

Adopt-a-School: A community partnership in post-secondary transitions

As part of our efforts to provide transitions programming for future generations of post-secondary students with learning disabilities, Carleton University's Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities has recently completed the very first Adopt-a-School. In community partnership with the Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board we welcomed 16 students, ranging from grade nine to twelve, for three consecutive Wednesdays in March.

Programming focused on essential components for success at post-secondary school: a clear understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses, the use of learning strategies (including assistive technology), and self-advocacy. A campus tour emphasized critical survival skills for all post-secondary students – accessing resources, such as career counselling, academic advising, and study skills supports. Adopt-a-School featured a combination of presentation, discussion, activities, and hands-on training. A panel discussion, featuring successful Carleton students with learning disabilities, was a highlight, with participants clearly inspired by the personal stories and practical advice from these positive role models.

Overall feedback was enthusiastic. Based on responses on an anonymous evaluation form, the program met and even exceeded participants' expectations. The majority found the hands-on assistive technology training to be the most useful component. All agreed that Adopt-a-School increased their understanding of post-secondary education and would recommend it to a friend.

The Paul Menton Centre team is proud of our new initiative and we are looking forward to expanding the program for next year. Based on our success, we encourage other post-secondary LD support specialists to "Adopt-a-School" in their community.

*Boris Vukovic and Laura Brawn,
Paul Menton Centre, Carleton University*

Web Innovations at BCOU

The British Columbia Open University (BCOU) is a public distance university that offers adult high school equivalency, college, vocational, and university-level courses and programs. Courses are

delivered in a variety of print and online formats, as well as some in person.

BCOU services for students have evolved over the past twenty-five years, and now offer fully integrated web resources to improve student and staff satisfaction, and to reduce service costs, while increasing enrolments. Our recent web innovations include our ability to effectively handle multi-institutional registrations, immediate secure e-payment and processing, automatic wait-list processing, immediate approvals routing for academic and disability services, tutor grading and submission, student portal, fully integrated Web Student Loan fee deferral, and more.

These enhancements cut through traditional delays, confusion, and frustration for the student, while maintaining academic integrity and cost-effectiveness. As a result, students can focus on learning, since the administrative means to learning has been de-emphasized. We are finding that gradually more and more students are completing repetitive administrative tasks themselves on the web, which allows staff to assist with detailed tasks, issues, and problems as they arise. The convenience of the self-serve web has also meant that staff members are learning and using higher-level interpersonal and technical skills in their own work areas, as well as cross-training in other areas of student services.

While implementing our integrated web enhancements, we learned about the importance of executive support for these innovations, and the technical support to build and maintain systems. We have learned to choose projects carefully, using student and staff feedback and the institution's mandates as guiding principles. As most of you will know, the right statistics are important for determining need, having projects approved, and for measuring success. We have found that we need to take small steps, keeping in mind the long-term goals. Of course we all want things done completely NOW! Usually, competing interests are vying for available resources, which requires that projects

be proposed and implemented in phases.

At BCOU one of the most important lessons we have learned is that change is constant. We need to continually improve and challenge ourselves to better meet our students' needs in the most effective and efficient ways possible. Web integration for both students and staff use has greatly improved our services and will continue to be our focus for future improvements.

If you would like to know more about any of the BCOU Web integration innovations, please email me at kristines@bcou.ca. I am also very interested in hearing about your service innovations. BCOU's web address is www.bcou.ca.

*Kristine Smalcel Pederson, British Columbia
Open University*

Adaptech study shows college students with disabilities graduate at same rate

We have some interesting research results to share with you. College students with disabilities graduate at the same rate as their nondisabled peers (i.e., the same percentage of students with and without disabilities graduate)!

We are in the process of examining the academic outcomes of 734 students with various disabilities who started their studies since 1990 at Dawson College. This large urban junior/community college in Montreal (Canada) offers two year pre-university programs (e.g., pure and applied science) and three-year career programs (e.g., nursing). Students in our province must first obtain a college diploma if they intend to pursue a university degree.

We are comparing graduation rates, average grades, and course pass rates of students with disabilities with their non-disabled peers in a study funded by PAREA. We now have some exciting preliminary results on graduation rates to share. Of the 269 students with all types of disabilities who commenced in two year pre-university programs between 1990 and 1998, 55.0% have graduated by November 2002. During the same period, 54.5% of the 16,053 nondisabled students graduated.

Similarly, of the 47 students with disabilities who commenced in three-year career programs between 1990 and 1997, 53.2% graduated by November 2002. During the same period, 51.7% of the 2694 nondisabled students graduated.

As expected, students with disabilities took slightly longer to graduate than their nondisabled peers. This difference was statistically significant. For the 9 pre-university program cohorts who commenced between 1990 and 1998, students





with disabilities took, on average, 5.9 semesters to graduate. Nondisabled students took on average 5.2 semesters. For the 8 career program cohorts commencing between 1990 and 1997, the time taken to graduate was 8.2 and 6.9 semesters respectively. Thus, the discrepancy was approximately one semester in our two year pre-university and three-year career programs.

Should students with disabilities be encouraged to attend postsecondary education? Are the funds spent on supporting them in college well spent? Absolutely!

Shirley Jorgensen, Alice Havel, Daniel Lamb, Crystal James, Maria Barile, Jennison Asuncion, Jean-Pierre Guimont, Catherine S. Fichten, Adaptech Research Network, Dawson College, Montreal

UTSC to host Get Started Days for incoming first-year students

The Academic Advising and Career Centre and Teaching and Learning Services at the University of Toronto at Scarborough will be hosting a series of one-day workshops for incoming first-year students in June and July. This first year of Ontario's so-called double cohort is a particularly stressful one for the incoming class, so UTSC is making a special

effort to ease the transition for its new students by getting them started on the right foot – and early.

Students will be asked to choose one of a series of workshop days between June 19 and July 16, depending on their likely major areas of study. On the day they attend they will be welcomed and introduced to the university and its range of programs and services, but much more importantly, they will complete a series of exercises designed to get them started on the road to being independent, self-directed, and successful students.

Students will actually begin the process by completing an assignment in course planning before they arrive at the event. The *Get Started Workbook* that students will receive in May includes detailed advice and some homework that they have to bring with them to the university. At the event they will complete or confirm their initial course selection and learn about the importance of self-directed academic success.

Curtis Cole, University of Toronto at Scarborough

Nova Scotia Round Table for disability service providers

The Nova Scotia Round Table for Post-Secondary Disability Service Providers was created in early 2002 as a result of Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) signed between the Department of Education and various post-secondary university and community college institutions. The Round Table goals are to develop a common standard of practice in delivering supports for students with special needs at the post-secondary level in Nova Scotia and to facilitate communications amongst its members.

The Round Table currently consists of ten individual university campus members, one community college member (representing fourteen campuses), plus officials from the Nova Scotia Department of Education's Rehabilitation Program Services, Community Services and other related Disability support providers in the province. The

Round Table meets quarterly to address topics of interest and concern.

The Round Table has recently hired a researcher to assist them in identifying what is happening across the country with regard to post-secondary institutional policies and programs for the delivery of services to students with disabilities.

The researcher also assists in compiling provincial data on students with disabilities in post-secondary environments and liaising with public school research statisticians on identifying the number of senior high students with exceptionalities and special needs that will soon be entering the post-secondary system. Related research tasks also include communications activities to the Round Table members through their monthly newsletter, as well as addressing various research needs that Round Table members may wish see addressed.

The Round Table is currently planning a June Symposium on legal considerations and issues relating to institutional supports for students with disabilities. The guest speaker will be noted human rights scholar and educator, Wayne MacKay, President of Mount Allison University.

Leo J. Deveau, Nova Scotia Round Table for Post-Secondary Disability Service Providers, ljdeveau@chebucto.ns.ca

Our People

University of Calgary

Welcome to Anna-Lisa Ciccocioppo, who has recently been appointed as a full-time tenure track Counsellor and Career Development Coordinator at the Counselling and Student Development Centre. Anna-Lisa is completing her Ph.D work at the University of Alberta and brings a wealth of experience having worked in three university counselling services previously – University of Calgary, Alberta and Manitoba.

Dr. Sharon Cairns was the recent recipient of the Alberta Student Services – Outstanding New Professional Award. Dr. Cairns is a very deserving recipient of this award. It was said of Dr. Cairns, "She is truly an example of an excellent student services professional combining excellent direct service to students along with research and service to her institution and the profession." Congratulations Shar!

Dr. Vivian Lalande, Senior Counsellor and Adjunct Associate Professor in Applied Psychology has been appointed Editor of the Canadian Journal of Counselling. Dr. Lalande will assume the duties of this position in spring, 2003. Congratulations Vivian, a real honor!

