

Adaptech Releases First Canadian Study on Computer Use by Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education

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Fall 1999 marked the release of "Learning Technologies: Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education / *Projet Adaptech: L'Utilisation des technologies d'apprentissage par les  tudiant(e)s handicap (e)s au niveau postsecondaire.*" Funded by the Office of Learning Technologies, this report is based on empirical research carried out in Montreal by Dawson College's Adaptech Project.

Through a series of focus groups, telephone interviews and questionnaires this bilingual research project collected data on computer and adaptive computer technologies from close to 800 college and university students with disabilities across the country. Topics studied include types of computer and adaptive computer technologies students with disabilities use (or wish they could use); advantages and disadvantages they experienced using the technology; and views about training and about obtaining the necessary technologies to meet one's needs. We had extensive support from over 200 individuals who provide disability-related services to Canadian postsecondary students, many of them CADSPPE members.

Participants had different types of disabilities. We found out how students used "mainstream" as well as adaptive computer technologies. Software that enlarges or speaks what is on the screen, adapted mice for use by people with limited hand movement, and word prediction software are examples of such specialised technologies.

Our results are too numerous to list here. Key findings indicate that 95% of respondents were computer users and 87% of them used the internet, mainly for research and e-mail. Only about a quarter of the students used adaptive computer technologies, although almost half indicated needing these. The reasons: cost and lack of information about what was available.

Our findings also revealed two important trends: (1) shared use of the same adaptations by students with different disabilities (e.g., both students with learning disabilities and visual impairments reported using screen reading software) and (2) use of

"mainstream" computer technologies, such as dictation software, spell-checkers and scanners as disability accommodations.

Results from all stages of our investigation converge on three points: the incredible potential of computer technologies to "level the playing field" for students with all types of disabilities; concern over inadequate funding for computer and adaptive computer technologies, both for the students themselves and for the institutions; and lack of information about existing subsidy programs to help students acquire computer technologies.

Our goal in conducting these studies was to provide informative data to students, staff and faculty at colleges and universities, to policy makers within government, and to developers and suppliers of mainstream and adaptive computer technologies. We are in the process of doing this through an extensive dissemination process that includes conference presentations, articles, position papers, our web site, and an information flyer for students.

We are presently engaged in two further research projects. Funded by PAREA, the ITAC Project focuses on the unique situation facing Qu bec's c geps (junior/community colleges). We are interested in the computer and adaptive computer technology concerns of students who have disabilities, their professors, and individuals who provide support services to them. Preliminary findings include difficulties related to lack of recognition of students with learning disabilities by the Quebec government (e.g., they are not eligible for disability related bursaries, equipment or educational services) and to the availability of specialized adaptive software in French (e.g., no appropriate software or software that is not up to date).

DSSFocus, our second ongoing study, is being carried out in collaboration with CADSPPE. Also funded by the Office of Learning Technologies, this companion to our investigation of student concerns differs from our previous work in that the focus turns from the students themselves to the individuals at colleges and universities who directly oversee support services provided to students with disabilities. Topics

being studied include: accessibility of computer technologies on campus; institutional and external factors that help or hinder access to these technologies; and what personnel providing services to students with disabilities require to improve the availability of computer related support.

For more information, visit us on the web: <<http://omega.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/adaptech>>. You can reach us by e-mail <md71@musica.mcgill.ca> or phone (514) 931-8731 #1546.

Fichten, C.S., Barile, M. & Asuncion, J.V. (1999). Learning technologies: Students with disabilities in postsecondary education / *Projet Adaptech: L'Utilisation des technologies d'apprentissage par les  tudiant(e)s handicap (e)s au niveau postsecondaire* (190 pages). Abstracted in English: <<http://olt-bta.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/publicat/Dawson79160exe.html>>

Full text in English: <<http://olt-bta.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/download/Dawson79160.pdf>>.

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C O L L E G E
ADAPTECH PROJECT

Le Projet Adaptech publie la premi re recherche canadienne portant sur l'utilisation de l'informatique par les  tudiants handicap s au niveau postsecondaire

Le rapport «*Projet Adaptech: L'utilisation des technologies d'apprentissage par les  tudiants handicap s au niveau postsecondaire / Learning Technologies: Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education*» a  t  publi    l'automne 1999. Subventionn  par le Bureau des technologies d'apprentissage, ce rapport repose sur une recherche empirique men e   Montr al par le Projet Adaptech du Coll ge Dawson.

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