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State of the Schools

Report on the State of Canadian Post-
Secondary Education and Accessibility

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NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DISABLED STUDENTS

Report on the State of Canadian Post-Secondary Education and Accessibility

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National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS)



**National Educational Association
of Disabled Students**
Association nationale des étudiant(e)s
handicapé(e)s au niveau postsecondaire

About NEADS

The National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) was founded in 1986 with the mandate of supporting full access to education and employment for post-secondary students and graduates with disabilities across Canada.

NEADS is a consumer-controlled, cross-disability charitable organization that represents its constituents through projects, research, publications, resources, and partnerships. NEADS' work is centered around three core strategic program areas: student debt reduction, student experience in class and on campus, and student and graduate employment.

To improve opportunities in higher education and the labour market for persons with disabilities, NEADS collaborates with post-secondary stakeholders, other non-governmental organizations, employers, disability service providers, and community members.

NEADS also offers a National Student Awards Program, consisting of the \$3000 NEADS National Student Awards Program, the \$1000 Holly Bartlett Memorial Award, and the \$1000 Christine Nieder Memorial Award. This program supports students with disabilities in post-secondary education, and aims to address the financial barriers students with disabilities disproportionately face in accessing education.

NEADS Websites

www.neads.ca www.disabilityawards.ca www.disabilityrightsonline.ca
www.breakingitdown.neads.ca

NEADS Social Media

@MyNeeds on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#)

[LinkedIn](#): <https://www.linkedin.com/company/805448>

[Mailing List Sign-Up](#): <https://neads.us3.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=2f5ea1e24363b139a88883ccc&id=3d194222db>

A Note from the Author, Elizabeth C. Mohler

The State of the Schools reports are made possible by the NEADS VirtualAccess4All Project, a two-year project empowering students with disabilities to successfully navigate the transition to post-secondary education. The quarterly State of the Schools reports aim to provide information on current trends and changes in post-secondary education, particularly those caused by the ongoing COVID19 pandemic. In this inaugural report, we lay out FAQs on successful transitions; what it means to be a strong self-advocate; and discuss different types of post-secondary education. Wherever you are on your personal academic journey, we hope you find this resource helpful and engaging.

Executive Summary

Research on 100 post-secondary institutions was undertaken to help determine answers to the following questions:

1. Does this school have a dedicated web page just for students with disabilities?
2. Does this school post its official policy on students with disabilities?
3. Does this school mention specific disabilities, or categories of disabilities, by name in any of its documentation?

The study found, first, that public colleges and universities are, overwhelmingly, doing an excellent job of providing information for students with disabilities on their websites, whereas private schools are not doing as well. Second, public schools are more likely than private ones to post accessibility and academic accommodation

policies on their institutional websites. Finally, three-quarters of public institutions, but only one-quarter of private ones, mention specific disability categories in their web materials; this is important, because such mentions are a good indicator that students should expect accommodations to be readily available for those disabilities. The broader implications of this study are:

- a. That both public and private schools need to do a better job of making accessibility policies and procedures available to students, their families, and their guidance counselors; and
- b. That, overall, public schools are doing a better job than private schools of publishing student disability services information on their websites.

Introduction

In the pre-pandemic days, summer was a time when recent high-school graduates prepared for the transition to post-secondary education, such as career training, community college, or a four-year university. This preparation has always been more fraught with challenges for students with disabilities. However, the stress and anxiety that came with the COVID-19 pandemic mean that now, more than ever before, students need easy-to-find information about infrastructural and academic supports for disabilities *before* they choose where to continue their education.

In this, the first of a series of quarterly reports on the state of accessibility services in Canadian post-secondary institutions, the focus is on students themselves and their experiences of Canadian schools' student-facing documentation (i.e., websites). This

report details research on a sample of 100 Canadian post-secondary institutions selected from all ten provinces and three territories. The data set includes both public and private colleges and universities, as well as some trade schools and academies. Please note that compiling these data on every post-secondary institution in Canada was outside the scope of this research project. It is hoped that future updates will be able to do so.

The transition from high school to post-secondary education can be puzzling and even difficult for any student. For students with disabilities, this transition can be made more difficult when post-secondary institutions make it challenging to find information on how to obtain services and accommodations. The National Education Association of Disabled Students hopes to even the playing field for transitioning students by supplying the following report on accessibility in Canadian post-secondary schools.

Accessibility means different things to different students. For some, it means removing physical barriers to campus buildings and student housing. For others, it means assistive technologies or mental health supports. At this crucial period in young people's lives, it is crucial that these support systems be put in place to assist students in meeting their educational and career goals.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought accessibility issues into sharper focus, particularly as home and online schooling, isolation from friends and teachers, and the loss of district-provided services continue to challenge our youth. As students transition to college age, it is important to note that young people aged 15–24 are more likely to experience mental-health-related disabilities than any other age group in Canada. At the same time, three out of five students with disabilities have a mental health-related

disability, and rates of anxiety and depression have only risen since the start of the pandemic. The more severe a student's disability, the less likely that student is to become employed after completing secondary education.

Working in concert with students and their families, high-school support personnel, post-secondary services personnel, and employers, NEADS hopes to provide guidance that will aid students with disabilities and their families in choosing the best post-secondary options to meet their career and life goals.

Objective



The objective of this study is to collect data to aid transitioning students in answering these questions:

- How does the post-secondary system work?
- Where can I go to find accessibility support?
- What is a suitable approach to self-advocacy?
- What are my rights at a given school?

To begin to answer these larger questions, the website of each school in the sample was searched for answers to these three questions:

1. Does this school have a dedicated web page just for students with disabilities?
2. Does this school post its official policy on students with disabilities?

3. Does the school mention specific disabilities, or categories of disabilities, by name in any of its documentation?

Methodology



A representative sample list of 100 colleges and universities was compiled from list pages on Wikipedia. The research method used to analyze each school's student disability services (SDS) web presence involved Google searches for each school's website, followed by keyword searches targeting the keywords most likely to be used by students or their parents/guardians to search the website for SDS information. These keywords and phrases included the following:

- Accessibility
- Disability/disabilities
- Student support
- Student services
- Accommodations

In cases where no results using these terms could be found, a search for “Policy/Policies” or “University Policy” was performed, and the list of documents was scanned for text related to students with disabilities, academic accommodations, or accessibility.

An interesting issue arose during searches on French-language sites: When entering search terms into the search bar of a French-language university, it was found that the

search function did not translate the English term into French for the search, and it often returned no results. This problem was consistent for French-only websites, even when the school's search engine was powered by Google. Google would automatically translate the pages and results from French into English, but would not translate the search terms. Therefore, the terms "handicap" and "politique" were used, which garnered much more information.

Another interesting issue arose when a school utilized a web layout that "buried" the search bar in a separate menu not immediately visible on the landing page. This design feature often made it difficult to immediately determine where and how to even search the school's website, let alone locate needed documents. Fortunately, this issue arose only infrequently, but it is likely it would be daunting to some students with disabilities where it does occur.

Data were collected into an Excel spreadsheet, with columns for each of the following items: name of institution, location, province/territory, public/private, *url* of disability services page (if any), *url* of university policy or handbook on accessibility, and six categories of disability: physical/motor, intellectual/learning, psychiatric/mental, visual, hearing, and neurological. Initially, each of those six columns was checked only when specific mention of a particular disability type was made on the student-centered pages; however, after scanning several policy documents, it was discovered that many mention these categories, so credit was then given to any institution that mentioned then, even if the only mention of a given disability type occurred only in a policy document.

Once data collection was complete, the Excel file was moved into Tableau Desktop, enabling the researcher to drill down into the data visually in an interactive and immediate way. Several sheets were created for analysis, including an interactive map of Canada showing school locations; an interactive table sorting schools by province/territory and whether they are private or public; and another interactive table with schools sortable by province/territory and including the website links to both the student-focused and institutional policy documents.



Results

This section summarizes the results of the 100-institution study, breaking them into several categories: public vs. private institutions, ease of locating a web page directed at students with disabilities, and whether an institution publicly posts its policies and procedures regarding students with disabilities.

Public vs. Private Institutions

Table 1 illustrates a breakdown by province/territory of public vs. private universities, indicating the number of institutions that feature a student-facing student disability services (SDS) web presence.

Table 1. Do public and private schools offer student-facing websites for students with disabilities?

Province or Territory	Number of Public Schools	No. (%) with student-facing SDS page	Number of Private Schools	No. (%) with student-facing SDS page
Alberta	7	7 (100%)	5	5 (100%)
British Columbia	11	11 (100%)	4	2 (50%)
Manitoba	5	5 (100%)	3	2 (67%)
New Brunswick	4	4 (100%)	5	1 (20%)
Newfoundland and Labrador	1	1 (100%)	0	-
Northwest Territories	1	0	0	-
Nova Scotia	8	8 (100%)	0	-
Nunavut	1	0	0	-
Ontario	23	22 (96%)	3	2 (67%)
Prince Edward Island	1	1 (100%)	0	-
Quebec	15	13 (87%)	0	-
Saskatchewan	2	2 (100%)	0	-
Yukon Territory	1	1 (100%)	0	-
TOTALS	80	77 (96%)	20	12 (60%)

Why is this information important? These data tell us that public colleges and universities are, overwhelmingly, doing an excellent job of providing information for students with disabilities on the school's website. However, it should be noted that some pages were easier to find than others; in fact, some SDS web pages appear in the institution's home page menu, for example, under "Students."

On the other hand, whereas many private institutions also provide this information, quite a few do not. It is worth pointing out that private institutions, including career colleges, universities, and professional licensing bodies, are also subject to provincial laws and policies (e.g., the Ontario Human Rights Code) governing accessibility.

Regardless of provincial codes, it is in each institution's best interests to provide reasonable accommodations for its students, particularly now that more students with disabilities than ever before are attending post-secondary schools.

Publication of Accessibility Policy at the Institution

Another question asked by this research is whether colleges and universities make available, and easy to find, their policies on accessibility and academic accommodations.

This study found that a handful of institutions include links to Policies and Procedures right on the SDS web page; however, this is not the norm across the data set. More often, a search was required, and too often, it was necessary to read (or keyword-search) policies to see whether they might contain references to students with disabilities, accessibility, or academic accommodations.

One caveat: It is possible that the researcher missed some policies because the documents were buried too deeply in the site's structure or were not properly indexed for search capability. PDF documents, in particular, may be unsearchable if they were created using a version of Adobe Acrobat that does not automatically index text. Any document posted as an image is not searchable. These issues impact the site's accessibility to students as well as to the researcher and should be reported. The researcher's limited skills in French may also have contributed to some missed policies; one recommendation is therefore that French-language institutions consider SDS information accessibility as part of their translation process.

It is vital that students, parents/guardians, and guidance counselors be able to quickly locate a post-secondary school's accessibility and accommodation policies, so that students and their families can make educated choices about their higher education.

Research indicates that public schools are more likely than private to post their accessibility and academic accommodation policies on their institutional websites with only 87.5% of public schools and 60% of private schools. What is clear from this analysis is that public schools are more likely than private to post their accessibility and academic accommodation policies on their institutional websites; however, the fact that only 87.5% of public schools and 60% of private schools do so is concerning. Students and their families should be able to locate this information quickly and easily on a school's website.

One caveat: The only public school in Ontario without a published policy is the French-language Université de l'Ontario Français, which may indicate that the researcher's limited French skills are again an issue.

Mention of Specific Disabilities or Categories of Disabilities

For the purposes of this study, disabilities were broken down into six categories, based on the most frequently appearing categories on school websites: physical, intellectual/learning, psychiatric/mental health, visual, hearing, and neurological (e.g., ADHD). Some schools' websites mentioned only some of these, but most of the school websites that mentioned disabilities by name covered all six categories. Table 3 illustrates these findings broken down by province/territory.

Table 3: Do public and private schools mention specific disability types?

Province or Territory	Number of Public Schools	No. (%) mentioning specific disabilities	Number of Private Schools	No. (%) mentioning specific disabilities
Alberta	7	6 (86%)	5	2 (40%)
British Columbia	11	10 (91%)	4	1 (25%)
Manitoba	5	4 (80%)	3	0
New Brunswick	4	2 (50%)	5	0
Newfoundland and Labrador	1	1 (100%)	0	-
Northwest Territories	1	0	0	-
Nova Scotia	8	6 (75%)	0	-
Nunavut	1	0	0	-
Ontario	23	15 ¹ (65%)	3	2
Prince Edward Island	1	1 (100%)	0	-
Quebec	15	11 ² (73%)	0	-
Saskatchewan	2	2 (100%)	0	-
Yukon Territory	1	1 (100%)	0	-
TOTALS	80	59 (74%)	20	5 (25%)

¹ Royal Military College mentions learning disabilities but no other specific disability; therefore, it was coded as not mentioning.

² Two schools mention mental health issues but no other disability; therefore, they were coded as not mentioning.

The analysis above shows that 74% of public institutions and 25% of private ones do mention specific disability categories in their web materials; such mentions are a good indicator that students should expect accommodations to be readily available for those disabilities mentioned (and should be ready to point out that specific mention if accommodations are not forthcoming). Due to the limits of sites' internal search engines, it is possible that some documents or mentions were missed; these limitations would likely mean that students would also miss these documents or mentions.



Question 1: How Does the Post-Secondary System

Work in Canada?

Once you, as a Canadian student, graduate high school, you are faced with a choice: continue your education or try to find a job with your high school diploma.

Types of Post-Secondary Education

Obtaining a four-year university degree is far from the only option; in fact, there are well-paying jobs in Canada that require only a high-school diploma. However, these careers tend to require physical labor or long periods away from home. According to CanadianVisa.org, examples of well-paying careers such as this include firefighter (with CPR and first aid certifications), long-haul truck driver (with the proper license and training), construction manager (with additional trade certification and two years' experience), web designer or developer (but you'll need to prove you have experience), pilot (with proper training and licensing), and real estate agent (again, with certification and testing).

Of course, many jobs exist in the service sector in fields such as public health, financial services, education, hospitality, entertainment, and mass media, though the better-paying careers require more education.

Going to a university may be your (or your parents') plan. However, you should be aware that a four-year university is not the right choice for every student (or every student as soon as they graduate). Other Canadian post-secondary options include

trade schools and community (usually two-year) colleges, which may offer a quicker path to employment for some. Trade schools focus on one trade only, such as culinary skills or art. If you think you may want to focus just on a job skill and skip liberal arts requirements, a trade school may be right for you. Community colleges offer a range of opportunities, from specialized two-year or “associate’s” degrees to programs intended to prepare students for future transfer to a four-year institution. An associate’s degree generally requires about sixty hours of coursework, which is why they are considered two-year degrees.

Public and private universities generally offer four-year, or bachelor’s, degrees in a wide range of subjects; these degrees generally include both theory and practical courses, as well as courses outside the student’s “major” (chosen field of study—for example, business administration or chemistry). These outside courses are often called “gen eds” (short for general education courses) because they serve to give each student a well-rounded or “general” education to prepare them for engaged citizenship and critical thinking as well as a career. What this means is that you may choose to major in, say, mathematics, but you’ll still need to take an English composition course, a couple of science courses, some social science, some arts, and possibly some language. You’ll normally have a range of courses from which to choose to fulfill these “gen ed” requirements. The beauty of “gen eds” is that they expose you to subjects you may never have thought would be interesting; it’s not unusual for someone to start university in one major and change to another based on their experience in a “gen ed” class. You also have the opportunity to meet a diverse group of people with different interests from your own.

Public v. Private Institutions

What is the difference between public and private schools?

Public schools are generally funded by the provincial or territorial government, with any remainder funded by tuition fees (paid by you). The federal government also contributes to public school funding, as do research grants written by professors and departments.

On the other hand, a private university is funded in part by endowments, but largely by you, the student. An investment in a private university education can be a hefty one, but for some students and families, it is the right choice due to the (usually) smaller class sizes, personalized attention, close-knit community, merit scholarships, and academic excellence (at least, according to their proponents). However, these schools are of course more demanding of their students and are harder to get into.

If you prefer a school that is more diverse, a public college or university may be for you. As well as attracting a more diverse population from all walks of life, public colleges and universities also tend to have slightly lower admission standards, so if you prefer a less competitive school (or your parent isn't a legacy at a private school), public may be the way to go. If you are worried about the reputation of your school and its degree, private schools have generally had bigger clout in the job market, but this, too, is changing. What this means is that your degree from affordable Memorial in St. John's, NL, may be just as meaningful as one from ivy-league McGill in Sherbrooke, QC.

What if you want your education to be affiliated with a church or religious tradition? Most religious post-secondary schools in Canada are private, so you will generally be at

a smaller school with stricter rules and expectations. In addition to your normal major, you'll likely take courses in religious studies, as well, and many require students to regularly attend services.

Post-Secondary Education in Quebec

Now, everything you just read changes if you're a resident of Quebec. In Quebec, you may leave school after grade 11 and move on to *cégep*, a French acronym that stands for *Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel*. Quebec has 48 of these professional schools, according to SRAM (Service régional d'admission du Montréal métropolitain). Your studies will earn you a DCS or Diploma of College Studies, which may enable you to enter the workforce or continue your studies at a university. According to SRAM, more than 85% of *cégep* graduates from technical programs find employment within the first year of graduation.

Getting Started

The next step for you as a student is to begin researching schools. The information collected for this study will help you in this process. It is a good idea to choose at least three schools to apply to, in case your first or second choice doesn't work out. While you are doing this, make sure you have prepared in other ways, as well:

- Get access to your high school transcripts (usually, they will need to be sent to your school choices directly from your high school).

- For competitive schools or programs, you may need to compose a resume or personal statement, and you may need to collect reference letters from former teachers and others who know your study skills and educational goals.
- If you have been home-schooled, you may need to produce a portfolio in addition to the documents listed above, and you may need to show evidence of preparedness by taking a standardized test such as the SAT, ACT, or AP. You may also need to attend admission interviews. According to University Admissions in Canada, universities prefer to accept “homeschooled students who present a typical senior year of provincially accredited high school courses, whether or not they have actually earned the complete diploma.”

It is also important, however, to determine whether the schools you want to attend have sufficient accommodations for your disabilities. The [NEADS](#) website offers information that will guide you through this process, including links to student services at 100 post-secondary schools. The next section discusses this issue in more detail.

Question 2: Where Can I Go to Find Accessibility



Support?

Although no federal legislation exists that covers accessibility in education, every Canadian province and territory has some form of policy on record. Unfortunately, these policies differ in several ways, such as how they define inclusion, how they practice inclusion, and how they fund inclusion (Towle, 2015, p. 5). This means that where you

live has some bearing on how you will experience post-secondary education with a disability.

Many young people just like you are going to college or university: one study (Levine, et al., 2004) found that 80% of individuals with some kind of disability have post-secondary education as their goal, and the Canadian University Survey Consortium (2019) reports that from 2010 to 2019, the percentage of students with disabilities who were in their first year of university went from 9% (2010) to 22% (2019). This is great news.

What you may not be aware of, however, is that you will likely not receive the same exact accommodations you did in high school. Universities and colleges will treat you as an adult and expect you to advocate for yourself; they will not hand you any accommodations on a “silver platter.” This is important because at least one study suggests that losing high school accommodations when transitioning to post-secondary school may result in poorer performance (Parsons, et al., 2021).

A study by Dong and Lucas (2016) found that at one university with 715 students identifying as having a disability, just 21% of those requested any accommodations. Trammell (2003) found that students with learning, neurological, or mental health disabilities did much better if they requested accommodations; of those who failed to do so, more than 15% ended up dropping out of school. Therefore, it is vital that you waste no time in contacting your school’s Student Disability Services (SDS) coordinator as soon as you receive your acceptance letter and make your decision to matriculate (enroll in classes) there.

The good news is that the majority of the 100 post-secondary schools we studied have SDS information readily available for you right on their website. This is especially the case for public schools. For example, of the twelve schools researched in Alberta, *all* of their websites feature at least one web page (if not several) dedicated to students with disabilities.

Private schools are much less likely to feature student disability services on a dedicated web page. This includes, for example, four of the five private schools in New Brunswick. What does this mean for you if you want to attend a private school? You'll likely need to make some phone calls or send some emails. Of the schools that do not maintain a dedicated page for students with disabilities, many do provide contact information for some sort of official who will help you. If your school of choice does not have this information ready, call the school's general information line and have someone transfer you to the appropriate person. Just be sure to do this before you make your final decision. You want a school that prioritizes giving you the support you need.



Question 3: What is a Suitable Approach to Self-Advocacy?

As stated earlier, you will experience some differences when you embark on a post-secondary education—primarily that you will not simply slide into your new place with

your high school accommodations intact. It is very likely you will need to meet with some sort of disability or services administrator on your new campus and that you'll need to produce lots of documentation to back up your request for services. This is normal: Remember, you're an adult now!

The prospect of having to do all this work on your own behalf may seem daunting, but the alternative may be quite dire: Studies indicate that students who do not self-advocate have a very difficult time adjusting to post-secondary education. For example, a study of US students with learning disabilities coming from high school (where they were assured services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) to university (where IDEA does not apply) found that these students faced an overwhelming amount of reading, a higher number and standard of written assignments, and less-frequent evaluation of homework. Working with their professors to obtain accommodations helped greatly; the authors report that those students who self-identified as students with learning disabilities and who had a solid understanding of their needs and how to accommodate them did best. The authors state: "It is, therefore, important for college-bound students with learning disabilities to understand their individual disability, how it affects their learning, and how to articulate reasonable need for academic accommodations" (Hadley, 2006, p. 16).

In other words: Talk to your professors! Get your documentation as soon as possible—before you get to campus, if you can, but certainly during the first week of classes. Then, deliver a copy to each of your professors, and keep doing so every single semester throughout your college career. Most professors want to help and are happy to do so, but they are not mind readers, and they will need to see your

documentation, because without it, they may be challenged by other students for giving you the accommodations you deserve.

In case it isn't clear from the discussion above, self-advocacy is vital to your success as a post-secondary student. For starters, learning to advocate for yourself and your needs builds your self-confidence. The more you do it, the easier it gets. Secondly, you will do better on your assignments and exams. No matter what you need to do your best—a quiet room, a longer exam period, frequent breaks, or whatever—you can, and should, negotiate all these needs with your student services coordinator and professors. Further, having accommodations in place can help reduce your anxiety, which in turn can help you do better academically and socially. Finally, self-advocacy builds communication skills, and it should be no surprise that excellent communication skills are one of the top competences employers look for in recent graduates. For instance, if you can work through your anxiety about approaching a gruff professor your freshman year, how much easier will it be to deal with a cantankerous manager at work?

Self-advocacy can be broken down into three parts: knowing (and believing in) yourself, knowing (understanding, researching, being the expert on) your needs, and knowing how to get what you need. Using the information in this report, contact the college's or university's student disability services and make an appointment with them to go over your paperwork. Each school has different requirements, but most will want to see any accommodations you had in high school (though they won't necessarily provide the exact same), diagnostic information from providers (these should be recent), your IEPs, and so on. Be prepared to discuss each accommodation you had in K–12 and why it helped you (or didn't, as the case may be). If student disability services is

unable to provide a particular request, alternatives should be discussed. Be prepared to advocate for yourself, though, if they suggest something you have already tried and know will not work. Come prepared with your own alternative ideas. Most of all, though, know your rights. Review your province's or territory's policies on accessible education; in fact, you may want to have a printout with you when you visit your new school. Highlight important areas so you can easily find them during your meetings.

What if you need, or want, to bring someone with you? You absolutely can. Again, the key is to know your rights. Each province or territory has its own privacy laws; for example, BC and Ontario use the Freedom of Information and Protection and Privacy Act (also known as FIPPA), and once you are 16, your parent may no longer give consent on your behalf (Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario). For officials at your chosen school to speak with your parents or guardians about your private information, you may need to sign a waiver giving permission for this information to be shared.

Once the school has agreed to your accommodations and given you the documentation you need to obtain them, you are responsible for getting that information to your professors. Keep in mind, though, that each professor is likely teaching multiple classes, some with dozens or even hundreds of students, so do not assume one brief chat after the first class will be sufficient. Instead, approach each professor ahead of time when accommodations will be needed. For example, if you have an exam coming up next Wednesday, meet with your professor this Wednesday to remind her what you will need. Be prepared to give a copy of your accommodations form to each professor (although some may not ask for it).

Although most professors are more than willing to provide accommodations, you may occasionally run into one who is resistant. There may be various reasons for this; do not be tempted to make assumptions. Instead, simply remind the professor that this is the school's, and therefore his or her, legal obligation, and that the office for students with disabilities is available to assist the professor if needed. Then, follow up with your coordinator. A good way to do so is to send a short email to the Student Disability Services coordinator, copying your professor. That way, if the professor has questions, he or she does not have to search for the email address of the person to ask.

Not receiving accommodations in a timely manner—or at all? You need to be persistent. It may be tempting to assume professors and administrators are purposely trying to throw roadblocks in your path, but this is almost never the case; rather, it is more likely due to the sheer number of cases they must manage at any given time. If you needed, for example, a note taker for your biology lecture, but no one signed up to help, be aware that sometimes accommodations may not be available. Keep asking. It is entirely appropriate to politely call or email as a follow-up to any request; just be sure to give the recipient time to react to your first message.

What about going too far as a self-advocate—is it possible? In many cases, you will find that your self-advocacy goes too far if (1) it asks for significantly reducing or eliminating major coursework (because that would give you an academic advantage over other students); (2) it asks for an accommodation that is not effective, simply because you want it; (3) your having it causes a direct threat to yourself or others at the school; (4) a reasonable alternative accommodation has been offered, but you continue to insist that only the accommodation you have requested (which would cause the

school undue hardship) is good enough; or (5) your communication style becomes angry, emotional, harassing, or otherwise threatening. It is one thing to be assertive in the face of dismissive administrators and resistant educators; it is another entirely to go on the attack in a way that makes you the school's enemy.

More often than not, you will not push too far if you simply keep on pushing for what you need and are legally entitled to have: reasonable accommodations for your disability. Above all, keep taking care of yourself throughout the advocacy process.

Question 4: What Are My Rights at My School of Choice?

One of the main goals of this study was to compile data on whether (and how) colleges and universities publish their policies on students with disabilities. The simple answer is that your rights are spelled out by the province in which you live or choose to attend post-secondary school (but not at the national level). However, practically speaking, how those provincial or territorial rights are interpreted is up to each institution, which is where our list of Policy links comes in.

Using the resources on the [NEADS](#) website, you can search for your school of choice to see whether it publishes its accessibility and accommodations policy on its website. If it does, you'll find the link to this document, and you can review the school's policies and procedures with your family. If it does not, and you would like to see the policy, you may need to reach out to the Student Disability Services administrator at that school for more information. He or she should be able to help you get a copy of the

policy document. If no written policy exists, it may be that you should reconsider attending this post-secondary institution.

Get ready!

Requested Further Information

Best Practices and Programming of Disabled Students' Groups on Campuses

NEADS provides a great deal of helpful information for students wishing to start and maintain a club or organization focused on students with disabilities. You can find that information here: https://www.neads.ca/en/norc/campusnet/leadership_starting.php.

Methodology

Search terms used were as follows: “on-campus club for disabled students [university name]” or “student club for disabled students [university name]”; if no results were obtained, then the researcher searched the university web page for student clubs or organizations and read through the list, if it was available.

<i>School type</i>	<i>Has a group on campus</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Public</i>	37 out of 81 (several schools did not provide access to their club lists)	46%
<i>Private</i>	2 out of 20 (several schools did not provide access to their club lists)	10%

A study of 101 Canadian colleges and universities, both public and private, found limited availability of clubs focused generally on students with disabilities. Many on-campus clubs focus on mental health issues; a very few schools seem to have clubs that are inclusive of all disabilities, although several have clubs focused on specific disabilities such as ADHD, multiple sclerosis, and so on. Many simply provide a list of club names, although a few schools do have clickable links to enable students to find out more about a given club.

Frequently, the only disability-related club on a given campus is a local chapter of Jack.org, which is a national mental health advocacy group focused on young people. Most schools do, however, post links to the process for starting a club or organization. So, as an incoming freshman, you do not have to settle for what's there; you can gather like-minded students and start your own. The procedure differs by school, but usually involves gathering a minimum number of interested students, writing a constitution, securing a faculty advisor, and meeting with a representative of Student Activities to have your new group approved.



Reports from Colleges and Universities on their Places for Fall and Winter Semesters Re-Opening

<i>School type</i>	<i>Has link to COVID-19 resources and plans for Fall 2021</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Public</i>	77 out of 81	95%
<i>Private</i>	17 out of 20	85%

One private school that did not have a separate page for COVID-19 information simply has a graphic in its homepage gallery that states all classes are still online.

To break things down by province and territory:

- In Alberta, most schools seem to be returning to campus for fall or providing a combination of delivery methods.
- In British Columbia, classes are mainly going to be in-person, with some online and hybrid offerings.
- Manitoba seems to have more restrictions than other provinces, with some schools reporting they are sticking with online delivery for fall.
- New Brunswick's schools tend to be returning to on-campus delivery, with many offering some online or hybrid courses.
- In Newfoundland and Labrador, Memorial University is offering mostly in-person classes, while College of the North Atlantic seems to still be online.
- In the Northwest Territories, Aurora is returning to campus but continuing to offer some online and hybrid delivery.
- Nova Scotian colleges and universities will primarily move to in-person course delivery. Many schools will still offer some courses online.

- Due to Nunavut Arctic’s COVID-19 webpage not being updated since June 2020, Nunavut’s plans are undetermined.
- Ontario schools are a mix. A few are still in restricted-delivery mode, meaning most courses will still be online. However, other schools are returning to campus with in-person classes being planned, either “some in-person” or “mostly in-person.”
- In Prince Edward Island, the University of PEI will return to primarily in-person learning.
- Like Ontario, Quebec schools are a broad mix, with some schools opting for a balance of in-person and hybrid/online, some returning to mostly in-person, and one “in person with no social distancing.”
- In Saskatoon, USask is requiring disposable 3-layer masks in all indoor environments and will be in a “transition period” during the fall semester to prepare for a more open environment the next semester. The University of Regina is also treating fall as transitional, with an increase in in-person activity on campus.
- Yukon’s public university, Yukon U, is returning to in-class learning for fall, with some online courses still being offered, particularly those in specialized programs.

Universal Design for Learning Best Practices

According to the CAST Universal Design for Learning (UDL) website, the goals of UDL are based on scientific research and comprise a framework “to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people.” These guidelines are intended not only

for instructors but also for instructional designers, researchers, and even parents who home-school.

The guidelines break learning design down into three categories, each with three goals: accessing, building upon, and internalizing information. In short, the goal of UDL is to give all students equitable access to information, tools to help them learn it, and finally, the means to help them internalize and transfer their newly gained knowledge, whether to later course modules or to settings beyond the classroom.

Engagement

The first category is “Engagement.” This category is about helping students understand why this information is important to their education. Learning designers need to get students interested in the subject matter by giving them choices and autonomy, spelling out the relevance, value, and authenticity of the information, and minimizing threats and distractions to learning. For example, an instructor may introduce a lesson by offering students a choice of reading a textbook chapter or listening to a recording of it. The instructor may then discuss the information’s relevance to the subject or to the outside world: why is it important for students to know this? Finally, the instructor can work to make the classroom as safe and distraction-free as possible, ensuring that no student feels unsafe or unheard.

For students to build their understanding of new information, they need clear guidelines and goals. What are they supposed to be getting out of this lesson, exactly? What should they be able to do once they have learned it? Providing students with multiple ways of meeting goals and objectives (e.g., with detailed assignment rubrics) helps ensure students are appropriately challenged, fostering greater learning. And

when students are given opportunities to collaborate and teach one another, they master the information more completely. Instructors should try to give students as much feedback on their level of mastery as possible.

Internalizing the new information is perhaps the most difficult part of the learning process for many students. It is often easier to temporarily memorize information long enough to regurgitate it for an exam, but absorbing and building on learning is much harder. Instructors can aid in this process by helping students create their own learning strategies and by offering opportunities for self-assessment (e.g., ungraded online quizzes) and reflection (e.g., discussion posts or blogs). Instructors can also provide mentors or tutors to aid students when they become frustrated or have weaknesses in their learning strategies. Ideally, instructors should help students understand what motivates them to succeed and how to set appropriate goals for themselves.

Representation

Instructors can greatly aid students' access to information by allowing them ways to customize how digital materials appear (e.g., text size, contrast, volume of audio, timing of video). Materials that are audio-only are not accessible to all learners, and therefore, should be accompanied by (for example) captioning or voice recognition, visual diagrams, written transcripts, ASL, and descriptions of any music. Visual-only information must be accompanied by non-visual alternatives such as (for example) descriptions of images, tactile objects of reference, spatial models, and auditory cues. Text information should be readable by digital tools such as text-to-speech software, or a reader should be provided for the student.

The semantic elements of a lesson can be difficult for some learners to access for various reasons, such as cultural and language backgrounds. Rather than assuming students can look up definitions or meanings of symbols themselves, provide glossaries and interpretations. Try to relate unfamiliar symbols or language to concepts and words students already know. Avoid or explain any jargon, idioms, culturally exclusive language, or slang. Key information may need to be provided in a second language (e.g., French) for language learners. Support textual information with other media, such as illustrations, animations, physical objects, or virtual representations.

Comprehension

Many instructors will already be familiar with the notion of 'scaffolding,' which is adapted from work done by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky in the 1920s. The idea is to build upon a student's prior learning by activating it to help the student deal with new information. Some learners may have the needed background information but not know it is relevant to what they are currently learning; others may lack that foundation entirely. Provide anchors to prior knowledge with, for example, visual imagery, concept anchoring, or concept maps. Use analogies and metaphors to link new information to previous knowledge. Provide access to prerequisite knowledge for students who lack the needed background.

Another way to aid students' comprehension is to provide a variety of ways for them to see patterns, linkages, and overlaps. Graphics (such as charts and infographics) can be helpful, as can a variety of examples to illustrate difficult concepts. Reinforce and highlight key concepts, for example by including those elements on PowerPoint slides

(rather than simply plopping an entire lecture onto slides). Point out to students how skills they have learned earlier can be used in new ways.

Retention, of course, is the goal; to help students retain information and apply knowledge to new situations, offer varied opportunities for them to review and practice, such as case studies or experiential learning. Build review into future lessons, providing students opportunities to access and apply that information anew, relating it to more advanced skills and concepts.

Action & Expression

For students to maximize their learning, they must be able to approach information in multiple ways. Provide options for physically approaching information by providing alternative means for response, selection, and composition in the classroom. Make sure students can access information or participate in class in ways other than pen-and-paper or using a mouse on a computer. Ensure that assistive technologies are available when needed, and make sure students know how to use them. Choose apps that work effortlessly with keyboard alternatives and alt keys.

Instructors should also provide multiple options for communicating in the learning environment, for example by giving students the ability to compose in text, speech, drawing, storyboards, design, movement, or video, rather than restricting them to one mode only (e.g., a typed essay, printed out and turned in on paper). Make students aware of contemporary tools such as spell checkers, grammar checkers, voice recognition, outlining and mind mapping tools, computer-aided design, virtual and concrete math manipulatives, and web applications such as Prezi or wikis. Provide students with differentiated models they can emulate, such as models that illustrate

similar outcomes using different approaches; build scaffolding into lessons to help students gradually increase their fluency and show multiple examples of novel solutions for real-world problems, so students can begin to see many possible outcomes.

Helping students capitalize on their executive functions is crucial to internalizing their learning. Instructors should guide students in how to set appropriate goals, how to plan and strategize projects, and how to manage and organize the information they are learning. Because learning doesn't happen in a vacuum, instructors must provide timely feedback, especially formative feedback that helps them learn to monitor their own progress. Students may find a variety of approaches helpful: guided reflection, representations of progress (e.g., before-and-after images), stating what specific type of guidance they need, role-playing or peer feedback, scoring rubrics, and samples of annotated student work, to name a few.

Takeaways

The goal of Universal Design for Learning is to help students become expert learners who are purposeful and motivated, resourceful and knowledgeable, strategic and goal directed.

The following graphic simplifies the guidelines found on the UDL website:

<https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>



Universal Design for Learning

Your Visual Cheat-Sheet for Improving and Optimizing Teaching and Learning for All People





Multiple ways of engaging:
 Prioritize choice and autonomy and minimize distractions.
 Provide ways for students to collaborate to meet challenging goals with varying demands using varied resources.
 Help students self-regulate by making expectations clear, helping students build coping skills and the ability to reflect and self-assess.

Multiple ways of representing:
 Let students customize the way they view, hear, or otherwise access course info.
 Illustrate and clarify using multimedia, and make sure info is easily decoded.
 Support comprehension through giving background info, highlighting patterns and relationships, guiding processing, and helping students generalize and transfer their newly acquired knowledge.

Multiple ways of acting and expressing:
 Give students several ways of responding or navigating physically, and provide access to assistive tech.
 Communicate, compose, and support practice in multiple media.
 Help students set appropriate goals, strategies, and information management, and frequently monitor their progress.



EXPERT LEARNERS WHO ARE...

**Purposeful and motivated.
 Resourceful and knowledgeable.
 Strategic and goal-directed.**

adapted from
<https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>

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