Adaptech Project: Adapted Computer and Information Technologies

Maria Barile, Catherine Fichten, Jennison Asuncion
Adaptech Project, Dawson College, Montreal
Fall, 2002

The Adaptech Project research team is made up of professionals, students, and consumers. We investigate the use of adaptive computer and information technologies by Canadian college and university students with disabilities. We are based at Dawson College in Montreal. We collaborate with individuals across Canada who form part of our multisectorial, dynamic and bilingual advisory board. Our primary objective is to provide empirically based information to interested individuals, professionals and organizations regarding universal accessibility of computer and information technologies.

We have completed three major research projects since 1996. The findings from these three studies demonstrate that students, regardless of gender, age, program of study or disability, make use of computer technologies throughout their studies.

The number and nature of the advantages that computer and information technologies provide demonstrate their importance in the academic success of students with disabilities. It is also noteworthy that personnel responsible for providing services to students with disabilities report that the use of computer technologies is beneficial not only to students but also to the education community in general. About half of the students in our samples had two or more disabilities. This implies the need for workstations that are adapted to accommodate several different disabilities at the same time. Students in our samples reported that they "cross-use" adaptive technologies - that is, students with a given disability use technologies that were developed for users with different disabilities.

Despite the fact that the Adaptech Project conducts primarily scholarly research, our findings have important implications. These prompted us to share our findings beyond the academic community. In addition to academic research, we have undertaken projects that are likely to be of interest to persons with disabilities as well.

In today's society, people make use of computer technologies for a variety of reasons. Unfortunately, computer technologies are not always adapted to meet the needs of persons with disabilities. Nor are these technologies always compatible with the hardware or software that is already installed on their computers. In addition, hardware and software is expensive, making it difficult for persons with limited financial means to have access.

It is for these reasons that Adaptech has launched the "Free and Inexpensive" project. This allows persons with disabilities the opportunity of trying out software before buying. We are on the lookout for products that are readily accessible and relatively inexpensive. Some of the programs are trial versions that only function for a limited time or only include some of the functions or features of the full program. Other programs are fully operational.

Our criteria for including a product involves a maximum cost of $150. By going to our web site (www.adaptech.org) and visiting the Downloads section you can view our list of software and judge for yourself which of these products are useful in meeting your needs. We are not implying that these programs are effective replacements for state of the art adaptive hardware or software available to consumers. Rather, we offer these as short-term solutions or as an opportunity for testing products before purchasing them. We believe that "Free and Inexpensive" is a good place to start.

We encourage you to visit our website to learn more about the Adaptech Project, our research and recommendations and to discover "free and inexpensive" products. We welcome your comments and would be pleased to answer any questions you may have. We will be launching new research projects in the near future and will keep you informed of our progress.

For additional information, please contact us: www.adaptech.org

Maria Barile: maria.barile@mail.mcgill.ca (514) 931-8731 (3586)
Catherine Fichten: catherine.fichten@mcgill.ca (514) 931-8731 (1546)
Jennison Asuncion: asuncion@alcor.concordia.ca