

**Students with Disabilities:  
Transitions from  
Post-Secondary Education to Work  
Phase One Report**

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Students with Disabilities: Transitions from Post-Secondary Education to Work – Phase One Report

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report presents findings from the first phase of a study examining the transition experiences of university and college students with disabilities as they graduate and enter the labour force. Forty students with disabilities who graduated or expected to graduate from universities and colleges in four Canadian cities during 2002 participated in interviews for the study.

This report describes what the students told us about their post-secondary experiences, including various factors that contributed to their successes, as well as obstacles they encountered. The report also provides findings about the participants' use and their impressions of services for students with disabilities, institutional financial supports, and career/employment services provided by their universities and colleges. The findings conclude with descriptions of the participants' employment-related experiences as students, including their participation in internships, co-op placements, part-time and summer jobs, as well as their immediate and long-term employment ambitions and their opinions about how well their educations had prepared them for entering the labour force.

This report also presents findings from interviews with nine university and college staff who provide services to students with disabilities, and nine career and/or employment advisors who assist students with and without disabilities.

In the second phase of the study, which is expected to begin in the fall of 2003, the students/graduates will be interviewed again approximately one year after graduation. This report's findings from the first phase will serve as a baseline to compare the participants' post-secondary experiences and their expectations to their actual experiences in the labour force since they graduated.



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- Mary Demarinis (Disability Services Coordinator, Okanagan University College, Kelowna, B.C.)
- MaryAnne Duchesne (Board of Directors, National Educational Association of Disabled Students, Yellowknife, N.W.T.)
- Tara Orchard (Career Advising Coordinator, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ont.)
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- Sanjeet Singh (Board of Directors, National Educational Association of Disabled Students, Calgary, Alta.)
- Lex Wilson (Director, Meighen Centre for Learning Assistance and Research, Mount Allison University, Sackville, N.B.)

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Finally, and most importantly, we extend our thanks to all of the study participants, including the university and college staff and the post-secondary institutions that formally participated in the study. We are most indebted, however, to the 40 students with disabilities that graduated during 2002 and talked to us about their university/college experiences and their expectations about making the transition from school to the labour force.



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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

During the 1990s, numerous studies confirmed that people with disabilities in Canada experience barriers to obtaining post-secondary education (Killean and Hubka 1999; Hubka and Killean 1996; Fichten 1995; Wannell and Caron 1994). Many of those barriers remain, but the proportion of students with disabilities enrolled in and graduating from Canadian universities and colleges, as well as the overall educational attainment of people with disabilities, increased throughout the 1990s (Lavallée et al. 2000; HRDC 2000; CADSPPE 1999; Hill 1992).

People with disabilities in Canada who have graduated from universities and colleges are more likely to participate in the labour force and be employed than people with disabilities who have lower levels of education (Human Resources Development Canada 2000; Fawcett 2000; Fawcett 1996; Statistics Canada 1993; Roeher Institute 1992; Ross and Shillington 1990). Nevertheless, a gap between people with and without disabilities remains even at the highest levels of education. That is, university and college graduates with disabilities have lower labour force participation and employment rates than university and college graduates who do not have disabilities (HRDC 2001; Lavallée et al. 2000; SIAST 1999a and 1999b; Fawcett 1996; Wannell and Caron 1994; Statistics Canada 1993). As Fawcett writes, "...while higher education for persons with disabilities eases their entry into the labour force and narrows the difference in participation rates compared to persons without disabilities, it cannot, by itself, eliminate the employment disadvantage stemming from the disability" (1996: 34).

Despite the statistical evidence that university and college graduates with disabilities face greater difficulties in making successful transitions to the labour force than their peers without disabilities, we know very little about the experiences of graduates with disabilities as they make that transition. This multi-year study will begin to fill that gap in our knowledge.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Project Overview**

This report describes the findings of the first phase of a longitudinal study that began in January 2002. During this phase, interviews were conducted with 40 university and college students with disabilities who graduated or were about to graduate from universities and colleges in Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, and Halifax during 2002. Interviews were also conducted with nine post-secondary staff who provide services to students with disabilities at universities and colleges in these four cities, as well as nine university and college staff who provide career and/or employment services to students.

The first phase of the study was completed in July 2003. In the second phase of the study, which is expected to begin in the fall of 2003, students with disabilities who graduated from universities and colleges in 2002 will be interviewed about their school-to-work transition experiences approximately one year after graduation. The findings in this report on the first phase will serve as a baseline to compare the participants' post-secondary experiences and their expectations to their actual experiences in the labour force. A report on their transition experiences is expected to be published in the fall of 2004.

### **2.2 Data Collection**

#### ***Institutional Participation***

From January to June 2002, seven universities and five colleges in Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, and Halifax were asked to formally participate in the study by (1) assisting CCDS recruit students with disabilities as potential study participants and (2) authorizing representatives of their disability services and career and employment services to be interviewed about services for students with disabilities.

Three institutions agreed to participate in the study early in this process. At other institutions, our request went through multiple levels of review. After lengthy consideration, some institutions advised us that they would only be able to assist us with the project if it was submitted to, and approved by,

one of the university's Research Ethics Boards. By June 2002, five universities and two colleges had provided institutional approval to formally participate in the study.

### ***Students with Disabilities***

During the period while institutional approval was being sought, project staff began recruiting potential study participants through a variety of other sources, including a national organization of students with disabilities and disability organizations in Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, and Halifax. Persons eligible to participate were students with disabilities who graduated or expected to graduate during 2002 from a university or college in one of these cities. A research assistant conducted brief screening interviews with potential participants, collecting their graduation dates, programs, degrees, and locations. People selected to be study participants subsequently completed a two-page questionnaire (see Appendix 4) of demographic information (e.g. age, gender, income, disability, etc.)

From July to December 2002, 40 interviews took place. The interview guide is reproduced in Appendix 5. Most interviews were conducted by three research assistants, all of whom were university students or recent graduates; two were persons with disabilities. These interviews varied in length from 15 minutes to two hours, with an average of about one hour. All students who were interviewed received a \$50 honorarium for participating in the study.

### ***Disability Service Providers and Career & Employment Advisors***

From September to November 2002, a research associate conducted telephone interviews with nine disability service providers and nine career and/or employment advisors at the seven post-secondary institutions that formally participated in the study. The interview guides for these interviews are reproduced in Appendices 6 and 7.

## **2.3 Data Analysis**

All of the interviews were tape recorded and professionally transcribed. Each research assistant analyzed the data from the student interviews she/he conducted and provided a preliminary report on the findings from

those interviews. The research associate who conducted the interviews with disability service providers and career/employment advisors analyzed the data from those interviews.

Following the completion of data collection and preliminary analysis, draft reports of preliminary findings were written and circulated to the advisory committee in March 2003. They were revised to incorporate comments and suggestions from the advisory committee and the revised versions were circulated to the study participants in May 2003. All of the student participants who reviewed and provided comments on the student report received a \$50 honorarium.

## **2.4 Presentation of the Findings**

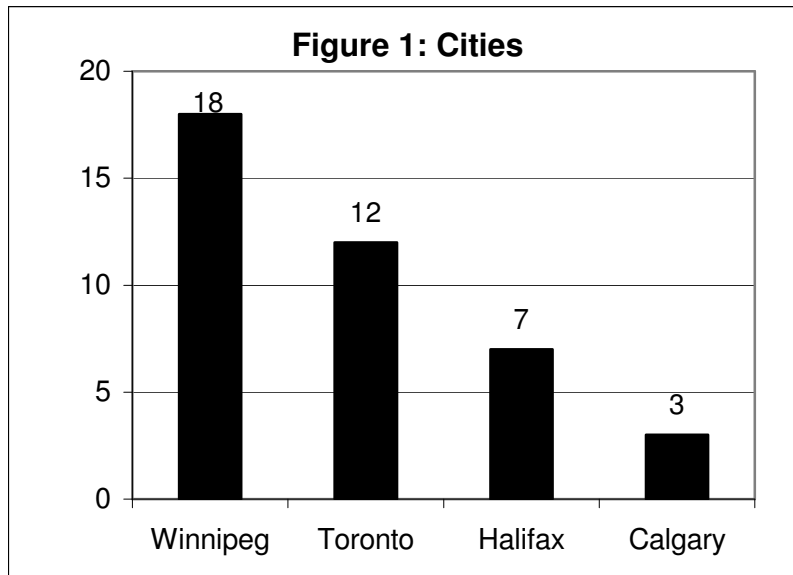
Some of the data collected were quantitative (e.g. the demographic questionnaire) while other data were qualitative (e.g. interviews). Findings from the quantitative data are presented with descriptions of numbers and/or percentages of responses, while the findings from the qualitative data are presented with the following broad indications of numbers or prevalence of responses:

- a few = 2 to 5 participants
- many = more than 5 participants
- most = more than half (i.e. the majority) of the participants
- all = all participants

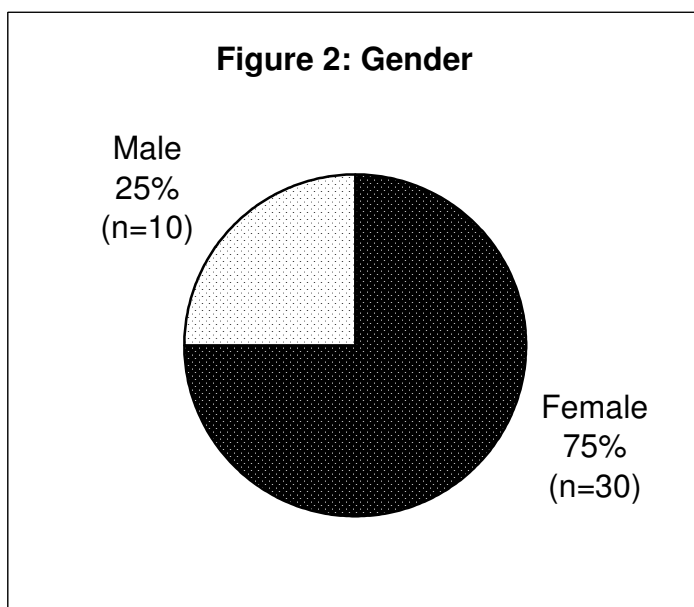
To protect the anonymity of the study participants, some personal pronouns (e.g. he/she, her/him, his/her) in the presentation of the findings have been changed (i.e. a participant described as “she” or “her” may or may not be female). Names of universities/colleges are not included in the findings, and have been edited out of the participant quotations (indented) that illustrate many of the findings. Quotations separated by blank spaces indicate two or more participants commenting on the same issue.

### 3. FINDINGS

#### 3.1 Graduating Students with Disabilities

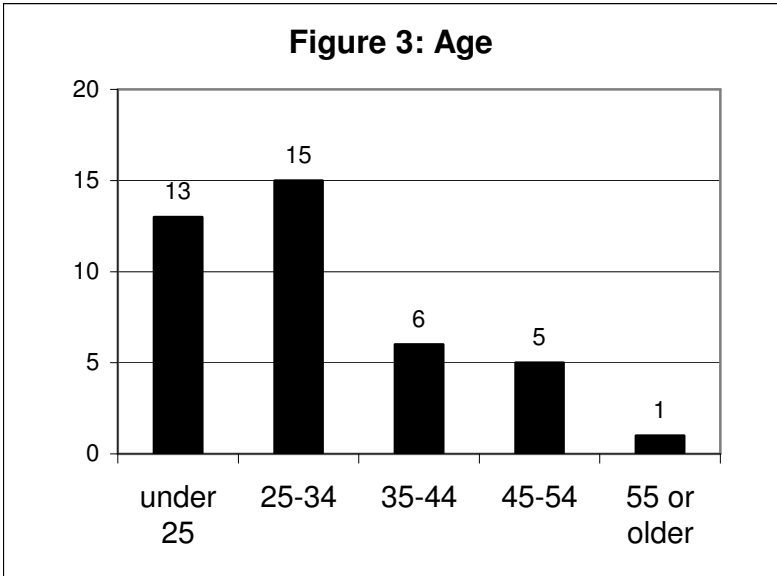


Almost half (18) of the forty students who participated in the study graduated from post-secondary institutions in Winnipeg (Figure 1). Twelve graduated from Toronto universities and colleges, seven from universities and colleges in the Halifax-Dartmouth area, and three from Calgary institutions.

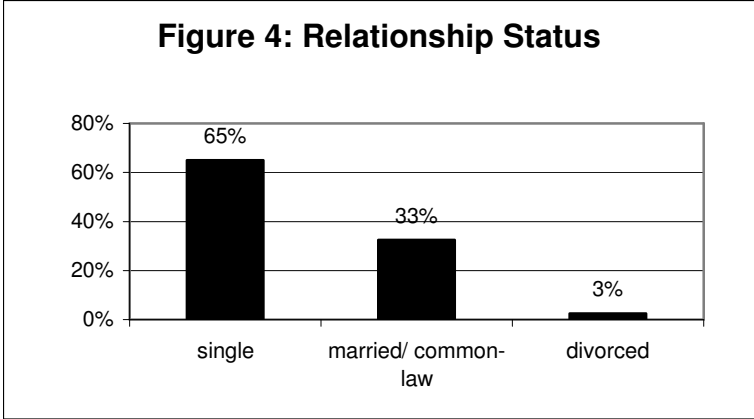


Seventy-five percent (75%) of the participants (30) were female, 25% (10) were male. The gender disparity was greatest in Halifax (where all seven participants were female), and in Toronto (where 10 of the 12 participants were female).

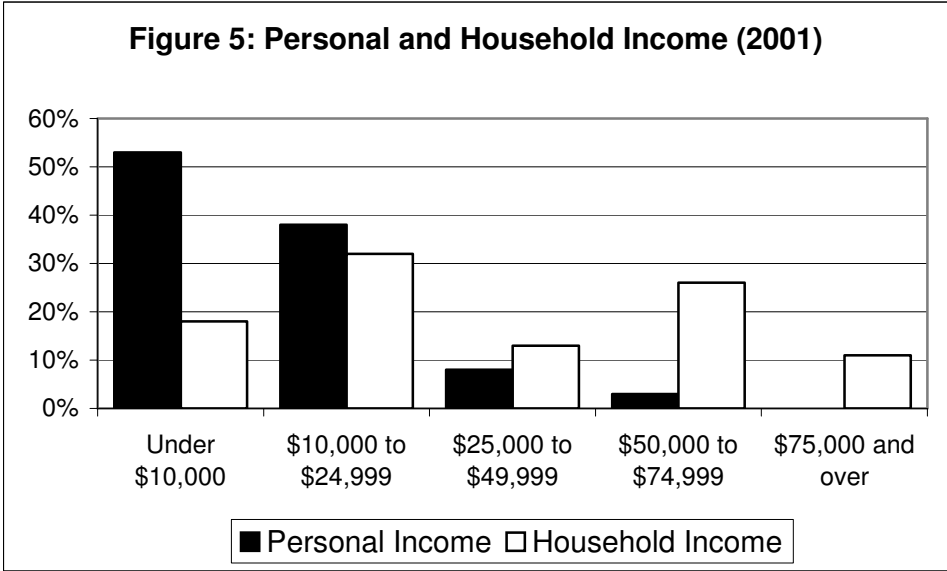
The predominance of women in this study is consistent with general trends found in the National Graduates Surveys (NGS) conducted by Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada. Amongst students who graduated from Canadian post-secondary institutions in 1995, 57 percent were women, with a peak of 61 percent at the Bachelor’s university degree level (Taillon and Paju, 1999).



Overall, approximately one-third of the participants (13) were under 25 years of age, one-third (15) were 25-34, and most of the remaining third (12) were 35-54 (Figure 3). One participant was over 54. University students tended to be younger than college students: 50 percent of college students were older than 34, compared to only 24 percent of university students.



Most participants (65%) were single. Thirty-three percent were married or in common-law relationships. One participant was divorced. Five participants (three women, two men) had children under the age of 18 who were living with the participants; all five were married or in common-law relationships, and were between 35 and 54 years old.

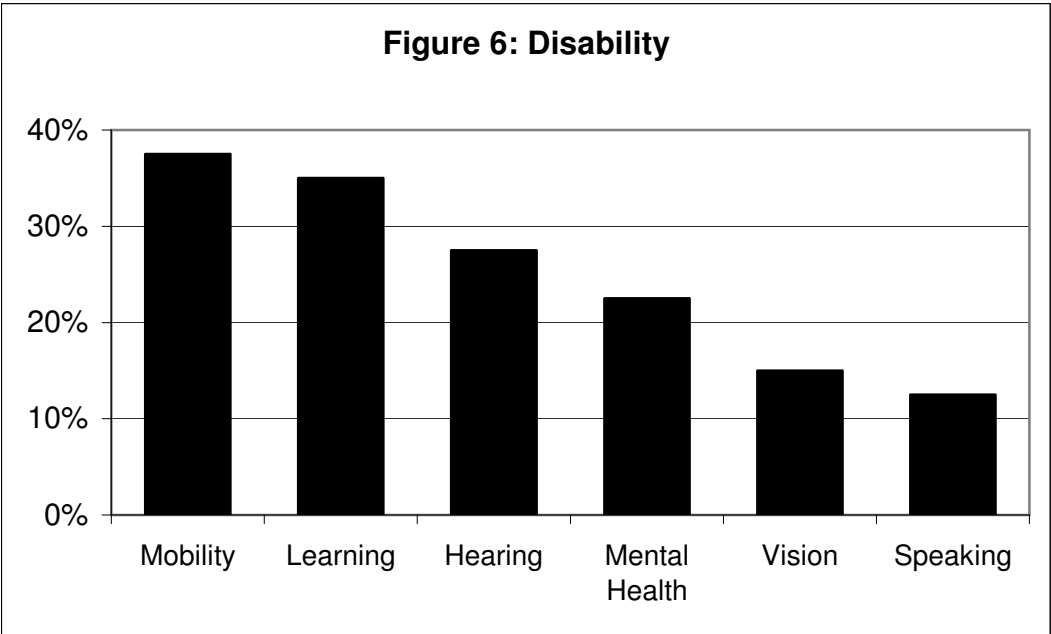


Most of the study participants had low personal incomes. Over half (53%) reported that their 2001 personal incomes—excluding loans—were under \$10,000. Most of the remainder had personal incomes between \$10,000 and \$24,999. Most study participants had lower personal incomes than the

overall population of Canadians with disabilities aged 15-64 (Statistics Canada 2003).<sup>1</sup>

Household incomes were more dispersed than personal incomes. Half of the participants lived in households with 2001 incomes below \$24,999, but 37% lived in households with 2001 incomes greater than \$50,000.

Sixty-five percent (65%) of the participants reported that they had employment income in 2001. The other most common income sources were awards, fellowships, and grants (36%), provincial income assistance (27%), workers compensation benefits (10%), Canada Pension Plan benefits (5%), and investment income (5%).



The most common self-identified disabilities reported by participants were mobility (38%), learning (35%), hearing (28%), and mental health (23%). Fifteen percent (15%) reported vision disabilities and 13 percent reported speaking disabilities. These percentages add to well over 100 percent, indicating that many participants reported multiple disabilities.

The prevalence of various disabilities reported by the study participants is generally consistent with the prevalence of these disabilities in the

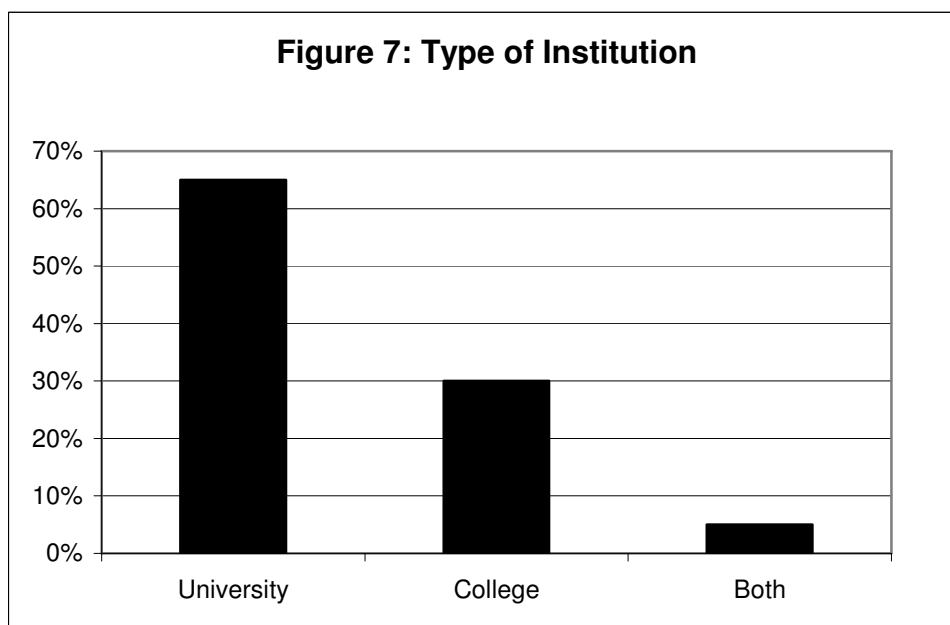
<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada has published 2001 income data for persons with disabilities aged (1) 15 and over, (2) 15-64, and (3) 65 and over (Statistics Canada 2003).



Canadian population (Cossette and Duclos 2002). Notable exceptions, however, are learning and mental health disabilities, both of which were more prevalent amongst study participants than in the overall population of Canadians with disabilities.

Most of the participants who reported learning disabilities indicated they had Attention Deficit Disorder. Others identified dyslexia and sequential processing disorders. Participants who experienced disabilities related to mental health had bi-polar disorder, depression, and/or anxiety disorders.

Two or three participants reported they had arthritis, back pain, cerebral palsy, chemical sensitivities, heart conditions, hip problems, or paraplegia/quadruplegia. Some of the other conditions reported by at least one participant were diabetes, multiple sclerosis, myofascial pain syndrome, spina bifida, and the effects of a stroke.



The 40 participants attended a total of 14 post-secondary institutions (8 universities, 6 colleges). Twenty-six (26) graduated from universities and 12 graduated from colleges. The remaining two graduated from a university and college, or from a joint university-college program.

The most common programs from which participants graduated were in Arts (8), Business (6), Applied Social Services (6), and Natural Sciences (4). Two or three participants graduated from Applied Arts, Education,

Engineering, Fine Arts, Health Services, Human Resources, Law, and Social Work programs. One participant graduated from each of the following programs: Deaf Studies, Theology, Family Studies and Gerontology.

Approximately half of the participants—most of the university students—graduated with Bachelor’s degrees. Five university participants received graduate degrees upon graduation. The remainder of the participants received college diplomas or certificates.

### ***Reasons Participants Chose the Programs They Studied***

Most<sup>2</sup> participants reported that they chose their programs primarily because of personal interest or other reasons unrelated to disability. Many did indicate, however, that disability played some role in their choice of programs, but most said that it was secondary to other factors. For example, a few participants who either could not sit or stand for long periods chose programs that would qualify them to work in occupations where they felt they would have greater opportunities for movement.

My disability is a deteriorating disability, and my job at that time [before returning to school] focused on sitting at a desk doing a lot of computer work and I can’t do that anymore. I need a job where I can be up and moving around more, or at least flexible so that I can change positions and tasks and things.

I can’t be on my feet for a long period of time, so I had to choose a career where it would be flexible, where I wouldn’t be on my feet all the time.

A participant who is blind reported that one factor that influenced his choice of program was that he was aware that other blind people had completed the program and obtained work in that field. Some participants chose programs because of a desire to help other people with disabilities, or to raise awareness about disability issues. For example, a participant with a

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<sup>2</sup> The remainder of this report describes the findings from qualitative interviews. “Most” refers to more than half of the student participants. “A few” indicates 2-5 participants. “Many” indicates more than 5 participants. (See page 4 for more detail.)

learning disability indicated that one factor that led her to choose her field (education) was her desire to help children with learning disabilities.

A participant with a mental health disability chose to study psychology because of a desire to understand her illness and disability.

Psychology has always been the main focus because of my disability, my mental illness. I mean, I've been struggling with mental illness since I was [a teen-ager] and, you know, just kind of wanting to know more about my mind.

Some participants indicated that they were unable to take the university programs they wanted because the organizations from which they sought funding (e.g. provincial government, workers' compensation boards) were only prepared to fund community college programs.

A participant who had experienced difficulties finding a job said that he might have chosen a different program if he had received counselling in choosing a field where people with visual impairments have greater opportunities and fewer barriers.

Thinking back, I think if I would have had a resource or career counselling, I might have chosen differently... There's certain paths that have a really good hiring rate for people with disabilities, and others that are not so... As I found out, in [field], to get a fairly good position you need tons of experience across a diverse range, and being a person with a disability, I think I need to be in a position with stability and consistency. In addition to that, it seems like the positions that don't require a lot of experience are "way out in the woods", and there's no public transportation out there.

Other participants also noted that they chose fields that subsequently presented them with barriers to employment opportunities. One participant who graduated from a college social services program said:

I was under the impression that the job outlook was in the high range, but when I graduated it's in the low range... That's why I went into it: because I thought there would be jobs. There are jobs out there, except they're physical and they're shift work, which I'm unable to do, so that puts me at a disadvantage in finding employment.

A participant described how she had been discouraged from pursuing her preferred program/career.

There was a major reason why I didn't stay in [the original program], because there was no way I could have told them I was sick...I remember coming to class late because I had to go to the doctor...I came in late for my evening class I think twice and my teacher just...told me like how ignorant I was and how awful I was for showing up ten minutes late...I had the textbook...I was learning at home, and I missed one or two classes and I came back...And everyone had done all this group work and he's like "you're not a part of it because you missed all these classes." He kept on asking questions, and everyone in their groups were supposed to know the answers to certain questions. I knew all the answers to all the questions, but he wouldn't let me answer because I hadn't participated in the group work, and group work is very hard for me because sometimes I have a hard time communicating with other people. I can do it on my own and in [the new program] they totally let me learn it on my own.

Some participants—particularly many with learning disabilities—explained that they chose their programs without consciously considering disability as a factor because their disabilities had not been diagnosed at the time they chose their programs. A few participants—particularly persons with workplace injuries—told us that they returned to school and pursued new careers after developing disabilities as adults. A few participants said that they chose a particular university or college because they felt the disability services there would meet their needs best.

### ***Experiences Disclosing Disability***

Most participants disclosed information about their disabilities to disability services providers at their universities or colleges, as well as to professors and instructors. For some participants with visible disabilities, disclosure was not an issue.

I'm blind and I have a guide dog, so it doesn't require much explanation...people can pretty much tell that I have a disability when they meet me...So in that sense it makes my situation a little bit

easier, because I don't have to do the sales job...It's just a matter of me being vocal about my needs and my accommodations. Every professor I've ever had in university in my life has been very open and accommodating once I meet them and I do say I have a visual impairment, it's pretty obvious and then I just sort of, we take it from there.

Amongst the minority who did not disclose, the most common were students with mental health disabilities who did not disclose (or delayed disclosing) their disabilities because of concerns about the stigma associated with mental illness. One participant with mental health problems was not aware of disability services at her university when she started her program. When she later learned a disability services office existed, she did not initially seek assistance there, but eventually did, and found it helpful.

When I did find the office, I was hesitant to call because I was just so afraid of letting people know that I suffered from depression. But once they put me onto the intake worker, it was so pleasant. All my fears dissipated.

A participant over the age of 40 who had hearing disabilities explained that she didn't disclose her disabilities because she completed an earlier degree before services for students with disabilities existed. She wasn't aware that such services were available to her when she started the program from which she recently graduated.

I went through the high school system and my first university degree before they had programs for students with disabilities, so I didn't come to [name of university] with the knowledge of what you could access and what you couldn't access. So I didn't feel comfortable going to them and disclosing my disability at all, I didn't do that.

Most participants who disclosed their disabilities to professors/instructors did so by requesting accommodations in a letter prepared with the assistance of the disability services office at their university or college. Some also spoke directly to professors about their accommodation requirements. One participant with learning disabilities who needed extra time on tests and a note-taker said:

...it wasn't a choice on whether or not I was going to disclose; it was more on how I was going to do it. My first semester we sent letters out to all the professors and eventually I got in touch with them. After that I'd go to my counselor, get my letters made up and then go straight to the teachers as soon as possible, because I found it was the easiest way. It was actually the best way. They got to know me better and it just ended up being better, the sooner I disclosed...

Participants described positive and negative reactions from professors/instructors regarding the participants' requests for accommodations. For example, one participant told us "they were tremendous, the faculty were tremendous." A few participants withdrew from courses or programs because of negative reactions from professors. Many students with invisible disabilities felt that professors/instructors and/or other students did not believe that the participants had disabilities.

For the most part the difficulties I had revolved around the fact that it's not visible; people can't see that I have a disability, therefore I'm not ["disabled"]...I had one professor who actually went over to [the disability service centre]...to question them about me.

I remember once a professor...didn't seem to understand...It was difficult for people to understand because I don't have a physical disability, something they can see and understand.

One participant with invisible mobility disabilities explained why he didn't disclose to his instructors.

I felt I didn't have to explain my situation unless I needed to. In my case, I didn't need to do that in order to accomplish my goals and to do my assignments.

He eventually did experience disability-related problems during his studies, but didn't disclose his disabilities when requesting extensions.

I almost tried to talk to some of my teachers about my problems because I was getting behind in my studies. But I didn't do it...I asked them for extra time, like maybe until the next day or the next class. I explained to them that I had problems but I didn't disclose my situation.

## ***Reasons for Success***

Most participants identified personal qualities and supports from others as key factors in their success. The personal qualities they described often referred to internal desire (e.g. motivation, persistence, determination, tenacity, optimism, perseverance, stubbornness, discipline).

Persistence, tenacity, sheer stubbornness that I was going to prove I could do it. I wanted it bad enough. I want to work, point blank. I know I have to have the education to get the work and I really do want to work. I want to become a productive member of society and not be on social assistance or things like that. I want to bring in my own money.

When asked to describe her reasons for success, one participant stated that her need for personal accomplishment was a definitive factor. She explained that after a breakdown and suicidal experience, she wanted to prove to herself that she could achieve her educational goals.

Oh, a personal accomplishment, personal success, because I think that, you know, especially having that breakdown during that period, it was more or less a personal accomplishment for me that I could do this, because I was suicidal, you know. I was admitted into the mental illness ward of the hospital, so it was like a personal accomplishment for me to see if I could do this...

Participants also described how support from family and friends contributed to their successes.

My parents support me fully going through this and so do all my friends...I've always surrounded myself with people who have supported me. If someone didn't support me I'd have to say goodbye as a friend to them.

I couldn't be where I am today if it hadn't been for my husband and my two children who help me and to some extent the [disability service centre] and [name] who was my counselor there.

One participant who had been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) noted that she received support from friends and family, but that her parents' created some obstacles.

Friends and family have definitely been major factors in my success, but some of them also were discouraging. While my boyfriend (who also has ADD) has really helped me believe in myself and to help me see the upside of having ADD, my parents' reluctance to believe the diagnosis was very difficult.

Many participants also indicated that disability service providers were important to their academic successes.

I'd say the number one reason I've been successful...[is] disability services, which is the best thing that ever happened to me. Without them, I would never have been able to make it through university because every time I had a problem, I'd just call them and they'd fix it for me.

It [disability services] was a huge impact. It meant I knew somebody there...She has given me a locker in a convenient place for myself ... right across the hall from the elevator, which had access to all the floors where all my classes were. It made a big difference. It meant I wasn't doing the stairs.

A participant described how having a note taker contributed to her success.

Without her I would have been completely lost... If I hadn't had her, my marks would not be nearly as good as they were. I'd probably just be an average student, or maybe even below average, but with her I'm like a high B+.

A few participants cited the impact of professors/instructors who provided supports and accommodations.

My professors would deny this but I'm saying that it's due to their support, their accessibility. They were really very, very supportive...At one point I actually said—about a month before my defense—I said “forget it, I gave it up, I can't take it anymore. I just have had so much bad luck that I don't think I can do anymore, I'm just empty.” But one



professor who basically sat and listened said “We understand that this has been huge for you and we admire your dedication and we know that you can do this, and we just don’t want you to give up.”

For students who had learning disabilities diagnosed during their studies, the diagnosis and supports available to them were often a significant factor in their achievements.

The diagnosis made me feel okay, I felt almost as if I had something off my shoulders. I was blaming myself for a lot of the things—how come you’re not doing better on the tests, what was wrong with me? Then I felt better that knowing that my learning disability was probably preventing me from getting better marks on that particular test.

I’ve always had Attention Deficit Disorder, but I never realized it until I got into university...I was a very bright individual, I have many coping mechanisms that I use to deal with Attention Deficit Disorder and those kind of ran automatically all through high school and all through my previous schooling because it was really so easy compared to [the university program]. [When] I went into university full-time, that’s when it hit me, that’s when I had to actually learn a large volume of information in a limited amount of time, and I almost fell apart on it. I could not understand why I was not capable of meeting the same level of performance as my peers, I mean I almost hit a 2.0 GPA or below and almost had to go on to academic probation...Once I started to undergo therapy for Attention Deficit Disorder I realized that I could tackle [the program], I could do anything I wanted in [the program] now that I could learn what I needed to do....

A few participants identified healthcare providers as important sources of support that contributed to their academic successes.

The support of physicians, chiropractors, massage therapists, they are quite helpful.

My GP has been the...biggest supporter since I had the car accident, in me getting back to a normal life...He gave me the best advice that anybody ever gave me.

Without the [university medical centre's] medical guidance and emotional support I would have been unable to continue my studies. These were the people that took time to listen, helped assess the medical situation, advised on academic options for disabled people, and encouraged me.

## **Obstacles**

Participants who requested accommodations noted a range of reactions from professors and instructors. Many reported inconsistency in the provision of accommodations they requested. For example, a participant with learning disabilities said some professors declined her requests for their PowerPoint presentations or clarification of exam questions.

Some of them would let me have their PowerPoint [presentations]. They wouldn't let the class have them, and some were pretty adamant not to [give them to me]...During exams, if they weren't giving me enough information to get the question, some teachers were quite willing to write a little bit more for my questions, or do the exam in a different way. Some other professors would just say "Well, tough luck, you'll barely pass but you'll still get the marks"....Some of them, you can just tell when you walk in how adamant they are, they won't [accommodate]. Some of the ones that wouldn't at first ended up realizing that I wasn't coming in and trying to get everything easier, I actually did need [accommodation].

One participant explained that an accommodation that was provided in her first year was not provided in her second year.

I found that the faculty members did not follow through the second year—actually some time in the first part of the first year as well—with the guidelines what were laid down for me, in terms of going for help. I had one faculty member tell me last year, "The first year you were here you drove us up the wall." ...I didn't understand what they were saying and I kept going back and asking them "explain it to me, I don't understand, what do you want me to do?" And all I got a lot of times was..."it's in your course outline, read your course outline."

A participant who described herself as having a hearing impairment needed professors to face the front of the class when they were lecturing so she could understand what they were saying.

The majority of them were pretty accommodating. It was easier in [department] because most of the classrooms are pretty small, like twenty students, so it's easier for them to pay attention to one student. But in the big lecture halls, in some of those I didn't bother telling the professor. [Interviewer: Why is that?] Just because in a huge lecture hall with 300 students there was really, in my experience, I found that if I told them to face the front, they would do that and then forget after a couple of weeks. I had a note taker and I thought, "If I tell [professor] again [about facing front of the class], they're going to forget again and I don't want to be doing that all year," so for those classes, I relied on my note taker.

A participant who experienced mental health problems during her studies asked a professor for additional time to complete an assignment. The professor was in the process of leaving the university and declined the student's request.

He said life goes on, that he couldn't wait for me to get better. [Interviewer: So what did you say?] What could I do? I just took it. So I handed in this half done paper. I didn't get a good mark on it, and it was only because I just needed a little more time.

A participant who wore dark glasses to minimize the adverse health effects of classroom lighting told us that a professor knocked the glasses off her face because he thought she was sleeping in his class.

A few participants who had learning disabilities diagnosed part way through their studies indicated that lack of awareness and accommodation was an obstacle prior to being diagnosed. A few participants said that an obstacle they encountered was not being aware of disability services and/or that accommodations were available.

It was very difficult to find the [disability services office]. There was nothing posted on campus anywhere that would make you aware that such a service existed.

Many participants described obstacles related to the physical inaccessibility of their campuses. A participant with foot and heart problems had difficulty with mobility on a hilly campus. Another participant reported that there was only one elevator in the large building where her classes were held. Traveling from one location on one floor to the same location on the next floor sometimes required her to walk a great distance to the elevator, and then again from the elevator to her destination when she arrived at the next floor.

One participant said that chairs in computer labs and libraries made it difficult to do research or study there.

There's not one chair in the library where my feet touch the floor, so I found it really difficult to go to the library and do research or study for any length of time because I'd have to keep getting up and having to move. It was just something that was really awkward. If I had a good chair I could have spent more time studying and less time dealing with my disability.

A few participants who reported being blind or have learning disabilities said that audiotape versions of textbooks were an obstacle.

When I first got to university, everything was put on tapes and that took a long time, usually you didn't get your whole book done by the time the exams were there...In the earlier years everything was put on tape and in [program] we jump around in our books—we do Chapter 1 and then 7 and then 8. Trying to find out where that was on the tape, plus the tape only ran at one speed so it was slow reading, you couldn't read fast and it read every single thing that was on the page, whereas sometimes you'd want to skip over [some parts].

...if you have to get the books sent off to be taped it can take several weeks, and if you don't get it [by the start of classes] you're already behind the eight ball. You need to get it at least a month early, whereas if you can get the book electronically you can pretty much get it the same time everyone else gets it at the store.

One participant indicated that these problems remained throughout her studies, while the participants quoted above indicated that these problems declined in the later years of their studies as more textbooks became

available electronically or they purchased scanners to convert print to electronic text.

The last year through school I was getting more books, probably more electronically than I was on tape, so I didn't have that gap I would have had with getting them taped.

As technology got better and then as I was able to save up and buy my technology, I now am at par with reading books with all my classmates.

A graduate of a professional school who had to work to support herself during her studies described how her disabilities and financial situation were obstacles.

You encounter obstacles because you're going to a highly competitive [professional school], with a very elite group of people that creates its own barriers. If you're different from them in any way, that difference itself creates barriers. If you're economically disadvantaged, that's a barrier in itself. If you're disabled and economically disadvantaged, that's another barrier....You don't get to be able to be free to socialize and participate in group activities. One of the parts of going to [professional school] is not just the knowledge you take away but the contacts that you're supposed to be able to make among your own class, and also contacts by maybe working for a professor or volunteering or being in one of the clubs... If you have to work like I did most every hour that you can get because you're working by the hour not on a salary, and you have to leave school as soon as the class is over and go to work and go and study, it doesn't leave you time to get involved with the students that you're in class with or go for a coffee or go for lunch or participate in the clubs.

A few participants mentioned they had difficulties with transportation, either with specialized transportation systems or with not having access to a vehicle. One person said:

When my boyfriend's sister dropped out, I didn't have a way to get to school, and I didn't have my own car, and I couldn't drive at that point. That counsellor helped me figure out a way to get to school.

Actually, two of my classmates who live near me, we decided to go together.

Every once in a while, if I needed to stay later to work on a project or I was talking to the profs, I had to miss the bus. I would find myself pretty much stranded and I would have to call home and I hate... having to rely on other people all the time because I have no other source of transportation.

### ***Educational Aspirations***

Participants provided varying responses to a question about their interest in pursuing further post-secondary education in the future. Most were eager to enter the labour force, but many expressed a desire to pursue further education in the future. Many of these were university graduates who were interested in pursuing graduate degrees. A few had already applied to or had been accepted into graduate programs, but the majority expected to spend some time in the labour force before taking further studies.

I'll probably end up possibly doing my Master's or, if not my Master's, working on different other educational programs because, as a teacher you jump up levels if you have certain education, so I might continue doing that as well....

One participant stated he would like to do further graduate work but had amassed a large debt getting two previous degrees, while another interviewee noted he would like to enroll in a Master's degree program but his grades were not high enough because he received poor accommodations in the early years of his undergraduate degree. One participant said that she required a Master's degree to obtain jobs in her field, but the federal-provincial program that provided funding for her Bachelor's degree would not fund her graduate studies.

The only way I have hope of getting my Master's is by working and then taking the Master's program. This leaves me in a vicious cycle where without the work I cannot get the schooling and without the schooling I cannot get the work in [chosen field]. A student loan is not feasible for me to meet this need.

A few participants talked of taking other programs in the future. For example, one respondent who received a diploma in a healthcare field expressed interest in taking an LPN course in the future.

### ***Disability Services***

Most of the study participants indicated that they had made use of disability services provided by their universities and colleges. Almost all arranged for accommodations with the assistance of a disability services office, but a few arranged accommodations directly with professors rather than seeking assistance from a disability services office.

Many participants who utilized disability services reported very positive experiences:

If I had not had the [disability services office] I would not have been able to succeed in university.

I don't think I could have finished university without it.

Huge [impact]...I wouldn't have known where to go to get [learning disability] diagnosed. I don't know if I would have been able to find the motivation or the courage to go do that, so having [disability services] right there under my nose was really important.

They were tremendous...I highly recommend them. They're fantastic, very accessible, very willing to work with you.

The most common accommodations or services accessed by participants were related to exams (e.g. extra time, private rooms, oral tests, readers, and use of computers). Participants also cited the following other accommodations:

- note-taking
- assistance in proofreading assignments
- extensions on assignments
- tape recording lectures
- books on tape
- tutoring

- American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation
- FM transmitter system
- specialized chairs and desks

One participant reported that the disability services office at her institution provided a space for students with disabilities to meet and support each other.

There we give each other moral support. If they're having problems with a professor, you can say what you've tried before with other professors or with that professor. Say [professor] won't give out notes [to a student with disabilities], you can say "I know that professor, he gave me notes, so just keep pushing on him." Or I can say "No, he's not going to give you your notes, try to find some other way."

One participant indicated that disability services staff helped her calm down and relax when she felt anxious or experienced panic attacks.

They sit you down and they talk to you, play relaxing music, whatever. It's just like a nice place to come.

A few participants who attended professional faculties reported that they did not seek supports from their institutions' disability services offices because all of their requirements were provided from within the professional faculty.

Many participants—including some who said positive things about disability services—offered numerous suggestions for improvements. Many participants reported negative experiences, and students from the same institution sometimes reported differing experiences/opinions. One participant visited the disability services centre once to use assistive technology available there, but did not return.

That was pretty much the only time. Just the sense that I got going up there—they seemed really intimidating. There was a friend as well in one of my classes who at some point was needing to use their services and she really didn't appreciate it. She I guess got a lot of the same reception that I did and she just didn't feel comfortable, that they made her feel stupid, was her feeling.



One participant who said “I wouldn’t have been able to do it without the [disability service centre’s] help” explained how the centre helped by arranging for her to have extra time to write exams, but she was not aware that she could access equipment from the centre until later in her studies.

They didn’t orient me to the resources that were there, or introduce me to the centre and what they could do for me. It was kind of like pulling teeth getting the information. But I think it might be because I don’t have a visible disability...

A few participants commented that they felt their institutions’ disability services offices should be more assertive in lobbying for enforceable accommodation policies and campus accessibility.

I thought they [disability services] could have been more proactive in insisting that all the professors agree or standardize it, but the university and [disability services] leaves that up to the individual professor. To me that’s a big flaw.

What I would like to see is that the faculty members follow through with what is laid out, because what is laid out is for the students to learn better, and if [faculty] aren’t following through and at least trying to help the students then the student’s going to find it even twice as hard, they may even drop out.

I don’t know if they have any real power to crack down on profs that won’t accommodate students, but I think most profs would rather not challenge them. I think that even the possibility of a phone call from [disability services] to the Dean or Department Head would be enough to keep most profs in line.

A few participants felt that their colleges or universities should provide sensitivity training for professors, instructors and teachers.

I think they need to look at the sensitivity training for their instructors. It’s just a few people in the college that are aware of this and a lot of people don’t seem to be very aware.

A few participants with invisible disabilities felt that their institutions' disability services providers were primarily concerned with assisting students with visible disabilities.

They do have their biases there even though they don't say them... They're very geared into students who are visually impaired, hearing impaired, noticeably physically impaired—those are the students who get the attention and the resources, and those are the ones that they kind of think of as disabled. Someone like myself, it took them a while to kind of come around to the fact that “yeah, she does have a disability, its legit,” because they can't see it.

### ***Institutional Financial Supports***

Most participants received some form of institutional financial supports, mainly in the form of bursaries. Some of these were bursaries specifically for students with disabilities, while other bursaries did not consider disability as a factor. A few participants received scholarships. A few received research assistantships.

A few participants indicated they had obtained support from a government department to pay for some or all of the costs of their post-secondary educations. A participant who was an employee of the university she attended reported that she received financial support from a program that waived tuition fees for university employees.

A few participants indicated that their particular kinds of disabilities were obstacles to gaining institutional supports. One participant with mental health related disabilities reported that she did not qualify for a bursary for students with disabilities because it was specifically for students with physical disabilities. (She was, however, successful in obtaining a general bursary.)

One participant reported that he had applied for a scholarship for students with disabilities, but was unsuccessful. He later learned that the scholarship had not been awarded and was told, off the record:

...that my disability was not apparent and they wanted to have somebody who really looked disabled to have the scholarship so that

when it went in the paper...it would draw a lot of attention or a lot of sympathy or a lot of PR for the [disability services centre].

A few participants indicated that they did not qualify for bursaries because their parents' incomes made the participants ineligible for a provincial student assistance program.

My parents' income prevented me from obtaining [provincial assistance program for students with disabilities] throughout my university career. I subsequently learned through the disability office that I would have been eligible for bursaries specifically for students with disabilities to buy equipment for school if I had qualified for [provincial program]. In the first two years of university, I had to invest in costly equipment in order to ensure my academic success. Access to these sorts of bursaries would have been a great benefit to myself and my family.

A participant who was not aware of many of the institutional financial supports available to her felt that universities should do more to inform students with disabilities about those resources

I wish they would have made me aware of the financial resources available to disabled students. I was unaware there where special bursaries and grants for disabled students. [Disability services] would be the perfect place to support the disabled students from all aspects, including the financial one. The admissions office could also include it in their little registration package.

A participant indicated that he would like to see more funding for the tuition fees of students with disabilities. He said that a program in the 1980's "subsidized 100 percent" of the educations of post-secondary students with disabilities, but it was terminated around 1995-96 when he began his post-secondary education. He said that now "...there's just simply no programs for special funding for people with disabilities. There's a bursary here, and a bursary there, but it's drops in the bucket."

### ***Employment***

Most participants indicated they wished to obtain employment immediately following graduation. At the time they were interviewed, many had already

secured jobs, but most of the group were seeking employment. Most were specifically seeking positions related to their fields of study, but a few indicated they were being less selective (e.g. “I just want to find a job”).

A few students noted that they developed diverse, transferable skills that gave them broader options when they graduated.

I have a broad background. [Program]...gives you skills in research, case management and developing or evaluating programs. I have many transferable skills and am hoping my broad background will make it easier to find employment and work environments that meet my needs.

Many participants provided information about the workplace accommodations they felt they would need when they obtained employment. There was considerable similarity with the accommodations participants used during their post-secondary educations. These included:

- ergonomic work station
- voice activated computer
- computer with speech output
- scanner
- Braille printer
- personal assistance with work tasks (e.g. proofreading)
- TTY
- mentoring
- flexible work hours
- flexibility to avoid sitting
- flexibility to avoid standing
- private office

A few respondents indicated they did not know what employment accommodations they would require. One of these persons who has a mental health disability said:

That’s questionable because I am not sure if I am going to tell them or not...Someone would say you should tell because what if something happens? But I feel really good.

During the second phase of the study, study participants will be asked about their experiences requesting and obtaining (or not obtaining) workplace accommodations they require.

Most participants felt that their education had prepared them fairly well for employment. Many of these people identified practicum placements or internships as valuable sources of practical workplace experiences (e.g. "...experienced-based learning is a good idea.>").

When I went out to my work experience, I could actually apply what I learned in the workplace to the job that I wanted to, so I think it's really good.

Some participants whose programs did not include any work experiences felt their educations had not adequately prepared them for employment. One first said, "I feel prepared and confident," but later said that an internship would have given her more practical experience.

Yes, definitely. Our program didn't have any internships, so basically you have to rely on yourself, either working during the year or summer, to gain your experience.

Another participant said this about how well his education had prepared him for employment:

In some ways, really, really well, and in some ways I think "why didn't they tell us more about industry jargon?" Not knowing all the jargon made job-hunting difficult because it was sometimes hard to interpret what was really meant by job postings, and it was hard to ask questions of people in my field without the necessary vocabulary.

Another participant said:

It's incomplete... [I took] 22 different subjects, and we just had a little of each one. Sometimes, we have all these little bits of knowledge... You're not efficient at anything.

Most participants reported that they had some form of employment during their studies. Forms of employment included:

- summer jobs
- part-time jobs during the academic year
- internships
- international internships
- co-op/job placements
- work-study program
- research assistantships
- volunteer work
- small business

Some participants found that jobs or volunteer positions influenced their academic choices and/or career direction.

My [summer] job didn't pay much, but it gave me direction in choosing a career and choosing what I wanted to do after my undergraduate studies.

One participant who took a social services program because she wanted to work with children described the impact of several work experiences and a part-time job.

Oh a lot, a lot of impact because I realized that that is what I wanted to do, and the more I seen the students that needed the help the more I was determined that I was going to make it because I wanted to help them.

Others reported that employers who hosted their student employment experiences subsequently offered them jobs. Others attributed their post-graduation employment successes to their student employment experiences.

Even the little summer job I had after second year helped me get the internship job, and the internship job definitely helped me get my permanent job now.

One participant reported that she quit a summer job with a government department because:

...the manager that I was working under was so very blatant, the discrimination because of my disability...[The manager] treated me like I was dirt and actually stood up in the office one day and—in front of me and to the other employees—said they would have to pull more workload because I had a disability and I wouldn't be able to carry all the responsibilities, which was totally not true.

Some participants did not work while they were students. Some attributed this to taking very intensive or compressed programs. Others indicated that disability was a factor.

People don't make very many accommodations for that, you know. Here it's very difficult, if you say you have a non-visible disability, it's very hard for them to grasp that, or they just don't know what to do about it. Can you handle the job or not, that's really what you get a lot. Yeah, I think there are some real obstacles there.

Others indicated that the cost of accommodations limited their summer job options.

...it would have been nice to have worked as a [occupation related to field of study] but to do that in a private place and put in everything that I need to adapt for just for the summer months, unless they already had the stuff there, it would have been harder. Because I have my disability, I wasn't able to get into a lot of jobs because they would say "Oh well, that's going to be too much to overcome."

### ***Career and Employment Services***

Most participants reported they had made little or no use of career and employment services offered by their universities and colleges. Some were not even aware that such services existed. Amongst those who had used these services, the most common services they reported utilizing were:

- help with resumes
- accessing job postings/boards/banks
- attending job fairs/expositions
- accessing internship opportunities

Interviewees provided a variety of reasons for not utilizing, or being disappointed with, career and employment services at their institutions. Some participants—mostly older students with considerable work experience—felt they already had strong career and job search skills, or had friends or family members qualified to assist them.

I find the whole [university] career services thing is really quite lame. It's great for the people who...have no clue; the career services people can help them. The career services people really can't do much for me...

They really haven't said too much about them [career services] to me. I didn't realize they were helping us that much. In fact it's kind of the first I've heard of it, that they're doing anything towards that...I don't think there's too much, at least not for somebody like myself as far as I would know. It's kind of like, you're done, we're done with you, out you go, go find a job. So I wasn't even aware that there is anything.

Most people who work in career services offices have had rather atypical career paths, so they really are the last people who should be giving advice. What they should be doing is arranging qualified speakers, providing a library of job hunting books, and giving advice on how to contact people who are qualified to answer your questions.

Some participants were receiving career services from their universities' disability services centres.

I've kind of relied on [counselor at disability services centre]...I'll have a question about a school or "can I use this as a reference?" and I'll e-mail her and she seems to be a wealth of knowledge. She's kind of been all my career services in one.

A few had existing relationships with agencies that provide employment assistance for people with disabilities, and chose to seek assistance there rather than from career/employment service providers at their colleges and universities. Others sought assistance from their post-secondary institutions and from community agencies.

No, I haven't [accessed career services at college]. And actually, to be honest with you, my counselor never informed me that they had



those there, so I wasn't aware of that. I just went straight through [an organization providing employment assistance for persons with disabilities].

I already have a counselor at [an agency that provides services to people with disabilities], so I'm probably going to use them to help me get into places, because I know they've got experience with employers that know that the people that they get from [the agency] might need some accommodations.

One participant said that she learned helpful resume writing and interviewing skills from her university's career services centre, but she elected to seek other career and employment assistance from an agency that provides services to people with her particular type of disability. One reason was that she lived 90 minutes from the university, but she explained that she also felt her university would not provide the adaptive computer technology she required to access their employment databases and career-related web sites, and would refer her to the disability-specific agency anyway. Unfortunately, she found that the disability agency lacked the resources to assist job seekers with university degrees.

I've gone through [agency] for career counseling, but I'm finding more and more and more that the quality of their services is very poor... I'm finding that most of the people that go there, they don't have degrees, it's basically, they have a high school diploma. I stopped going because it's more of a social group thing, having coffee and talk.

A few felt that their college and university career services did not have resources or services appropriate to the participants' fields of study and career interests.

I don't think [career counselor] should be giving me or any student any advice, unless she knows [about the student's field], and she doesn't... They just haven't helped in any way; I didn't get anything from them. I think [field in applied arts] is such an unconventional type of career path, you're not going to find something there [career services].

A few participants—particularly those in professional schools/faculties—did not access their institutions’ career and employment services because they felt that their faculties provided all of the assistance they required.

Coming out of the [program], they set you up going to a job fair and you have that opportunity to apply—they conduct interviews at the job fair. Through the Education program—through notices on the board—you become aware of a lot of career options for teaching.

[Professional school] has its own career development office...their sole job is to hook the students up with job opportunities. They hold career fairs and they hold seminars and lunch-time speeches from potential employers...You can take them your CV and this is the same idea as a university career office, except within the [professional school] it’s just for the [professional school’s] students, so I used them but I didn’t really go through the [university] general career office.

Some participants who utilized career services at their universities and colleges noted particular dissatisfaction with the services they received.

I did one networking workshop there. I didn’t find it very good...It was like she was talking to beginner students, and she spent lots of time explaining what networking was...I was a student at the time, but I knew what networking was. What I needed was to know how to do it.

[A career counselor] came into our classroom for a 50-minute period and explained to us different things that went into a resume and the different kinds of resumes. Fifty minutes, to me, is not enough time... I think what I would like to see done is...they work it into the schedule where she could come in maybe once a week for fifty minutes and speak to the class and get them prepared for it.

Some participants felt that their institutions’ career services centres would be able to assist students with disabilities more effectively if the centres employed career services professionals who specialized in assisting students with disabilities. One interviewee reported that her university already has a career counselor who specializes in assisting students with disabilities. She explained that this provided greater employment opportunities for students with disabilities because employers seeking to

diversify their workforces actively recruited graduating students with disabilities through that counselor.

A lot of [employers] know that he has a database of recently-graduated or soon-to-graduate students with disabilities...so he gets a lot of people asking him for people with disabilities, so it sort of gives us a niche that we can go to.

## **3.2 Disability Service Providers**

### ***Introduction***

From September to November 2002, nine interviews were conducted with university and college staff who provide services to students with disabilities at seven post-secondary institutions in Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto and Halifax.

### ***Staff***

The nine disability service providers reported that they came to their current positions from a variety of educational and employment backgrounds. Academic fields of specialization included psychology, social work, education, communication disorders and anthropology. Some persons had worked in educational settings, research-based organizations, rehabilitation agencies, independent living centers, or for federal and provincial governments. Several respondents had past experience in providing services for people with disabilities, including recreation services. Other interviewees indicated they had no prior background in service provision to students with disabilities before assuming their current positions, but that on-the-job experience had greatly influenced their professional development.

Several respondents were persons with disabilities. One noted that her own disability was important to her preparation to provide services to students with disabilities, while another noted the influence of the independent living philosophy on her personal and professional development.

### ***Disability Services Offices***

The disability services offices where the interviewees worked varied in size and scope from small entities with two or three full time staff to larger departments with more employees and larger budgets. Departments of student affairs hosted the majority of the offices. For the most part, services to students with all types of disabilities were available in one office but some institutions offered services to students with disabilities through several separate units, each specializing in supporting students with particular kinds of disabilities.

Disability services developed differently at each of the nine post-secondary institutions. At one university, services to students with disabilities began in the late 1960s with a focus on providing wheelchair accessible residence units, followed by improved library services for students with visual impairments in the 1970s and supports to students who were deaf and hard of hearing in the 1980s. At one college, a program to support deaf students was launched in the 1970s, with supports to students with all types of disabilities expanded in the 1980s. At one university, one individual began to coordinate provincial educational funding and supports from disability organizations in the community to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the mid-1970s. At another university, an organization of students with disabilities formed in the late 1970s and lobbied the administration for greater campus-wide accessibility and a staff person to assist students with disabilities in meeting their accommodation needs.

Other institutions opened small departments or offices to respond to the support needs of a few students who would have otherwise been unable to participate in post-secondary education, or created supports for individuals with physical, sensory and cognitive disabilities first and then branched out to offer supports to those with psychiatric and learning disabilities following the receipt of additional funding. The development of disability services at two institutions was a more recent phenomenon beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

### ***Accommodations and Supports***

The seven post-secondary institutions in the study provided a wide range of accommodations to meet the needs of students with disabilities, although the extent and nature of these varied with the size of the disability services offices, human and financial resources, number of students to be served and their individualized needs.

A variety of academic and non-academic accommodations were available at all of the participating colleges and universities. Non-academic supports included:

- assistance with registration and orientation to campuses,
- ensuring classes were in accessible locations,
- assistance in obtaining accessible parking,
- providing ergonomic chairs and tables, heating pads, ice packs, etc. and
- helping students complete applications for grants such as Canada Study Grants (formerly Special Opportunities Grants) to meet the extra costs of disability.

Academic accommodations generally centered around exams, tests and assignments, including:

- assistance with registration and orientation to campuses,
- providing scribes for exams, extra time and distraction-free environments in which to write,
- ensuring that deadline extensions on assignments were available where necessary,
- preparing letters of introduction to professors outlining the individualized accommodation needs of students,
- providing sign language and oral interpreting, notetaking, (including computerized notetaking), tutoring services or access to these supports and
- aiding individuals to get textbooks in alternate formats (including tape, braille and computer disk).

All institutions offered assessments for those with suspected learning disabilities and aided these persons to acquire skills to more effectively accommodate to the academic environment. Examples of skill building supports included such things as tutoring, sessions to enhance memory retention and study abilities and assistance in proofreading assignments.

Six of the seven participating universities and colleges outlined the assessment process they use in situations where students suspected they had learning disabilities that were not diagnosed prior to entering post-secondary education. At five of these institutions, assessments were

conducted by psychologists based within disability services offices, student counselling centres or career services, although three interviewees mentioned there was a waiting list for these services. One respondent noted that psychological testing would not be available at his university after April 2003 because a contract with a psychologist had expired and there was insufficient funding to renew it. The sixth institution referred students to a community-based learning disabilities organization for assessment. Two of the five institutions indicated that pre-screening sessions were undertaken to determine if a psychological assessment was indicated. No differences were found between colleges and universities in terms of the procedures they utilized to assess suspected learning disabilities.

All disability services offices assisted students in advocacy efforts to ensure appropriate accommodations were in place, provided referrals to various campus services, and offered awareness workshops to university and community college personnel.

Assistive technology of various types was also provided at all participating facilities, although the extent and nature of this support varied with the institution. Examples of such technology included screen reader, voice recognition, Optical Character Recognition (OCR), and large print software and software to facilitate writing and grammar checks. One university was piloting an innovative use of technology in classrooms that assists students with learning and hearing disabilities.

The majority of institutions had academic accommodation policies outlining the types of supports provided to students with disabilities, but the interviewees reported that these policies were not enforceable. Thus, if faculty were unwilling to provide the appropriate classroom accommodations, it was necessary for individuals with disabilities to initiate an appeal process.

Well, the student could challenge that [refusal to accommodate to their needs] through the advocacy or human rights office but, of course, those things take so long that the class would be over by the time they challenged that. So, in a lot of cases, it's better for the student to try to get into a different class...The impetus is always on the individual to make the change, which is unfair. If we had a

stronger policy, I think that we [disability services office] could do something from our standpoint more effectively.

A number of specific services were available at selected institutions. One disability services office assisted students to obtain keys to key-operated elevators on campus. Two took bookings from those who wished to utilize on-campus transportation systems. One university operated an assisted living program in conjunction with a community organization to facilitate access to attendant care. Another housed a tape library, and two universities operated student mentoring programs, either to offer one-on-one support to students with disabilities or to provide assistance during the transition year from post-secondary education to work or to further study.

Many of the institutions offer mentoring programs.

We have a student mentor program where we match people one-on-one. It's sort of a buddy system, so a new student [is matched] with a student who's been here for a few years. It's really informal and they just sort of meet and keep track of each other and offer support when they need to.

We match students in their transition year with senior students and we just started this year an e-mentoring program for deaf and hard of hearing students, so that they have mentors, but it's online. They have access to e-mail chat and senior deaf and hard of hearing students. That's just like a pilot and it's in its initial stages.

I hire students with psychiatric disabilities to be mentors [for other students with mental health disabilities]. They're absolutely critical jobs, because the program couldn't run without them. They enhance the service, they expand the service. We're so busy here I might not have time to spend time with students that somebody else would, so it's a tremendous asset.

Disability service providers from several facilities reported that they offer specific supports to students with mental health disabilities and other supports to students with learning disabilities. For the most part, however, these were similar to services available to all students with disabilities. One school that offered mentoring had one program for students with mental

health disabilities, and another for students with learning disabilities. Another school offered a mental health speaker series.

We have a once a month meeting for mental health consumers. We bring in a speaker to talk about various issues and then it's also kind of a peer support network.

One college mentioned the availability of a special admissions process for students with disabilities requiring more intensive support.

Basically it's an alternate application opportunity for students who would have been on individualized program plans in their K to 12 system, and require a higher level of support. What the special admissions process does is we bring the students in, we discuss with them career choices, find out the barriers, the challenges they're going to note in a particular program of study and try to make a good fit between the student, their challenges, their strengths, their weaknesses, the program of interest, and make a fit so that they have an increased chance of success. It's an exciting new process that I feel opens the doors for an opportunity for students to acquire a set of skills and competencies that result in an employment situation.

The majority of service providers stated their institutions required documentation of disability to verify the need for accommodations. In most cases, proof of disability was valid only if it came from professional sources (in a few instances, the professionals who had made the original diagnosis). Some facilities offered greater flexibility than others in this regard. Certifying professionals could include medical doctors, ophthalmologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, audiologists, rehabilitation counsellors, social workers, etc. A few institutions accepted documentation from guidance counsellors, community organizations, band councils (in the case of aboriginal students) or other professionals with whom students had worked in the past. Proof of temporary disability was sought from medical doctors, physiotherapists or occupational therapists. In situations where students had suspected learning disabilities but were unable to obtain or afford the appropriate testing, the post-secondary institutions provided or facilitated access to these services. Two institutions did not require documentation in situations where students' disabilities were apparent, although one of them indicated that most students enroll with the necessary proof of disability.



Since the majority of accommodations offered through disability services offices were academic in nature, most respondents stated that students would not require these types of supports following graduation unless they returned to further study. However, most interviewees indicated they provided informal support or advice to the extent that resources would allow. Writing letters to validate the need for disability-related accommodations in employment assessments or workplaces was mentioned most frequently, but one-on-one consultations with disability services personnel were also provided. Most institutions also provided specific transition supports that will be described later in this report.

Respondents felt their respective post-secondary institutions did a good job in supporting students with disabilities within the constraints of human and financial resources.

We are giving one hundred percent support for the students with disabilities that come to [name of institution]. If they ask for it and if they need it, we're going to provide it for them, I mean short of tearing down a whole building. I think if you speak to our students, they would tell you that.... If a student needs interpreting on a social function, our interpreters will provide that support for them. We just go to the limit for them.

I can certainly say that by evidence of the financial support that our unit receives through student and academic services, I think there's a definite commitment on the part of the institution to support students with disabilities. The flexibility and the creativity that I think has also been evidenced by our ability to second academic and non-academic staff to our unit, and some willingness to work some creative options and alternatives in terms of staffing I think are a couple of indications.

Some respondents noted their abilities to provide excellent academic-related accommodations and to undertake outreach on campus and in the community to increase awareness about the existence of their offices.

I think our strengths lie in our accommodation meetings which... empower the student; they provide the student with an opportunity to learn self-advocacy skills to clearly articulate their needs and their abilities to other people. It's an educational opportunity for our faculty

and for others involved, and the reports I get back from faculty have been exceptionally positive that they've learned so much. The number one outcome of that is that we humanize the process. The student moves from being a “student with a disability” to [name] sitting across the table who is a living, breathing human being to everyone involved in the process. I think as long as we maintain sight of that individuality and the need to address supports and accommodations on an individual basis I think we'll be doing well by the students.

I think the other strength that we have and the direction we're going and continue to move in is a fair reality based approach. We understand the holistic approach to accommodation and that involves an effective transitioning process, connecting with agencies within the community to provide support that's required and also making that smooth transition into a work environment.

One respondent indicated that, in situations where requested accommodations were not currently in place, every effort was made to implement the needed services. Others mentioned that accessibility-related committees on campus facilitated increased support for students with disabilities and the commitment of their respective institutions to the provision of disability supports.

We have an institution-wide committee...with representation from all the faculties, from students with disabilities, a couple of reps from student union, a couple of reps from the graduate students association, from the library, from the registrar's office. That committee meets three or four times a year to talk about global campus-wide sorts of issues and we've got three sort of sub-committees that look at education awareness, physical access and the accommodation appeals process.

The majority of interviewees cited the availability of limited human and financial resources which prevented them from doing more to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities. Particular resource gaps were:

- the accessibility of campus infrastructures,

- ability to meet accommodation needs in programs with practicum placements,
- insufficient proctor support for exams and tests,
- attitudinal barriers among some faculty members and service providers and
- inadequate assistive technology at some institutions.

Two respondents mentioned the need for more effective accommodation policies and one noted that more could be done to assist students with disabilities in making the transition from post-secondary education to employment.

I think students need a lot more individualized support especially around employment and career. That doesn't exist. That's definitely an area to improve upon.

Interviewees suggested long-term changes that could improve the way that college and universities support students with disabilities.

Ultimately I believe a unit like this should not exist really, everything that we do in our office is just about adult education, there's no magic in it...The whole notion of making it such an arduous process, I think it speaks more to where we were at societally, in terms of attitudes about people with disabilities and certainly some of those attitudes that continue to be reinforced regarding the appropriateness of people with disabilities attending post-secondary institutions. So ultimately I think there shouldn't be academic accommodations, each student should have access to the supports and the resources that they require.... I guess in the interim step towards not having a unit like this necessarily required in a university might be to relocate accommodation, resources and supports under the auspices of a kind of learning success centre, regardless of what the learning issue is.

In an ideal world, this office wouldn't exist because everybody would be able to accommodate within their classroom. So maybe if we could move more in that direction and our office could take on a more consultative role instead of direct service provision. In the long run I think that would probably be better. But whether that would ever happen, that would be so difficult to implement, and...everybody is struggling for resources, and that would pose an additional burden on

the faculties to pay for those kinds of services and also to make a commitment to those kinds of services. I think that would be the first thing that would be cut, if it were to go that way.

### **3.3 Career and Employment Advisors**

#### ***Introduction***

From September to November 2002, nine interviews were conducted with university and college staff who provide career and/or employment services at seven post-secondary institutions in Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto and Halifax.

#### ***Staff***

The nine interviewees reported that they came to their current positions from a variety of educational and employment backgrounds, including career development, employment counselling, psychology, educational psychology, education, administration, etc. A few had previously worked at post-secondary institutions while others had not. Respondents also mentioned teaching, career counselling, internship placements in disability services offices and a variety of other settings. One noted the value of on-the-job training in the career area, while another stressed the importance of his disability in identifying with the needs of the consumers with whom he worked. As a person living with a disability, he felt his knowledge and personal experience with the job search process stand him in good stead in his current position.

#### ***Career and Employment Services***

Career and employment services to students with disabilities were, for the most part, made available through the general service stream on campus using several different approaches. In some cases, career and employment services were provided by separate units within student affairs, with career support as an integral part of student counselling departments. In others, career and employment services were offered within the same unit or by one individual. In the case of one college, career, employment and disability services were all provided by an educational support centre. At other institutions, disability services offices provided career and

employment supports to students with disabilities, but students were also free to utilize general employment and career services on those campuses.

The nine career and employment service providers described a history of career and employment services at the seven participating post-secondary institutions which covered the 1970s, the 1980s and the 1990s. All but one provided career and employment-related support to students with and without disabilities. The exception served students with disabilities as part of the disability services office.

The majority of career and employment services were housed within student counselling centres of universities and colleges. They began with the provision of a limited number of workshops related to career planning and career inventory testing and later expanded to offer a wider range of services. In the case of one university, career services emerged from an environment which focused primarily on employment recruitment which changed to career planning with the advent of the counselling model. Another facility's career services were originally launched under the provincial department of education and was later taken over by the college.

For the most part, employment services were originally provided by Canada Employment Centres funded by the Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission, the predecessor of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC). When the federal government stopped providing employment services on university and community college campuses in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the post-secondary institutions assumed responsibility for offering these supports.

## **Services**

The seven post-secondary institutions in the study provided a wide range of career and employment services to meet student needs, although the extent and nature of these varied with the size of the units and human and financial resource constraints.

Career services provided by most or all of the participating institutions included:

- individual counselling,
- workshops in career planning and exploration,

- administration of career inventories,
- career and education fairs,
- outreach services to faculties and departments to provide workshops and courses within those settings,
- peer support and
- career resource libraries housing career-related materials.

In some cases, career planning, employability skills and job search services were integrated into the curricula of post-secondary institutions as part of particular departments or faculties. One institution trained volunteers to work with career counsellors to offer workshops to students while several others noted they had web sites containing career and employment resources.

The seven participating universities and colleges offered a wide range of employment-related services, as well. These included:

- job search skills such as resume preparation, marketing (including tapping into hidden markets),
- facilitating networking and employer contacts,
- interview preparation, and
- salary and contract negotiation skills.

All of the institutions had job posting centres and/or provided links on their websites to available jobs. As with career services, several universities and colleges integrated the development of job search skills into their curricula. Two institutions assisted students in assembling portfolios to demonstrate their abilities.

The respondent who provided career-related supports from within his institution's disability services office stated that he also educated employers about the abilities of persons with disabilities and tried to dispel widely-held misconceptions about their capabilities. In addition, he had a database of alumni which facilitated their access to services after graduation.

Most of the participating universities and colleges offered career supports both through individual counselling and in workshop formats. One respondent said that her institution delivered some career services

individually (e.g. resume-critiquing and mock interviews), but explained that her institution preferred to focus on service provision in groups.

With the [individual] counseling model, the sub-text there is really that there's pathology in career and decision-making. It reinforces that notion that "there's a problem here and the problem is you, which is why we have to deal with you on an individual basis."...Most people go through life not really knowing for sure how do we create a life we actually want to live? How do you identify an opportunity when you stumble across it? How do you create an opportunity? We find the group format for that approach much more effective than the one-on-one counselling. So we don't do the one-on-one counselling, although students ask for that, because they assume that—it's the guidance model from high school, so it's that model they're familiar with—but once they go through this, they are actually very happy, because they come out a lot more in control of the next stage than they would be with a problem approach, which we try to avoid.

At some institutions, students were eligible for the full range of career and employment services following graduation, while others placed limits on the types of supports alumni could access or imposed time restrictions on the length of time they would work with individuals who had graduated.

One university did not impose limits on access to career services (with the exception of individual counselling) but stated that employment supports were available up to a year following graduation. Another university provided career assistance up to one semester after graduation prior to instituting a fee for alumni. However, this institution did not charge alumni for employment services.

The bulk of the alumni who use our services are zero to two years out...but we will get students who graduated in 1978 and are making a career change or want assistance with something with their job search. We're looking at increasing our alumni programming at this point, and there's a possibility that there will be a fee for the service.

In still another scenario, fees for alumni were imposed on all services except workshops immediately upon graduation.

## ***Accessibility of Career and Employment Services***

All of the interviewees felt that students with and without disabilities had the same access to career and employment-related supports at their universities and colleges, although the degree of accessibility of these services to students with disabilities varied with the institution.

Career and employment services at all of the participating institutions were:

- housed in wheelchair-accessible locations,
- ASL interpreters were made available through disability services offices to facilitate the participation of deaf students in career and employment workshops, individual interviews with counsellors and employers, the administration of career inventories, etc and
- readers and scribes were also provided on request to assist those who were visually impaired or blind or who had difficulties writing with tasks associated with career inventories and testing, career and employment workshops and so on.

One interviewee reported that her university has the ability to make career test results available in large print. A respondent who conducts career-related workshops indicated he distributed his notes ahead of time to all participants so that they would not need to take notes during the session. These materials were also made available in large print, computer disk or via e-mail to those requiring alternate formats.

The seven universities and colleges housed libraries of career and employment resources but, for the most part, these documents were not available in formats alternative to print.

One college had the ability to scan books and articles for students requiring electronic versions of these items, while a university stated that its career resource library contained videos and tapes related to career exploration which were made available to all students. The disability services office at one facility contained a library of taped textbooks and articles, but career-related materials were not included. One respondent indicated that the top shelves of her institution's career resource library were inaccessible to those using wheelchairs but that this situation would be rectified soon when her department moved to new facilities.



Although the seven institutions noted that on-line career and employment resources were available to all students, the accessibility of those on-line resources varied. At a majority of institutions, assistive technology was not available at career and employment facilities, and students with disabilities accessed on-line career and employment information on adapted computers located in disability services offices.

Six of the seven participating institutions stated that their web sites contained career and employment resources. Four reported that they had made changes to these sites to increase their accessibility to persons with disabilities. One institution mentioned that a designated section of its web site included career and employment resources specifically for students with disabilities.

Three interviewees noted they fostered links with their institutions' disability services offices to provide employment and career information to students with disabilities (e.g. publicizing when particular employers were on campus). One respondent indicated her university was developing a list of "equal opportunity" employers to share with students. Her university also operated an e-mail listserv for students to exchange employment-related information. Three facilities offered awareness workshops to employers. One respondent reported her institution had not made any changes to make career and employment services accessible to students with disabilities but planned to do so in the future.

For the most part, respondents felt their respective post-secondary institutions did a good job of providing career and employment services to students with disabilities, within the constraints of human and financial resources that were present. Positive aspects included:

- the ability to forge links between career, employment and disability service providers,
- the cooperation with disability organizations in the community,
- the fact that services are based on individualized needs and
- the availability of interns to assist with service provision activities.

Offering assistance in portfolio development and providing employer education also facilitated the transition into the workplace.

The whole process of developing a portfolio, whether a person has a disability or not, is highly beneficial to students. Portfolio development gets students to focus on their skills and abilities, so they realize what they can do and how they demonstrate their skills to others. It's a major advantage.

One interviewee stated her university had a long way to go in this regard, as there were no transition services for students with disabilities. "I think we do a good job in terms of accommodating them while they're here, but we do nothing to make the transition from here into the work world a smoother transition."

All respondents identified insufficient staff and financial resources as challenges in terms of the ability to work with students with disabilities and to implement additional career and employment services. Some interviewees noted the difficulties inherent in raising awareness of career and employment services on campus and encouraging people with disabilities to utilize these resources.

The colleges and universities that did not provide transition services mentioned that this created barriers for students with disabilities.

We don't have one person specifically responsible to students with disabilities, and the fact that we don't provide, as a rule, intentional transition services. You could come in as a person with a disability or a non-disabled person and have questions about the transition to work and how you go about that and you're going to get some good advice and resources from our office, but it's not a key program that we focus on.

I think the other thing is that at times students with disabilities don't want to identify that way. They don't have to, but it can make it a challenge in helping somebody with a learning disability if they don't make you aware of that problem, you know, and how to work with them or be considerate of it and so on.

Interviewees noted that some individuals with disabilities lack awareness of the full impact their disabilities have on the job search process (particularly in the case of persons with hidden disabilities) and that this factor brought additional challenges.

There are some students who are a little bit more challenging to work with, but at the same time we kind of work with them to identify a plan of action and maybe instead of a twelve step plan it's a twenty step plan. We might break it down into smaller chunks of action or activity and we find that can work really well if the student follows the plan. I remember a student who had some particular problems and initially when we saw it in a group, we thought he was going to take a lot of time to work with and we even worked with Counseling Services in that particular instance because he needed other assistance as well. But in the end he got a job and it was really rewarding to see that, but it took longer than some of the other students, you know, we just worked with him a little longer.

A respondent at a college said his office implemented an individualized program to work with students with more challenging needs.

We have some students enrolled in our programs for whom the goal isn't necessarily to graduate with a diploma or a certificate, because due to the nature of their disability they aren't able to conquer all the course curriculum. These students develop practical skills and graduate with a Certificate of Accomplishment stating what skills they have developed and demonstrated in their respective program. Employment is a goal for most of our students, but not for all. For some it's to gain a skill set that enables them to be able to function more efficiently in their home environment or become more involved in their community.

Another participant noted:

One big challenge is that we feel that for ethical reasons and other reasons I'm sure as well, that we can't be dragging them back here to access employment related services because you know we want them to work or there's a job that they might qualify for, so there have been times that I knew of students who I felt were qualified, but the policy is that we can't go chasing after them and trying to force them to use the service.

The career and employment service providers suggested a number of things their post-secondary institutions could do to better support students

with disabilities making the transition from university or college to work. These included:

- providing additional human and financial resources,
- increasing coordination between the various units on campus which meet the needs of students with disabilities and
- conducting assessments of student needs to determine the effectiveness of current services and other services that could be added.

A few participants felt that students should be encouraged to embark upon career and transition planning earlier in their post-secondary education.

I think education and connecting with people would be important, which is always a challenge with any group here—trying to get them to career plan earlier. Students typically don't do that, so that's the one thing that comes to mind: what's life going to look like when you're done at university? For a lot of people—and this is the same for people with disabilities—they're not looking that far ahead, and we need to get them to do that to some degree.

One participant felt that greater attention should be given to locating skilled employees for available positions with less emphasis placed on the presence of disabilities.

I think we should continue to seek out employers who are for public sector employment for their philosophy or mission or equal opportunity requirements or finding those employers out there that are interested in the best employee, not just focusing on the person's physical or mental or emotional abilities, and can see the value of the education they bring, the experience they bring, and the value of the employee. That connection is probably the thing that we've begun between our office and [disability services], but could go broader in that there could be more resources and time put to that and to finding grant funding to hire a co-op student or a graduate student to spearhead this effort and move things forward. I think that would be wonderful.

We could certainly be doing more, but then the question comes: do you favour the students with disabilities over the students from

abusive homes or the students that are financially disadvantaged or the students that are struggling with language?

### **3.4 Services Related to School-to-Work Transition**

Most of the disability services providers and career/employment service providers indicated that their institutions offered supports to assist students making the transition from post-secondary education to employment or further study. One disability service provider reported that her university undertook a variety of transition-related initiatives, including providing information about employment opportunities, hiring work study students, meeting with employers to assist in forging links with people with disabilities and formulating partnerships with particular industries to develop internship placements.

We also have an employment liaison group, where we've got employers—major employers from across the province—who come in and look at barriers to employment and help students with those barriers. We have a career mentorship program. Students who are interested in a particular career path can be linked through our career counsellor with people in those fields, and they serve as mentors for them for a year. They meet several times over the course of the year getting advice and direction and finding out more about the career that they're interested in.

One college assisted students in transition by working in partnership with rehabilitation organizations and the federal-provincial Employment Assistance Program For Persons with Disabilities.

That's part of their mandate, so [students] still receive the technological supports, the accommodations in the work situation. What we try to do in the time that our students with disabilities are at the college is to remove any type of dependence on a human being or a system, which isn't going to be usually translated into an employment situation. In many cases that involves the use of technology, so that's employed over the time that they're here and we're able to effectively bridge them into employment by addressing that issue upfront and fostering independence, and then that translates very comfortably into an employment situation...Supports

that move with a student in an educational setting to a work placement is a bonus.

Through a partnership with a government rehabilitation program, the same college also offers wage subsidies to employers who provide work experience opportunities for students with disabilities.

Our faculty and department heads play a large part in connecting with industry. What's unique about college versus a university, is that we do have a strong connection with industry, and so they rely on us to provide them with students for placements... I think our wage subsidy program is another bonus—working at part-time employment while doing their training is part of the wage subsidy program.

The disability services office at one university developed a web-based list of disability-specific organizations (including those that provide employment-related supports) to share with students, as well as a list of federally regulated and employment equity companies in the region. One disability service provider stated her institution was in the beginning stages of planning a transition program. Another indicated she had considered the possibility of providing an employment-related workshop for students with disabilities but had not done so due to insufficient interest.

They've got so much on their plate that looking ahead to the transition into employment is not a priority for them, but I think its to their detriment because that's okay for your first three or four years of school but when you're in your last year of school you really need to be looking ahead.

All of the disability service providers reported they worked together with career and employment service providers on their respective campuses. In some institutions, disability and career/employment services were housed within the same department or worked as part of the same team, which enabled staff to work collaboratively on a regular basis. In another situation, the director of a disability services office also worked part-time in the career and counselling centre to provide staff training, thus creating opportunities to forge linkages between the two areas. Other respondents reported that liaisons between disability and career and employment services were more informal and involved participating in joint workshops, requesting services

from time to time to meet the accommodation needs of specific students and serving on campus-wide committees to increase accessibility.

Career and employment services staff also identified a variety of ways they worked together with their institutions' disability services offices. In some cases, the links were more formalized than others.

One university stated that joint services were provided in the form of individualized counselling and support and initiatives such as services to students with learning disabilities and the creation of lists of equal opportunity employers. Student referrals flowed between the various units, and one staff person worked in both career counselling and disability services. In other scenarios, career, employment and disability services were provided by the same department or team work between the various entities took place on an ongoing basis.

One career/employment service provider described several ways he works in collaboration with his university's disability services office.

Basically I work together with the staff of [disability services] to coordinate things like employer tours. We bring employers on campus. I've done it a bunch of times with a couple of the banks, and some other government people. I coordinated a tour whereby we'd have a couple of staff people demonstrating the uses of different technologies, so that has been useful. That's one way I work together with the [disability services office] and really that's primarily educating employers. Basically, I send out the major recruiting stuff by e-mail. I used to send the same stuff to the [disability services] staff. They'll often send students to me and I'm often there shaking hands, handing out cards. It's one of the exciting things—there have been students that got jobs because of information I sent them, but I never met with them, all I did was shake their hand and get their e-mail address. It's kind of exciting.

Sometimes, the linkages were less formal, e.g. staff of career and/or employment services contacted disability services offices to request student-specific accommodations. One participant mentioned he did not regularly work with the disability services office on his campus around career planning but hoped to collaborate more frequently in the future. He stated that, since a close family member had worked with students with

disabilities on campus, he was more aware of the issues and had not felt the need for ongoing consultation.



## **4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

The 40 students who participated in the first phase of this study provided demographic data (e.g. age, gender, disability, etc.) that indicates the sample was diverse and generally consistent with demographic data pertaining to post-secondary students and people with disabilities in Canada. Although the small sample size prevents us from making generalizations based on the individual experiences of those 40 students, the rich qualitative interview data allows us to identify patterns of experiences encountered by post-secondary students with disabilities.

We found that many of the university and college students with disabilities participating in this longitudinal study encountered significant challenges during their post-secondary educations. Others, however, reported that they encountered few, if any, barriers. These different findings appear to stem in part from different experiences accessing appropriate accommodations: those who were able to access consistent and appropriate supports tended to report fewer problems than those who encountered barriers to obtaining the accommodations they required.

Most of the students said that one of the major factors that contributed to their successes in completing their post-secondary educations was the existence of appropriate supports. These came partially from non-academic sources like families or friends, but also from disability service providers at the students' universities and colleges. The importance of the disability service providers was reinforced by the providers who participated in the study, who felt they did a good job of supporting students with disabilities within existing financial and human resource constraints. Students also reported that, despite the supports of disability service providers, their educational experiences were directly affected by their professors/instructors/teachers, who may or may not facilitate needed accommodations and supports.

Appropriate accommodations and supports are also important in assisting graduating students with disabilities making the transition from post-secondary education to work. No formal transition services existed for students with disabilities at the seven post-secondary institutions that officially participated in this study. However, disability services and/or career and employment services staff at a few schools indicated that they

were informally providing services intended to encourage successful transitions for students with disabilities. In some cases, disability service providers offered career and employment services to students with disabilities. In others, disability services and career/employment services offices jointly offered some transition services to students with disabilities. The absence of formal transition services for graduating students with disabilities indicates an opportunity for more work in this area.

There was a significant difference between students, and career and employment service providers, in their perceptions of how useful post-secondary career and employment services were for students with disabilities. Most of the students who participated in the first phase of this study made little or no use of these services, either because they were not aware the services existed, they found them unhelpful, or because they obtained career and employment services from disability service providers.

Career and employment service providers, however, felt the services they provided were equally accessible to students with and without disabilities, and that they did a good job of providing career and employment supports to students with disabilities. In describing their services and supports, many of the career and employment service providers overlooked how at least some of their services were inaccessible to different groups of students with disabilities. For example, most career/employment centre library resources were not available in multiple formats for students with print disabilities. As well, assistive technology many students with visual or learning disabilities utilize to access the World Wide Web and other on-line resources were not available at most career and employment services offices.

This report describes the findings of the first phase of a longitudinal study of the experiences of students with disabilities as they make the transition from post-secondary education to work. The students participating in the study had just graduated, or were about to graduate, at the time they were interviewed during Phase 1. As such, this report tells more about their experiences as post-secondary students than about their experiences moving from school to work, because most were just in the initial stages of that transition. In Phase 2 of the study, we will interview the students (now all graduates) approximately one year after graduation. We expect that those interviews will yield new insights about the transition from school to work for post-secondary students with disabilities. The findings of this

Phase 1 report will provide valuable background data for assessing different transition experiences we expect to encounter in Phase 2. We expect the study participants to offer fresh insights about the factors that support successful transitions, as well as obstacles that impede successful transitions. Those insights will provide ideas for improving accommodation, career, employment and transition services for post-secondary students with disabilities in Canada.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Consent Form (Students)**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (*print name*) agree to take part in the research project entitled “Students with Disabilities – Transition from Post-Secondary Education to Work.” I understand that the purpose of this study is to document the post-secondary education experiences of students with disabilities who graduate in 2002. This study is expected to be the first phase of a longitudinal study that will track the school-to-work transition experiences of students/graduates with disabilities one and two years after graduation.

I understand that this research is being conducted by the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS) and is funded by the federal government’s Office for Disability Issues, which is part of Human Resources Development Canada.

I understand that participating in the study means that I will be interviewed about my experiences as a person with disabilities attending a college or university. The interview will last approximately one to two hours. I will be asked questions about the reasons I successfully completed my post-secondary program, what obstacles I encountered, how well my university or college education has prepared me for employment, the impact of on-campus support services for students with disabilities, the impact of student work experiences (e.g. summer jobs, internships, co-op placements) and the impact of institutional financial supports (e.g. scholarships, bursaries, teaching and research assistantships). I will also be asked to complete a questionnaire about my gender, age, marital status, income, and disability. Later in the study, I will be asked to review and comment on a preliminary report of the findings.

I understand that the interview will be tape recorded to allow the researchers to review and transcribe my answers. The audiocassette will be erased after my interview has been transcribed. I understand that my name, personal characteristics or other information that could reveal my identity will not be included in the research report or other publications without my written permission.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time by writing to the researchers at the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies. I also know that I may refuse to answer any questions.

I understand that I will receive a \$50 honorarium for being interviewed and a \$50 honorarium for reviewing and commenting on a preliminary report of the findings of the study.

I understand that if I have any further questions about the study, I can contact the researchers at CCDS. If I have ethical concerns about the project, I can contact the Chairperson of CCDS's Research Committee. CCDS's contact information is listed on the front page of this form.

I agree to participate in this study.

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PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

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DATE

---

MAILING ADDRESS

---

CITY

PROVINCE

POSTAL CODE

---

AREA CODE TELEPHONE NUMBER

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E-MAIL ADDRESS

COPY ONE TO PARTICIPANT  
COPY TWO TO CCDS



## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Consent Form (Disability Service Providers)**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (*print name*) agree to take part in the research project entitled “Students with Disabilities – Transition from Post-Secondary Education to Work.” I understand the purpose of this study is to document the post-secondary education experiences of students with disabilities who graduate in 2002. This study is expected to be the first phase of a longitudinal study that will track the school-to-work transition experiences of students/graduates with disabilities one and two years after graduation.

I understand that this research is being conducted by the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS) and is funded by the federal government’s Office for Disability Issues, which is part of Human Resources Development Canada.

I understand that participating in the study means that I will be interviewed about my experiences as an employee of a university or college support service for students with disabilities. The interview will last approximately one to two hours. I will be asked questions about factors that help post-secondary students with disabilities successfully complete their programs, obstacles they encounter, how well their university or college education prepares them for employment, the impact of on-campus support services for students with disabilities, the impact of student work experiences (e.g. summer jobs, internships, co-op placements) and the impact of institutional financial supports (e.g. scholarships, bursaries, teaching and research assistantships).

I understand that the interview will be tape recorded to allow the researchers to review and transcribe my answers. The audiocassette will be erased after my interview has been transcribed. I understand that my name, institution, personal characteristics or other information that could reveal my identity will not be included in the research report or other publications without my written permission.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw from the study at any time by writing to the researchers at the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies. I also know I may refuse to answer any questions.

I understand that if I have any further questions about the study, I can contact the researchers at CCDS. If I have ethical concerns about the project, I can contact the Chairperson of CCDS's Research Committee. CCDS's contact information is listed at the top of this form.

I agree to participate in this study.

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PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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UNIVERSITY/COLLEGE \_\_\_\_\_ ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

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CITY \_\_\_\_\_ PROVINCE \_\_\_\_\_ POSTAL CODE \_\_\_\_\_

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TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **Consent Form (Career/Employment Advisors)**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (*print name*) agree to take part in the research project entitled “Students with Disabilities – Transition from Post-Secondary Education to Work.” I understand the purpose of this study is to document the post-secondary education experiences of students with disabilities who graduate in 2002. This study is expected to be the first phase of a longitudinal study that will track the school-to-work transition experiences of students/graduates with disabilities one and two years after graduation.

I understand that this research is being conducted by the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS) and is funded by the federal government’s Office for Disability Issues, which is part of Human Resources Development Canada.

I understand that participating in the study means that I will be interviewed about my experiences as a provider of career and employment counseling services to university or college students/graduates. The interview will last approximately one to two hours. I will be asked questions about employment and career counseling services my college/university provides to students/graduates, and my experiences providing employment and career counseling services to students/graduates who have disabilities.

I understand that the interview will be tape recorded to allow the researchers to review and transcribe my answers. The audiocassette will be erased after my interview has been transcribed. I understand that my name, institution, personal characteristics or other information that could reveal my identity will not be included in the research report or other publications without my written permission.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time by writing to the researchers at the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies. I also know that I may refuse to answer any questions.

I understand that if I have any further questions about the study, I can contact the researchers at CCDS. If I have ethical concerns about the

project, I can contact the Chairperson of CCDS's Research Committee. CCDS's contact information is listed at the top of this form.

I agree to participate in this study.

_____ PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE		_____ DATE
_____ UNIVERSITY/COLLEGE		_____ ADDRESS
_____ CITY	_____ PROVINCE	_____ POSTAL CODE
_____ TELEPHONE		_____ E-MAIL

## APPENDIX 4

### Demographic Questionnaire (Students)

Please complete this questionnaire either by (1) hand-writing your answers on a printed copy or (2) entering your answers into the document file on a computer and printing it when you are finished. Please bring the completed questionnaire to your interview.

1. Are you \_\_\_\_\_ female or \_\_\_\_\_ male?

2. How old are you?

- \_\_\_\_\_ under 25
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25-34
- \_\_\_\_\_ 35-44
- \_\_\_\_\_ 45-54
- \_\_\_\_\_ 55-64
- \_\_\_\_\_ 65 or older

3. What is your marital status?

- \_\_\_\_\_ single
- \_\_\_\_\_ married/common-law
- \_\_\_\_\_ divorced
- \_\_\_\_\_ separated
- \_\_\_\_\_ widowed

4. Do you have children under the age of 18 who live with you?

- \_\_\_\_\_ yes (If yes, please list their ages: \_\_\_\_\_)
- \_\_\_\_\_ no

5. From which of the following sources did you receive personal income in 2001 (check as many as apply):

- \_\_\_\_\_ employment
- \_\_\_\_\_ student awards, grants, fellowships, etc. (not loans)
- \_\_\_\_\_ provincial government income assistance
- \_\_\_\_\_ Canada Pension Plan
- \_\_\_\_\_ private insurance
- \_\_\_\_\_ other (describe \_\_\_\_\_)

6. In 2001, what was your gross personal income from all sources?

- under \$10,000
- \$10,000 to \$24,999
- \$25,000 to \$49,999
- \$50,000 to \$74,999
- \$75,000 or over

7. In 2001, what was your gross household income from all sources?

- under \$10,000
- \$10,000 to \$24,999
- \$25,000 to \$49,999
- \$50,000 to \$74,999
- \$75,000 or over

8. What is/are the name(s) of your impairment(s) or medical condition(s) that is/are associated with the disabilities you experience? (e.g. blindness, chemical sensitivity, diabetes, dyslexia, mental illness, multiple sclerosis, quadriplegia, stroke)

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9. In which of the following activities do you experience disability? (check as many as apply)

- hearing
- learning
- mental health
- mobility
- speaking
- vision
- other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_
- other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_
- other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX 5**

### **Interview Guide for Graduating Students**

#### 1. Overview of Education

What program did you graduate from?

What were the major factors that led you to choose [name of program]?

Was disability a factor in your choice?

While you were a student, did you formally disclose your disability or disabilities to any staff of [name of university or college]?

If yes: Can you tell me a bit about your experiences disclosing your disability?

If no: Were there any reasons you didn't disclose your disability?

Do you expect to continue your post-secondary education in the future?

If yes: What are your plans for continuing your education?

#### 2. Reasons for Success

What do you think are the main reasons you successfully completed the [name of program]?

#### 3. Obstacles

Did you encounter any obstacles related to your disabilities while you were a student?

If participant has difficulty thinking of obstacles, ask about the following obstacles: physical accessibility, technological barriers, attitudinal barriers, access to human supports and other accommodations, access to financial resources, transportation.

#### 4. Employment

What are your immediate employment goals?

What are your long-term career ambitions?

Do you need any workplace accommodations?

If yes: What accommodations do you need?

How well do you feel your education has prepared you for employment?

Have you used any career services provided by [college/university]?

If yes: What impact have these services had on your job search?  
(prompts: Have these services helped you? How? Have they hindered you in any way? Would you like to see anything done differently?)

If no: What are the reasons you haven't accessed these services?

#### 5. Disability Services

Did you make use of the disability support services provided by [name of university or college] while you were a student?

If yes: What impact did these services have on your ability to successfully complete your education? (prompts: Did these services help you? How? Did they hinder you in any way? Would you like to see anything done differently?)

If no: What were the reasons you didn't access these services?

#### 6. Institutional Supports

Did you receive any institutional financial supports like scholarships, fellowships, bursaries, teaching assistantships, or research assistantships?

If yes: What impact did these supports have on you successfully completing your education?



If no: Did you encounter any obstacles to obtaining institutional supports because of your disabilities?

## 7. Student Employment

Did you have any jobs or work experiences when you were a student? (e.g. summer jobs, internships, co-op placements, volunteer work?)

If no: Did you encounter any obstacles to participating in student jobs or work experiences related to your disabilities?

If yes: Tell me about [insert the student jobs/work experiences the participant names]. What impact did they have on completing your education and your post-graduation employment prospects?

## 8. Miscellaneous

Those are all of my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add?

## 9. Wrap-up

Thank you for taking the time for this interview. During the summer, I will be analyzing the data from all of the interviews I do. Other researchers in Calgary, Winnipeg, and Halifax will be doing the same. In the fall, the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies will contact you about reading and giving them comments on a preliminary report of the findings of this phase of the study. If this phase of the study is successful, the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies expects to receive funding to do follow-up interviews with all of the study participants approximately one and two years from now.

You will receive a \$50 honorarium cheque in the mail within four weeks.

## **APPENDIX 6**

### **Interview Guide for Disability Service Providers**

1. Tell me about the history of disability services at [name of institution].
2. What is your background in providing services to post-secondary students with disabilities?
- 3.a. What supports and accommodations can students with disabilities access at [name of institution]?
- 3.b. Who is eligible to access these services?
- 3.c. Are students eligible to access these services after they graduate? If yes: What services can they access?
4. In what ways do you think your institution does a good job of supporting and accommodating students with disabilities?
5. Are there any ways you think your institution should be doing more to support and accommodate students with disabilities? If yes, describe.
- 6.a. What services does your institution offer graduating students to assist them in making the transition to employment?
- 6.b. Do students with disabilities have the same access to these services as students without disabilities?
- 6.c. Are there any transition-oriented services specifically for graduating students with disabilities?
7. In what ways, if any, do you and other disability service providers at [name of institution] work together with career and employment advisors on your campus?

## **APPENDIX 7**

### **Interview Guide for Career and Employment Advisors**

1. Tell me about the history of career and employment services at [name of institution].
2. What is your background in providing career and employment services to post-secondary students?
3. What services does [name of institution] offer to assist graduating students make the transition to employment?
4. Are students eligible to access these services after they graduate? If yes: What services can they access?
5. Do students with disabilities have the same access to these services as students without disabilities?
6. Has your [university/college] made any changes to make career and employment services more accessible to students with disabilities?
7. Does [name of institution] offer any transition-oriented services specifically for graduating students with disabilities?
8. In what ways do you think your institution does a good job of supporting students with disabilities make the transition to employment?
9. Do you encounter any difficulties or challenges that make it difficult for you to support students with disabilities making the transition to employment?
10. Are there any ways you think your institution should be doing more to assist students with disabilities make the transition to employment? If yes, describe.
11. In what ways, if any, do you and other career and employment advisors at [name of institution] work together with the staff of your institution's disability services or special needs office?