabilities which would include information and the application form. Include information on required documentation and assessments, both in hard copy and on-line. Whenever possible, provide the option to submit requests electronically.
- Provide clear and explicit deadlines for when students must submit their documentation, submit requests and/or meet with their advisor. However, try and be flexible as unforeseen circumstances may arise.

- It is important to respond to requests in a timely manner. This includes requests for accommodations but also for requests for appointments and general inquiries. If staff is unable to reply immediately, acknowledge the receipt of the request and provide a reasonable timeframe when it will be addressed. Ensuring students receive their accommodations in a timely manner is a high priority.
- While students are responsible for meeting to discuss their accommodation plans, disability services should help remind them of the required process. Develop a mailing list and send out important date reminders to registered students. Another option is to have a detailed calendar available online which highlights key dates and deadlines.
- Allow returning students who do not require changes to their accommodation plan to register on-line. If students are required to have their accommodation plans signed by their instructors, the plans can be generated electronically and sent to the student who will get the signatures and return them to the office. This will be convenient for most students and help alleviate the workload of disability advisors.
- Ensure that students have an outlet to which they may appeal in the event there are disagreements on the provision of accommodations. Any Appeals Committee should be knowledgeable on the subject matter and impartial.
- The question of who should contact course instructors regarding necessary accommodations can be difficult. While it is important for students with disabilities to act as their own advocates, it can be stressful and burdensome for some students. There are a few options in this situation:
 - Provide students with disabilities with letters for each of their instructors; the letters would outline the necessary accommodations. Students may choose to meet with their instructors in the first couple of weeks to discuss the accommodations and have the instructor sign-off on the plan. Students would then return a signed form to disability services. Disability advisors would only intervene if students encountered difficulties with instructors. This kind of process may be difficult, however, at a school with a lot of part-time faculty members.
 - Disability services could deliver copies of students' accommodation plans directly to instructors and, at this time, could also direct them to faculty resources. After this initial contact, students could identify themselves to their professors and discuss any necessary follow-up.
- Instruct students with disabilities to follow-up and communicate with their instructors to ensure timely implementation of accommodations. If necessary, disability advisors should be available to meet with instructors and clarify the accommodation services.
- Disability advisors should conduct follow-up meetings with students, particularly new students, to ensure the accommodations are meeting their needs.

Academic Accommodation Types

The following are some of the possible ways PSE institutions accommodate students with disabilities. Please note, however, that this is not an exhaustive list.

Notetakers

- Students with certain physical or learning disabilities may have difficulty taking clear and concise notes. When available, instructors could provide students with disabilities with supplementary copies of lecture notes, overheads or PowerPoint presentations. Ideally, instructors would post notes and other materials online so they are accessible to all students.
- Allow students to record lectures or have professors create “Podcasts” of their lectures. This allows students to listen to the lecture at later dates and play back key information to clarify notes.
- Students with disabilities could submit a request form indicating the classes they will require notes for. Volunteers could then be recruited. This could include having a representative from disability services or the instructor ask the class for volunteers at the beginning of lecture. An email requesting volunteers could also be sent out to those who are enrolled in those classes.
- Methods for copying notes could include use of non-carbonized two-ply paper, photocopying of classmates notes, or ideally by creating electronic copies.
- Consider supplying laptops to registered volunteer note-takers who do not have their own laptops. This would facilitate note-taking for the student requiring the accommodation and might act as an incentive for individuals to volunteer.

Visual Language Interpreting

- Interpreting Services should be available for deaf and hard of hearing students. Interpreters would need to match the preferred sign-language style of the student.
- The interpreter should interpret into Sign Language everything that is heard in the

classroom, as well as interpret all questions and comments signed by the student.

- When possible, interpreters could also be provided with class notes or presentations ahead of time to help prepare.

Captioning

- Some Deaf or Hard of Hearing students who don't use sign language may request captioning services.
- Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) should be made available for lectures, labs and seminars, so that all course content is captured and displayed in print-based format on a laptop that the student will view.
- Often real-time captioning services are not located on campus and will need to be contracted out to local providers. Assistance with securing funding should be provided to students with disabilities.
- It should be taken into consideration that in some communities it is very difficult to find qualified sign language interpreters and CART service providers. Options need to be explored to facilitate access for students who require these services.

Classroom Features

- Students should be able to request class relocations if they are scheduled in an inaccessible room. These requests should be addressed quickly to ensure students aren't forced to miss classes.
- Students with disabilities who require it should be given priority seating whether it be at the front of the class, near electrical outlets, near a speaker system, etc.
- Listening systems, such as infrared listening systems or FM sound systems, should be made available in as many classrooms as possible so that students can amplify sound during lectures and tutorials.

- Classrooms and labs should be equipped with wheelchair accessible tables and computer workstations.
- Seating with ergonomic back support may be a necessary accommodation for some students. Proper equipment that can be loaned or installed in the classroom should be available as required, For more on physical accessibility, see the section on Physical Accessibility (page 21).
- Consider having one or more academic strategists or advisors who have training in learning supports for students with disabilities and ensure that these strategists are available to students registered with disability services.
- If it is not possible to hire staff with these particular credentials, graduate level students in relevant programs such as Special Education, Education Studies, or Psychology may be a good resource.

Procedural Adjustments

- For those who require it, allow for a reduced course load while still maintaining full-time status. Disability services should discuss with students with disabilities the advantages and disadvantages of studying with various course loads.
- Assignment substitutions, such as substituting a written report for an oral one, could be considered for students with certain disabilities.

Field and Practicum Supports

- Offer field and practicum placement supports for registered students who may require accommodation support in practicum or experiential learning courses. This could include a field mentor, use of assistive technology or equipment or an alternate field placement or project.

Learning Skills Services

- Many students, not just those with disabilities, would benefit from learning services to help them build and improve effective academic skills. However, students with disabilities, particularly learning disabilities, may require special considerations.
- As learning services can be shared among many different departments, it may be beneficial to have a central agency where students can go to obtain assistance with their academic skills. As well, disability advisors should be aware of these services so they can properly inform and refer students with disabilities.

- Learning skills counsellors or strategists could help students with disabilities identify strengths, weaknesses, academic goals and appropriate training.
- The institution should offer a variety of learning methods such as one-on-one training sessions, group sessions, workshops or seminars. Topics may include:
 - Learning styles and strategies
 - Study skills and memory strategies
 - Motivation and concentration skills
 - Problem solving skills
 - Time management and organizational skills
 - Effective presentation and public speaking skills
 - Writing effective essays and reports
 - Note-taking skills
 - Preparing for and writing tests / exams (including multiple choice and essay)
 - Self-advocacy and networking skills

Testing Accommodations

Special accommodations may be necessary for students with disabilities that could affect the completion of in-class exams, tests, and quizzes. Accommodations could include the following:

- Allow additional time -- from 25% to 100% additional time depending on the nature of the disability is not unusual. However, some students may require up to three times as long to complete a test. The accommodation, in this case, must suit the students' disability..

- Allow for short, supervised breaks when the disability or chronic condition, such as chronic pain or ADHD, interferes with performance.
- Allow for in-class exams, tests and quizzes to be written in a separate, distraction reduced environment;
- Allow for the use of approved assistive technologies such as computers, calculators, electronic dictionaries and/or spell-check.. (for more on assistive technologies see Assistive Technologies on page 26).
- Provide alternate formats such as Braille, large print, and digital format. (for more on alternate formats see Alternate Formats on page 24).
- Allow for use of scribes.

Exam Accommodations

- Exam period accommodations can be more difficult to arrange if they are coordinated through a central office, such as the registrar's office, who may not know an accommodation is needed. It is therefore important to provide clear and detailed information for students with disabilities on the process of requesting exam accommodations. For example, create an online guide that lists available exam accommodations and how to request them, as well as any other information that students with disabilities will need to know, such as procedures or rules.
- Ensure that the exam accommodation requesting process is simple and easy to complete. Provide options for booking accommodations online or make staff available to help coordinate accommodations.

- As exam accommodation requests often have strict timelines, ensure students are aware of upcoming deadlines. This can be accomplished by notices or an updated calendar on the disability service website. Use a list-serve to email reminders, and encourage faculty members to announce deadlines to their classes.

Tutoring

- Tutoring services are available at many PSE institutions and are usually open to all students. Disability services should be aware of these services and able to assist students with disabilities in acquiring them.
- Whenever possible, direct students to tutoring services that have experience with people with disabilities; it may be useful to maintain a registry of tutors and tutoring agencies with this experience.
- Assist students with disabilities with acquiring funding whenever there is a cost involved.

Alternate Formats and Assistive Technology

- Provide access to alternate formats and assistive technology. For more on these see Alternate Formats on page 24 and Assistive Technology on page 26.

Special Arrangements

- Sometimes situations will arise where a student with a disability requires uncommon accommodations or special arrangements such as attendant care. Even if the mechanism for this is not already built in to the institution, be willing to investigate the options and help facilitate the request.

Admissions

Accommodations for students with disabilities should start in the admissions process. The following best practices have helped PSE institutions provide accessible services to prospective students with disabilities.

- Encourage students with disabilities to self-identify so that their disability can be taken into consideration during the admission process as self-identification can initiate early access to accommodation services. Self-identification entails indicating that there is a disability that requires supports. Further details and any required documentation, can be provided to the disability services centre for acquiring appropriate accommodations.
- Ensure that detailed, accessible information is available through the admissions office or the registrar regarding services available for students with disabilities, as these are often the first points of contact.
- Work with secondary schools to provide students with information on the services available for students with disabilities during the admission process.
- If a program requires a submission of previous work (such as a portfolio), an admission interview or a test, accommodations may be necessary during these processes. For example, individuals may wish to submit a portfolio in an alternate format or may require interpreter services for an admission interview or a scribe for testing. Provide clear instructions on how to request these accommodations.

Convocation

Students with disabilities may require accommodations in order to fully participate in the convocation ceremony. This could include physical considerations or the use of assistive devices/personnel. The following are recommendations from PSE institutions for effectively providing this service.

- When students submit an 'intent to graduate' form, allow them to specify accommodation needs.
- Provide contact information for students who may wish to call and discuss possible accommodation needs. Also provide concrete deadlines and timeframes for ensuring accommodations can be provided.
- Be proactive. Disability advisors should discuss convocation needs with graduating students and direct them to the appropriate outlet to submit requests.

*Providing physical accommodations for students with disabilities is also very important. For more information on this topic, please see Physical Accessibility on page 21.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Funding post-secondary education can be difficult for many individuals; however, students with disabilities can incur higher costs than students without disabilities owing to the costs associated with their disability (such as accommodations) and the fact that many students with disabilities take an extended period to complete their education. It is therefore imperative that students with disabilities have access to additional funding opportunities to help reach their educational goals.

The following are some best practices that PSE institutions have used to provide financial support to students with disabilities.

- Hard copies of information on financial aid for students with disabilities should be readily available both in disability offices and financial aid offices. Information on disability funding should also be made available in high-school guidance offices.
- Provide a page on the disability services website as well as on the financial aid website that outlines current opportunities specific to students with disabilities.
- Remind students with disabilities that they should apply for scholarships and bursaries that are not disability specific.
- As many funding opportunities have strict deadlines and/or lengthy application processes, it is important to provide students with timely information. Provide a timetable or calendar with important deadlines on relevant websites. Allow students to sign up for an email list and send out reminders of upcoming deadlines.
- Hold seminars on financial opportunities for students with disabilities which could cover available funding, eligibility and the application process. Seminars could be open to current college and university students, high school students, parents/caregivers and/or the general public.
- Provide information on and assistance with applications for external funding including Federal and Provincial Government funding.
- Provide support to students who are ineligible or unsuccessful in obtaining funding to find alternative solutions to achieve reasonable accommodation of their needs.
- Encourage student unions or student groups to allocate some funding towards a bursary or scholarship for students with disabilities.
- Encourage local disability organizations, charitable donors or private corporations to support a yearly bursary or scholarship.
- As many students with disabilities study part-time, consider implementing a bursary or scholarship for part-time students or allowing students with disabilities to be considered for full-time funding with a reduced course load.
- For students who must study with a reduced course load due to a permanent disability, consider a reduced tuition fee.
- Provide flexible, on-campus employment opportunities for students with disabilities – this will provide extra funding and an opportunity to gain work experience.
- Develop innovative funding opportunities, within the limits of available resources, for activities that promote inclusion, awareness and accessibility and to support extra-curricular activities..
- Increase awareness while providing funding through disability awards which can be given to volunteers or caregivers of people with disabilities, those studying in disability studies, or special education, etc.

TRANSITION FROM HIGH-SCHOOL TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Making the leap from high-school to post-secondary education can be difficult for anyone but especially for students with disabilities who may require additional considerations and accommodations. It is imperative that students with disabilities receive timely and relevant information to help make a smooth and successful transition into post-secondary education. Being uninformed or unprepared can lead to unmet needs, emotional stress, and poor academic performance.

Transition programs and resources are a useful way for students with disabilities to determine what they should expect when entering a post-secondary institution, and to obtain valuable information about available programs and services. Though some of these programs may not be feasible at smaller colleges or universities, institutions should explore practical ways to facilitate transition for students in to PSE.

Transition and Orientation Sessions / Courses

Many students, as well as their families and supporters, feel that preparatory courses for post-secondary education are beneficial. These courses can be as simple as a 1 day orientation session or a more intensive transition course spanning a few days or even weeks. The following are some recommendations from PSE institutions on creating effective transition courses for students with disabilities.

- While many institutions offer programs specifically for students with learning disabilities (the most common type of disability among students), consider providing a general course which highlights disability services for all disability types. Another alternative is to design courses or material for specific target groups, such as those for students who are blind or partially sighted, or who have mobility issues and provide them on an individual or by request basis.
- Make courses available to all students with disabilities regardless of where they plan to attend university. Keep sessions open to returning students who might need a refresher on the services or who might benefit from the discussions.
- Transition courses for students with disabilities can also be held in conjunction with general transition/orientation sessions for all students. This way, students who may not be sure if disability services would be right for them, or who may be hesitant to come to a disability specific orientation, are more likely to participate.
- If numbers are not large enough to warrant a large scale transition course for students with disabilities, consider partnering with larger institutions nearby and help co-ordinate a joint transition program.
- If it is not possible to provide transition programming for students with disabilities, provide links and information on external services that do.

What to Include

The following are some suggestions from PSE Institutions on how to structure a dynamic transition event.

- Provide informative speakers such as successful graduates with disabilities offering strategies for success, current students offering their transition experience, community organizations speaking about

available services, school champions offering support and encouragement, etc.

- Facilitate panel discussions which could include current students and/or recent graduates, service providers from a variety of student service offices, professors / teachers, etc.
- Offer breakout or roundtable sessions to facilitate discussion among prospective students. Current students, recent grads,

faculty and staff could participate in these sessions.

- Provide a student meeting with key personnel, and an on-campus tour of relevant services which highlights the accessibility features of the school.
- Include an introduction to available assistive technology on campus. Include an overview of what's available, what it does, and how to access it. Provide hands on training for students who may not be familiar with all devices.

Key Topics

The following are some of the key topics that PSE institutions feel need to be addressed during a transition course for students with disabilities.

- Differences between high school and university/college for students with a disability and how to be successful in a PSE environment.
- Self awareness and self-advocacy.

- Accommodations, services and personal strategies to meet academic, social, physical and emotional needs.
- Determining strengths and weaknesses.
- Academic and study skills including note-taking strategies, time management, organization skills, and critical reading and writing skills, etc.
- Campus supports and library resources.
- Community and/or Government based supports.
- Academic and exam accommodations.
- Documentation requirements and expectations for submission.
- Assistive technology options and applications.
- Campus life, including social areas and events, accessible transportation and accessible housing.

Resource Guides

Transition guides for students with disabilities are a practical way to provide key information to a broad audience and can be provided to those who are unable to attend an in-person session. A guide could be complementary to the orientation session and would include many of the same key topics. The guide would serve as a reference point for students and provide contact information and links to key information both on and off campus. The following are some tips utilized by PSE institutions in creating useful transition guides.

- Include in the guide a calendar for students with disabilities that highlights key dates, deadlines and milestones.
- Provide an on-line copy of the guide for all students to access and/or print.
- Provide hard copies of the guide in the student disability office and consider making the guide book available in other student areas such as the counselling office, health services, student union office, etc.
- It is important that the guide book be made available in multiple formats.
- It is also very important that students know that the guide book is available. Make reference to the guide and/or provide a link to the guide in places such as the general student orientation manual, student handbooks, new student acceptance packages, college/university promotional materials, etc.
- As parents and caregivers often provide a strong supportive role for students transitioning to post-secondary education, it is helpful to have a section providing them with tips on how to assist students during this process.
- It is important to keep the guide up to date and ensure that resources and links are current. Review and update the guide regularly.

Mentorship Programs

Mentorship programs can be used to help support students with disabilities throughout their entire college/university career. However, mentors can play a substantial role in introducing students to life at college/university, providing practical information, guidance and support, and helping students learn from their own personal experiences. Peer support can lead to lasting friendships and has long term benefits for both the student and their mentor. The following are some tips for effective mentorship programs gleaned from effective practices in some Canadian PSE institutions.

- Match students with current students or alumni with disabilities who can answer questions and provide insight. If possible, matches should be similar to the student in disability type and program area.
- Students with disabilities can be matched with a mentor in a variety of ways. Mentors can be included in a transition orientation session or course. Students would meet their mentor at the event and establish communication. For those who don't attend an orientation session, mentors can also be assigned throughout the summer by disability services and contact provided via email or telephone.
- After the initial contact, students and mentors can interact independently. Follow up sessions can be scheduled periodically with all mentors and students throughout the school year.

Programs for High School Students

The earlier that students with disabilities can prepare for the transition to post-secondary education, the better. The following are some effective ways PSE institutions may provide transition options for students with disabilities in a high school setting.

- Provide transitional training well in advance by offering training courses to high school students in their secondary institutions.
- Connect with local high schools to offer full or half day excursions for students with disabilities to the college/university campus. This could include campus tours, information on disability services, and an introduction to available assistive technology.
- Discuss with students their expectations of post-secondary education, their options, and the requirements. Have them set goals and go over the steps they must follow to achieve these goals.
- Offer presentations within local high schools on programs and services for students with disabilities. This could be in class presentations, presentations for the whole school, or after school presentations for students and their families/caregivers.
- Provide information on disability services to be displayed in high school guidance offices.

Training for High-School Educators

High school educators and guidance counsellors play a key role in linking students with disabilities to the appropriate PSE resources. It is therefore important to increase educators' awareness of the opportunities, requirements, and supports available to students with a disability. The following are some best practices that PSE institutions have developed on how to educate high-school educators:

- Consider hosting an orientation session tailored to high-school educators that is similar to those for students with disabilities.
- Provide a short presentation for high school educators and counsellors in their own institution. It could be a structured group presentation, or a simple one on one informative discussion.
- Develop a resource guide or web page that educators can refer to for up-to-date information such as an educators' section in the transition guide for students with disabilities.

- Maintain informal relationships with key educators at local high schools as it allows for the easy exchange of information in the event they have specific questions or if they need to be informed about changes that will impact incoming students.

Online Training

The internet is a great resource for all students and their families/caregivers. For those who may not be able to attend an orientation session but want something more interactive than a resource guide, an online training course could be very helpful. PSE institutions have successfully used the following online training methods.

- Set up training modules online that a student must complete prior to registering for classes. This would include many of the same key topics as the orientation session.
- Include interactive tools to have students set goals, learn about their own disability and accommodations, practice using assistive technology, go through the accommodation request procedures, etc.
- Include audio and visual presentations from staff and students providing information on a variety of topics.
- It is important when designing online resources to consider web accessibility.

Promotion

PSE institutions have found that a large problem for students with disabilities is that many are unaware of the different services available to them. The following are recommendations on how to address this issue.

- Send out information on disability services to all students who are accepted to the institution not just students who register with disability services. For example, include a small bookmark with links to a transition guide and/or disability website in all acceptance packages.
- Be proactive. It is much easier to inform students ahead of time, then to try and accommodate students who didn't realize until after they've begun classes that the services would be useful for them.

PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY

General Physical Accessibility

While it is understandable that many college and university campuses were built before accessibility standards came in to place, there are relatively easy things – including retrofit projects – that can be implemented to better accommodate the needs of students with disabilities on campus. As upgrades are made and new buildings replace old buildings over time, the goal should be to promote campuses that are fully accessible to everyone.

Many PSE institutions across Canada are working towards the goal of full accessibility. The following are some tips and considerations from PSE institutions on enhancing physical accessibility on campus:

- Provide reserved seating to students with disabilities where the disability requires them to sit in specific locations.
- In instances where students with disabilities find themselves with a class in an inaccessible room, alternate classroom arrangements should be made in a timely manner.
- Ideally, a student with a disability should not have to miss a single class due to inaccessibility. Provide maps and a detailed breakdown of which buildings and classrooms are fully or partially accessible for students with disabilities. Remind students to be proactive in ensuring their classrooms are accessible by visiting the sites before classes start and reporting any problems immediately to the appropriate office.
- Make accessible washrooms available in various convenient locations across campus. If all washrooms are not made accessible, ensure that the locations of the accessible washroom be readily available to students, for example, on campus maps.
- Make all social, recreational and retail locations on campus accessible as these are important elements of campus life for students.
- Commit to regular retrofit projects that enhance accessibility. Any renovation projects should be carried out in consultation with the disability office, or other relevant experts.
- Put in place barrier-free guidelines for any new on-campus buildings. Plans should be reviewed by an accessibility committee comprised of experts and stakeholders before any construction begins.
- Make the safety and security of people with disabilities a priority in all campus locations by installing visual and auditory fire alarm systems in all areas of the college/university, including washrooms.
- Devise emergency evacuation procedures for people with disabilities and ensure appropriate personnel are trained on these procedures.
- Public telephones should be available with volume control and low-mounts for easy reach. TTY or video telephones should also be made available on campus.
- Conduct an on-campus review of accessibility which highlights areas that require attention. Outline accessibility goals and a timeline for reaching full accessibility. Have a committee or organization which includes experts and stakeholders lead the review and conduct consultations ensuring that people with disabilities are included in the process.

Housing

Living on or near PSE campus can be a convenient way for students to access their classes and can also provide a valuable social experience for students. This is why considerations should be made for students with disabilities who may require accommodations, but still wish to take advantage of the benefits of student housing.

The following are some best practices developed by PSE institutions regarding accessible housing for students with disabilities.

- Develop an accessibility committee for college/university housing. Smaller institutions may wish to develop an accessibility committee for the entire school with housing being a focal area.
- As housing applications generally need to be reviewed for eligibility, it is important for students with disabilities to submit their applications and supporting documentation early. Include a space on the college/university admission application asking whether the applicant requires special considerations for housing and, if so, the types of supports needed.
- On the housing application, direct students to an accessible housing website which details what housing accommodations are available for students with disabilities, who is eligible, and what documentation is necessary to apply. This allows students with disabilities to prepare early so, upon acceptance, they are able to quickly send in their application. Applications could also be accelerated through on-line processes.
- Information should be made available about any off-campus housing that is both accessible and within a reasonable distance from campus.
- For colleges/universities with multiple campuses and multiple residences, it is important to offer accessible rooms in all locations so that students with disabilities are able to be accommodated in a location that is most convenient to their educational needs. This also promotes inclusion by not segregating students with disabilities in certain locations.
- As obtaining nearby accessible housing and/or accessible transportation can often be difficult for students with disabilities, consider allowing priority access to housing for those with documented severe disabilities.
- Also consider allowing students with severe disabilities to remain living on-campus throughout the entire year and the duration of their program.
- Many on-campus residences require a minimum course load. As students with disabilities often must take a reduced course load for disability-related reasons, make an exception for students with a documented severe disability.
- The safety and security of students in residence is very important. Install visual and audio alarm systems in all residences. Residence services should keep a list of those requiring special assistance in case of emergency.

Parking / Transportation

Transportation can be stressful and costly for students with disabilities who might not have a convenient means of commuting to and from school. Driving may provide some freedom for students with disabilities but can be burdensome if accessible parking is not readily available.

The following are some recommendations from PSE institutions with regards to parking and transportation for students with disabilities.

- Provide accessible parking spaces at various locations across campus, including residences, social and recreational areas, and academic buildings.
- Parking permits from outside provinces and certain international countries are valid across Canada. However, there might be slight differences in policy so it is important to provide students with information on the regulations within the specific province.
- If students do not have a provincial accessible parking permit, information on the process and help with the application should be offered. This includes those who may require a temporary parking permit.
- In conjunction with the accessible parking permit, students with disabilities will most likely pay the same fee for a student parking pass. However, if a different parking pass is required for different lots on campus, provide students with disabilities a “universal” pass which allows them to access all of the lots. Restricting people with disabilities to certain lots may eliminate the advantage of having an accessible parking permit.
- For large campuses or colleges/universities with multiple campuses, implement a shuttle service for students with disabilities or a general shuttle service that is fully accessible.
- Ensure that transportation for social events that require travel, such as school trips or shuttles for school sporting events, is accessible so that all students with disabilities can participate.
- Allow for collaboration and information sharing between the disability service office and parking services so that students with disabilities requiring accessible transportation services do not need to supply documentation that has already been submitted.
- Make information on accessible transportation services, including parking and shuttle services, available and well advertised to students with disabilities.
- Provide readily available information on accessible off-campus transportation.
- Students with disabilities who feel transportation to and from school might be an issue should be able to speak with a disability advisor to help plan convenient and accessible transportation.

ALTERNATE FORMATS

Students with disabilities have the right to access the same information that is available to students without disabilities. In some cases, this may require the use of alternate formats.

Students with print-based disabilities, such as those who are blind, partially sighted or have certain learning disabilities, access text material using alternate formats such as electronic text, Braille, large print, audio tape (e.g. MP3), etc. Commonly, students use text-to-speech software to listen to electronic versions of text material. Electronic text can also be used with refreshable Braille display for Braille users.

The following are some examples of how PSE institutions in Canada deliver accessible formats for students with disabilities:

- Provide students with information on how to access materials from sources such as the CNIB library, or Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic (RFB&D).
- Help facilitate, through either the library or the disability office, the acquisition of e-text directly from the publishers. To do so requires proof of purchase and the ISBN from the textbook. It may also require that certain documents or agreements from the publisher are signed by the student so that copyrights and restrictions are maintained in accordance with the publisher's e-text guidelines.
- Make scanning stations available for students to convert their own materials. Have software that can then, in turn, read the scanned material aloud.
- Provide clear, simple, step-by-step procedures regarding scanning, converting text/format using the available equipment.
- Have volunteers available to convert text materials to e-text or tape format if necessary.
- Provide an online service where students can upload audio recordings which are then sent back as multi-media transcripts.
- As converting materials can be a time consuming process, it is important to make students aware that they should bring their course outline and proof of purchase of texts to the disability office as soon as possible (for example, a minimum of 6 weeks before the beginning of the term) in order to assess if accessible formats are needed.
- Have an advisor or advisors who are knowledgeable about and deal exclusively with alternate formats as this allows for a central resource for students with print-based disabilities.
- Ensure library staff members are aware of their roles, responsibilities and legal requirements in providing alternate formats. In particular, they should be aware of the Canadian Copyright Act (CCA) Section 32(1) which allows individuals with perceptual disabilities and those acting on their behalf to create and use alternate formats of copyrighted print materials. Refer to your libraries copyright officer for specific details.
- Ensure instructors inform their departments and the bookstore of their text selections in a timely manner.
- Faculty members are obligated to ensure that courses materials are accessible. As they may not have the expertise or resources to do so, make instructors aware of accessible formats and the necessary steps to make documents easily accessible for students. Assist them in making alternate formats if necessary.
- Promote the idea of universal design to faculty and staff. For example, podcasts of lectures are becoming an increasingly popular tool with professors. Transcribing podcasts will not only benefit people with a

hearing disability, it will benefit students who want to search the text for information quickly or who may not be able to access sound files on their computer.

- As professors may feel that making accessible materials is burdensome and restrictive, it is important to frame accessibility as a value-add. Disability services – along with any learning and teaching centres that support faculty -- are there to help faculty deliver courses using technology in a way that is effective and that enhances teaching and learning for all students, including those with disabilities.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Many PSE institutions offer assistive technology services to students. With the wide variety of assistive technology available today, students with disabilities are better able to access the information available to them and to participate fully on campus. Assistive technology in PSE can be any item, piece of equipment, system or program which helps students with disabilities overcome barriers to learning.

Since assistive technology relies heavily on accessible design, the principles of creating and designing accessible information from the inception is imperative within colleges and universities. It is also necessary to raise awareness of the benefits of universal design, accessibility and assistive technologies.

The following are some suggestions from PSE institutions on providing assistive technology services to students with disabilities.

- Have a centre or office specifically for assistive technology and staffed by knowledgeable specialists; alternatively, have an advisor in the disability office who is an expert on assistive technology. Either of these options would allow for a central resource for students requiring assistive technologies.
- After identifying a need for assistive technologies with their disability advisor, students should meet with a specialist to discuss their options for assistive technology.
- Assistive technology devices and software could be available for short-term loan to students with disabilities for use at home or on campus.
- If assistive technology is required but not available at the school or if students wish to possess their own, provide information on external sources of adaptive technology, both free and for purchase. Make information on funding options such as the Canada Student Grant for Services and Equipment for Persons with Permanent Disabilities available. Advisors should also offer assistance with the application process.
- Offer individualized or small group training to introduce students with disabilities to the types of technology available and how to use them.
- Make larger group training sessions available to the entire student body and/or to faculty and the public. Charge members of the public a small admission fee if required.
- Promote the idea of universal design through the use of available technologies. This way, students with “invisible disabilities” such as certain learning disabilities who may not want to self-disclose, are still able to benefit from these technologies. For example, ensure that the entire college or university website is accessible and provide computers equipped with assistive software in communal locations.
- Since some assistive devices will only work in conjunction with accessible design, awareness for faculty and staff is important. Providing information tools such as brochures, seminars or one on one discussion with professors is beneficial. Have an assistive technology specialist offer to review course materials and website content to ensure they are accessible.
- If a small student population and limited resources do not allow for on site assistive technology, consider partnering with larger colleges and universities nearby to allow students access to their assistive technology.
- It may be beneficial, particularly for smaller institutions, to include a small cost in tuition fees and then allowing access to accessible software and assistive technologies for all students.

Examples of Assistive Devices

- CCTV Magnification units
- Flatbed scanning devices
- Voice Output Devices
- Note-taking devices
- Braille printer
- Scan and text reading technology such as Kurzweil Personal Reader
- FM Systems for students who are hard of hearing
- Portable keyboard with built in word processor such as Dream Writer Smart Keyboard
- Portable scanner and print magnifier such as Magna Cam
- V-Cam: head mounted zoom-lens (Jordy - zoom - lens video eyewear)
- Visual & hearing devices such as AudiSee
- Head mouse and bat keyboard such as Tracker 2000
- Talking scientific calculators such as Audiocalc
- Spell checkers with visual and auditory feedback such as Franklin Language Master
- Notebook computers loaded with assistive software
- Incandescent desk lamps
- Digital recorders
- LiveScribe Pen/Audio recorder

Examples of Assistive Software

- Text-to-speech and screen reading software such as JAWS, Kurzweil or WindowEyes
- Speech recognition software such as Dragon Naturally Speaking
- Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software such as Open Book Unbound or Kurzweil 1000 to scan printed text and convert to E-text
- Grammatical and writing software such as Text Help Read and Write Gold, Kurzweil3000, Wordsmith or Word Q/Speak Q word prediction, which is a multi sensory computer software that assists reading fluency and enhances writing development for students with reading and written language difficulties, sometimes combined with OCR capabilities
- Idea/Concept mapping software, such as Inspiration or MindView
- Screen enlargement software with synthetic speech output such as DECTalk PC
- Screen magnification software such as ZoomText or MAGic
- Open Book Unbound OCR software, scan text and convert to E-text
- Braille Translation software, such Duxbury

MENTAL HEALTH

With advances in medications, treatment and the increasing empowerment of those with mental health disabilities, students with mental health disabilities are increasingly able to access and complete post-secondary education. However, those with mental health disabilities often experience difficulty accessing services and accommodations that suit their needs due, in part, to the episodic and “invisible” nature of their disability, the stigma surrounding mental health disabilities, and the fact that accommodation for mental health disabilities is a relatively new practice.

Most university and college campuses have counseling services which offer a variety of information and services for those with mental health issues. However, most of these offices support students on a short-term, emergency basis, focus on the student’s personal health, and are not meant to provide academic accommodations.

While many students do suffer from bouts of anxiety, stress or depression that can be handled through short-term counseling, more and more students are arriving on campus dealing with serious mental health disabilities such as schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder, eating disorders or self-injury that require a more holistic and long-term approach.

The following are some promising practices from PSE institutions on how to address services for students with mental health disabilities:

- Students with mental health disabilities often require both academic accommodations and medical or therapeutic treatment. For this reason, it is extremely important to facilitate collaboration between disability services and counseling services regarding these students as individuals with mental health disorders who present at one can quickly and easily be referred to the other when necessary. Additionally, having someone directly responsible for case management for these students is very valuable.
- It is also important for disability services and counseling services to establish their roles and responsibilities regarding students with mental health disabilities. While some roles may be clear, others may not be or may overlap. Establishing a joint policy or advisory committee may help clarify responsibilities.
- For institutions with larger populations of students with mental health disabilities, consider establishing a stand-alone Mental Health Disabilities Office to handle the accommodation and support of students with mental health disabilities.
- Students with mental health disabilities will undoubtedly have varied needs with no “one-size fits all” solution. This is why it is important to have staff knowledgeable about mental health disorders, treatments and appropriate accommodations. If possible, hire disability service staff with specialized knowledge and experience and have them deal exclusively with students with mental health disabilities. This includes qualified counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists.
- Have a psychiatrist on campus for appointments one or two days a week if it is not possible to hire a full-time staff psychiatrist.

Outreach and Awareness

Students with mental health disabilities may be afraid to disclose their disorder or are unaware that their disorder qualifies them for disability services. The following suggestions have been successfully utilized by PSE institutions across Canada.

- Develop an outreach plan specifically for those with mental health issues to increase awareness and uptake of services.
- When reaching out to students with mental health disabilities, it is important to stress that individuals who have their symptoms under control should still register with the disabilities office as this will make it easier to receive services and accommodations in the event that the illness becomes disabling.
- Have staff members or student volunteers conduct outreach activities to help raise awareness of mental health issues and services. This could include depression self-screening services at major events or presentations to students, staff and faculty on how to recognize distress signals and access help.
- Stigma and discrimination is an issue many students with mental health disabilities face and can have a large impact on both their academic and social life. It is important to educate and raise awareness of mental health issues throughout the entire campus by using, for example, education and training initiatives for staff, faculty and students, or more general awareness and anti-stigma campaigns on campus.

Personal Counselling Services

One-on-one counselling with a counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist is a valuable tool for all students in PSE who may experience a variety of personal and emotional issues. The following are recommendations from PSE institutions on providing this service effectively.

- Conduct intake consultations with students who are new to counselling/mental health services or are returning after an extended absence as this will help to identify appropriate needs and interventions. For facilities dealing with large volumes of students with mental health needs, a hospital-style triage unit can help identify and prioritize more serious cases.
- If students seeking counselling require more serious and long-term care, make referrals to community resources. It is important to ensure students with mental health disabilities are fully supported in locating and obtaining the most appropriate services for them. Consider allowing student health plans to cover a percentage of costs for external services. Offer information and assistance on other payment options.
- Obtaining documentation of a mental health disorder is often difficult and time consuming so it may be useful to have staff available on campus who are qualified to provide testing and documentation. This way, students may quickly obtain appropriate interventions and accommodations. If this is not possible, offer referrals to community resources and information on funding options.

Other Services

With the growing population of students with mental health disabilities within PSE institutions, many institutions are expanding their services to include a variety of innovative and holistic approaches to mental health. The following are some best practices from PSE institutions across Canada.

- Along with individual counselling, some PSE institutions offer these other services in relation to students with mental health disabilities:
 - Group and/or family counselling which includes friends and family members.
 - Workshops on a variety of mental health topics available to students, staff and faculty either on demand, or scheduled in advance.
 - On-campus training courses such as suicide prevention training, mental health first-aid, or general wellness techniques. Courses could be mandatory for certain staff members but open to students, staff and faculty. Certain courses could be made available to the public for a fee.

- Peer support programs where student volunteers, trained in suicide prevention and supportive listening, are available for peer support. This could be done through peer support groups, or one-on-one support by phone, email, or in person. Provide volunteers with an extensive list of resources and referral information.
- Crisis/emergency counselling which would be available without appointment and on a same-day basis for those who are experiencing an urgent need. Crisis/emergency services could also include counselling for individuals or larger groups who have been affected by a tragedy.
- Consultation services for students, staff or faculty who might be concerned about the behaviour of another individual.
- Allow students to access these services through a variety of means such as telephone, e-mail, drop-in, or appointment. Whenever possible, have some point of contact available 24 hours a day in the event of an emergency.
- Provide information and resources on a variety of topics and issues in a variety of different formats and for a variety of different audiences. Include resources in the office and on the internet.

As services are often open only to full and part-time undergraduate and graduate students, consider extending services to alumni, previously registered, and prospective students, if resource permit.

SPORTS AND RECREATION

Campus sports and recreation can enhance social, physical and emotional well-being for students and should be made inclusive of students with disabilities. The following are some suggestions from PSE institutions on how they are working to ensure students with disabilities are able to fully participate in campus sport and recreation activities:

- Provide fully accessible recreational facilities with, for example, accessible doors, ramps and elevators, washrooms, change rooms and drinking fountains.
- Make staff available to provide assistance to students with disabilities both to access the areas within the sports/recreation facilities and in the use of equipment.
- Offer exercise equipment specifically developed for people with disabilities such as wheel chair accessible equipment and pool wheelchair lifts.
- If there are fitness or training programs available, offer adaptable services for students with disabilities.
- Organize a volunteer program for students who use the gym facilities or are enrolled in fitness classes, programs or teams. Pair them up with a student with a disability who is interested in those activities and requires assistance.
- Organize sports and recreation teams or events for students with disabilities such as a wheelchair basketball team or league.

SOCIAL INCLUSION

Social interactions between students are an important aspect of campus life in PSE institutions as they allow students to make new friends, join groups or clubs, and participate in school events. Having a healthy social life is essential for all students including students with disabilities. However, students with disabilities may be prevented from fully participating in social events and activities if barriers exist.

The following are steps which some PSE institutions have recommended to help ensure students with disabilities are able to fully participate in the social community at college/university:

- Have a centre specifically for students with disabilities to promote inclusion and the removal of barriers. The centre could also organize social opportunities, provide information on available services for students with disabilities, and act as a forum for disability issues on campus. This centre could also work as a smaller part of a larger group which promotes inclusion for a variety of underrepresented groups.
- Support students with disabilities who wish to join social groups, clubs or communities. Creating an online community can be a safe and convenient way for students with disabilities to interact, socialize, and organize events.
- Create a method for students with disabilities to advocate for disability issues by, for example, including representation on the student union or government or by creating a liaison service to advocate on their behalf.
- Events that are run by the college/university should be held in accessible locations and include accommodations such as interpreters or captioning services.
- For events that are being held off-campus, accessible transportation should be provided.
- Anyone organizing an event that is not run by the college/university but is being held on campus should be directed to a centralized location for detailed information on how to make their event accessible. This could include a website with a guide for planning accessible events, an accessibility checklist with reference to the appropriate resources, or contact information for an accessibility coordinator who would be able to review their event plans and provide advice, etc.
- Even where accessibility is not mandatory, make efforts to promote it among clubs, groups and teams.
- Promote disability awareness and inclusion through workshops and campus wide events for staff, faculty and students.
- Reserve accessible residence space for students with disabilities and provide assistance services to ensure that students with disabilities can fully participate in residence life.

TRANSITION TO EMPLOYMENT

For many people, finding meaningful employment after graduation from college or university can be difficult and stressful. This is particularly true for people with disabilities who have, upon leaving PSE institutions, lower employment rates than those without disabilities, make less money, and are more likely to be employed part-time. Access to post-secondary education is an integral component of achieving income security for people with disabilities. Connecting students with disabilities with meaningful work experience and employment opportunities after graduation can be even more beneficial.

The following are some considerations put forth by PSE institutions with regards to assisting students with disabilities transition to the workplace.

- Many colleges and universities have career services on campus for all students. Disability services should co-ordinate with career services to provide information and programming specifically targeting students with disabilities.
- Institutions that do not have a career service centre could run employment information and services for students with disabilities out of the disability office.
- Offer one-on-one consultations for students with disabilities with career advisors knowledgeable about the particular issues students with disabilities face in the workforce. Advisors should be able to offer assistance on topics such as how people with disabilities can effectively market themselves to employers, whether or not to disclose a disability, when to disclose a disability, what types of accommodations are available in the workplace, the rights and responsibilities of the employer and the employee, etc.
- Offer workshops specifically for people with disabilities addressing the main issues they may face in the workplace. Offer strategies for obtaining work and available resources. It may also be useful to include knowledgeable speakers, such as alumni with disabilities who have found meaningful employment, can speak to their own experience and provide tips.
- For smaller institutions, consider holding a general career workshop which includes disability specific content. Consider opening this workshop to the general public.
- Establish a mentoring network where students with disabilities can speak with alumni or mentors who have been successful in obtaining employment in their chosen profession. Whenever possible, match students with mentors with similar disabilities and similar career goals.
- Connect students with disabilities with employment through internships, co-op placements, volunteer positions, job shadows or part-time work. These programs allow students to gather real world experience, develop practical skills and knowledge, and to develop networks and references for obtaining future employment. The programs can be specifically for students with disabilities or open to the entire student body. In either case, it is important to ensure proper support and accommodations are considered for students with disabilities.
- Provide information on external programs to connect students with disabilities with work; many such programs are offered through local, provincial/territorial and federal governments.
- Prior to and following graduation, provide extensive career counselling and job search assistance to students.
- Ensure that accessibility issues are addressed when hosting job fairs or workshops as well as for online job search tools.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR FACULTY

In order to ensure a fully accessible campus, institutions must also address the attitudes and knowledge of the people on that campus. It is important that students with disabilities are knowledgeable and proactive about their needs and options but it is equally important for faculty to possess the necessary information and attitude to offer meaningful guidance and assistance in accommodating students with disabilities.

Many institutions report that educating faculty members about disability issues and accommodation practices can be difficult due to heavy workloads, time constraints, attitudinal barriers and a general lack of awareness regarding responsibilities and available resources. However, faculty members play a vital role in supporting students with disabilities in their studies and implementing accommodations and accessible learning. It is therefore important that they receive information about disability issues.

The following are some of the ways PSE institutions are providing effective training and development for faculty.

- Provide short training/information seminars on disability issues specifically for faculty members; the seminars should cover only the most pertinent information and then provide resources with more in-depth information. Also provide contact information for those who may have additional questions or require assistance.
- Training/information seminars must include knowledgeable speakers from disability services as well as students with disabilities and provide opportunities for faculty to ask questions.
- Make seminars available to all faculty members and make them mandatory for new faculty members.
- Videotape seminars and make them available online as it may allow people who cannot attend to view the material and provides permanent resources for those who wish to review the information in the future.
- Offer training through the office which facilitates other faculty instructional development courses so the training is framed as a general teaching support.
- Ensure that faculty members have specific disability service staff to work with. Propose that disability advisors check in on faculty members once a term to remind them of available services or provide updates. Ensure that advisors are available if faculty members have questions or concerns.
- Provide one-on-one consultations with faculty in order to provide information and answer questions. This can be done informally via email or telephone, or a more structured in-person meeting.
- Develop a guide specifically for faculty members which addresses many of their main concerns in relation to students with disabilities and ensure it is available in a variety of locations and a variety of formats.
- Develop a newsletter or become a regular feature in an already existing faculty newsletter.
- Develop checklists that outline steps for a variety of disability related processes such as accommodation requests, the use of universal design to ensure accessible lectures, the creation of accessible materials, or the use and acquisition of assistive technologies. Make these checklists available on-line.
- Provide online resources tailored to faculty members and updated regularly. To ensure faculty members are aware that these resources exist, send out email reminders at the beginning of each term.

- If students with disabilities are having difficulties with particular faculty members, disability services should first encourage the student to resolve the issue on their own. If they are unable to do so, request a meeting with the faculty member and a representative from disability services to discuss the issue.
- Get on the agenda at regular staff meetings so that key disability issues can be addressed, updates provided and resources highlighted.
- In order to assist with uptake on disability related training and information, get support from the Dean's Office or associated academic head and have all the resources sent to faculty members through these channels.
- Designate a "champion" within the faculty who is willing to be a contact for other faculty members and who can facilitate colleague-to-colleague discussions on, for example, accessibility issues.
- Whenever possible, involve the students with disabilities and provide opportunities for people with disabilities to meet staff and faculty.

Key Topics

Wherever and however one chooses to educate faculty, the following are some key topics that PSE institutions feel should be addressed:

- Faculty members may not be knowledgeable about different disabilities and suitable accommodations. It may be necessary to assure faculty that disability accommodations are meant to "level the playing field" and not provide an unfair advantage to students with disabilities. It may also be useful to provide information on different types of disabilities, particularly "invisible disabilities" such as mental health and learning disabilities as these are more likely to be misunderstood. Common accommodations should also be discussed.
- Faculty members might be concerned about being overburdened with having to implement accommodations and accessible teaching methods. Provide faculty with practical and straightforward ways they can implement accessible design into their courses and educate faculty about the benefits of universal design for all students.
- Faculty members might be unsure of their roles and responsibilities regarding students with disabilities and how disability issues are applicable to them. Provide relevant legal information as well as the school's policies regarding students with disabilities and accommodation. Clearly outline the different roles that faculty must play and how that role interacts with other key players such as students, disability staff and the institution.
- Faculty members might be hesitant or unsure about how to speak to students with disabilities. To address this, present faculty with communication strategies that includes respectful wording and addresses confidentiality.
- Faculty might be unaware of how the accommodation process works and what actions need to be taken by the student, the faculty and the disability office. Provide information on what resources are available for students with disabilities and how they would access these supports. The process for accommodation requests, including exam accommodations, should be clearly outlined. It is also important to educate faculty about the low-cost of most accommodations and the different funding sources available as this will help faculty members better assist students with disabilities and direct them to the appropriate resources.
- As no two situations are exactly alike, provide faculty with a variety of resources where they can go to find information or ask questions as situations arise.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR STAFF

Those who work in disability services often possess specialized training and experiences that prepare them to assist students with disabilities; however, this is not always the case and even those with specialized training should be given the opportunity to expand and improve their knowledge.

In addition, students with disabilities will undoubtedly interact with staff members in other offices within the college/university who may not be familiar with disability issues. Providing comprehensive and ongoing training for staff will help maintain knowledgeable, efficient and effective services for students with disabilities.

The following are recommendations derived from PSE institutions across Canada regarding training and development for college/university staff.

- Provide disability services staff with on-going opportunities for professional development (e.g., conferences, credit courses, and membership in professional organizations.).
- Host professional development opportunities at the college/university. For example, become a training centre for courses such as Mental Health First Aid or host a conference on disability accommodations and invite speakers from across Canada.
- Make training mandatory for new staff at the disability office, administrative staff within the registrar office, and staff in the library or other offices which are likely to be points of contact for students with disabilities.
- Have disability services staff get involved in advisory committees across all departments and services. It is important to be involved in decision making forums and ensure disability issues are considered and addressed.
- Maintain consistency between policy, practice and the law by ensuring all staff members are knowledgeable in all three areas. This extends to staff outside of disability services such as library and office staff who may receive requests from students with disabilities. They need to know and understand their responsibilities.
- Consider having an independent individual, committee or office that is directly responsible for ensuring the policies of the institution are enforced and that accessibility standards are met. They could coordinate awareness, advocacy, and provide expertise on social, physical, legal and policy matters to all staff, faculty and students.
- While disability staff are understandably busy responding to accommodation requests, try and instill the ideology that disability staff and students are working together to ensure inclusion in all aspects of student life. Disability staff members are more than just paper filers and should be encouraged to promote, advocate and work to improve disability issues whenever possible.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Some universities and colleges across the country are creating opportunities for young adults with significant intellectual disabilities so that they can meaningfully participate in postsecondary education. As more students with significant intellectual disabilities are graduating high school, post-secondary education is being considered as a viable option.

Reports have shown that inclusive education offer benefits not only to students with intellectual disabilities, but to classmates and to professors. Students with intellectual disabilities gain self confidence, emotional growth, an expanded social network and independence. Other students, faculty and staff get to see and grow from the diversity and potential that students with disabilities possess, and to help make a serious impact on the lives of those with significant disabilities.

There are different ways to provide inclusive education for students with significant intellectual disabilities. Hart, et al. (2006) have defined three models: substantially separate model, mixed/hybrid model, and inclusive or individual support model.

- A Substantially Separate Program focuses on life skills or transition programs in a community based settings. There is no sustained interaction with the general student body and no option to take standard college courses with peers.
- A Mixed Program is a transition program that is housed on the college or university campus. It offers some interaction with the general student body in common areas and at social events. Some may offer the option of taking college/university level classes but the focus is still on life skills.
- The Inclusive, Individual Support Model provides individualized services and supports for students with significant disabilities while in a college or university setting. Students select college or university courses based on their preferences and attend classes along with their peers.

While the Substantially Separate and Mixed Programs can provide valuable experiences and opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities, the Inclusive/Individual Support Model allows for the most autonomy for the student and maximizes opportunities for typical interaction with peers. These programs are more focused on the individual and are designed to support their personal goals.

The following are some examples of how PSE institutions in Canada are implementing inclusive education at a college or university level. As inclusive education continues to grow, variations of these models will continue to emerge. Institutions should explore and adapt the options that best suit their needs while providing a valuable opportunity for students with disabilities.

- For fully inclusive education, students with intellectual disabilities should attend classes, complete assignments and write exams just like all of the students in the class; they should also be encouraged to participate in group projects and class discussions.
- Students in an inclusive education program should design an individualized learning plan and then, in consultation with a disability advisor, select courses that are best suited to their interests and goals.
- Typically, students in inclusive support programs are restricted to taking first or second year introductory classes which may pose a challenge as these classes are usually larger and can make individualized support more difficult. Coordination and information sharing between support staff and faculty is very important to ensure students in inclusive education programs are adequately supported.
- Students in the inclusive education program should be matched up with an assistant who will support them in their classes by helping them with note taking, communicating in class, etc. This assistant should

support students in their day-to-day activities but only intervene when necessary and allow the student as much independence and autonomy as possible.

- The assistant, or another program co-ordinator, could be responsible for making any necessary modifications to the curriculum, tests and assignments as well as completing all grading for the students in the program. Another option is to designate these responsibilities to a committee comprised of assistants, co-ordinators and members from disability services. Faculty members should be included as well, if possible.
- Often, students in inclusive education programs will not be enrolled in courses in the traditional sense but will instead audit the course with permission from the instructor. For this reason, information on the inclusive education program should be given to all staff and faculty in order to gain support and clarify misunderstandings prior to students from the program requesting to audit their course. This may also help reduce the rate of instructors who refuse audit permission to students in the inclusive education program and enhance instructors' willingness to engage and assist these students.
- In some instances, instructors may not have any direct responsibility for adapting their curriculum, grading the work or assessing the students with intellectual disabilities. However, some institutions may wish to involve faculty members in the evaluation process.
- The program could include a separate mentorship program where students with intellectual disabilities are matched up with college/university students and encouraged to engage in recreational and social activities. Mentors could be individuals from relevant faculties, such as special education, disability studies or psychology.
- While mentorship programs can be beneficial and lead to meaningful friendships, it can also hinder the development of friendships if the relationship is seen as forced. It is therefore important for students in the program to be given opportunities to interact with other students in a natural way.
- Students who complete the program should be given the opportunity to participate in the graduation ceremony alongside their peers.
- Students should be given some form of formal recognition for the work they have completed. While this may not be equal to the regular course credit, some credit should be given with the goal of obtaining a completion certificate.
- Inclusive education enhances the need for universal design in teaching materials and methods. Colleges/universities which implement these types of programs must also emphasize to faculty and staff the need to address and accommodate different learning styles.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS FOR POST-SECONDARY DISABILITY SERVICE PROVIDERS

Canadian Association of Disability Service Providers in Post-Secondary Education

The Canadian Association of Disability Service Providers in Postsecondary Education is a national group of professionals who assist university and college students who have a disability. Their role is to work towards the removal of institutional barriers, both physical and attitudinal, and ensure that students receive academic and other accommodations which permit them to pursue their studies in an environment of equality.

Objectives

- To promote professional development for members.
- To ensure that the nature of service to students with disabilities across the country develops within the framework of common objectives.
- To lobby appropriate agencies on behalf of students with disabilities.
- To promote ease of movement across the country, from one institution to another, for students with disabilities.
- To benefit from the experience of colleagues and provide mutual support for problem solving.
- To develop affiliations with groups who pursue a common purpose.
- To encourage the development of research in the field.

College Committee on Disability Issues (Ontario)

Since its inception in 1987, the College Committee on Disability Issues (CCDI) has been instrumental in creating and developing disability services to Ontario college students.

The CCDI membership is comprised of disability service providers from across the Ontario College system, offering leadership, support, and training for our members and the college community. This translates into direct support for thousands of students with disabilities in all colleges. From advocating with various stakeholders, to generating and sharing a wealth of information, to making appropriate recommendations on system-wide issues, policies, and practices, the CCDI works to enhance educational opportunities and student success for Ontario college students with disabilities.

Inter-University Disability Issues Association (Ontario)

IDIA, Inter-University Disability Issues Association, is an association of disability service providers from Universities throughout Ontario. Working together, Universities can share ideas and strategies to overcome issues and problems, allowing students with disabilities across Ontario to succeed in post-secondary education.

Association québécoise interuniversitaire des conseillers aux étudiants en situation de handicap

The Association's mission is to promote development of its members' professional expertise and recognition of the organization's field of action.

The role of the AQICESH

- To unite university advisors involved in welcoming and integrating students with disabilities
- To promote access to university studies and student life for people with disabilities
- To affirm advisors' expertise within the university community
- To act as a credible spokesperson within the university community as well as with various governmental and para-governmental partners
- To create a network for mutual assistance, support and collaboration
- To organize professional development activities on subjects of common interest