

*Beyond discrimination,
beyond special treatment*

**TOWARDS A BETTER
UNDERSTANDING OF STUDENTS
WITH A PHYSICAL DISABILITY**

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INTRODUCTION

This brochure is intended primarily for teachers, but also for anyone likely to work directly or indirectly with students with mobility impairment (physical disability). Our goal is to identify the potential challenges faced by these students and suggest the attitudes most likely to be helpful.

We hope that the information presented here will assist teachers in their work and facilitate support for learning, and the integration of cégep students with a physical disability into the college community.

Also, please note that students with a physical disability are responsible for informing the cégep of their intention to study at the school and of their need for adapted services. The sooner the institution is notified, the better the chances of having the required services ready on time.

The person in charge of the **Special Needs Services**¹ must always consider how the limitation will affect the student's learning process. For that reason, a one-on-one interview will be held with students in order to get to know them, understand their needs and clarify with them the services they will need to compensate for the effects of their disability.

¹ Translator's note: This generic term is being used throughout the text to designate the cégep's service catering to students with Special Needs. If necessary, please change throughout text to suit your cégep's reality.

Definitions

In keeping with recommendations issued by the Government of Canada,² we will be using the terms “person or persons with a disability” throughout this brochure. As per the Government of Québec, a physical disability is defined as “a physical handicap that limits a person’s ability to carry out daily activities and limits that person’s prospects for study and employment.”³ To fully understand what this definition entails, the International Index and Dictionary of Rehabilitation and Social Integration (www.irdpq.qc.ca under *Soutien scientifique - Terminologie*) provides other useful definitions.

Impairment: Any loss of substance or alteration of a psychological or anatomical structure.

Disability: Degree of loss of an ability.

Handicap: Disruption in a person’s major life activities resulting from an impairment or incapacity, on one hand, and from obstacles caused by environmental factors on the other, given his or her age, gender or sociocultural background.

Handicap creation process: Causal chain in which a series of various causes leads to diseases or injuries, which in turn produce impairments and disabilities that, in conjunction or interaction with obstacles, disrupt life habits.

For the purposes of this brochure, which is intended for an educational setting, we will be using the terms physical disability, mobility impairment or functional limitation when referring to persons with a disability.

Motor impairment

Students with a motor impairment are those whose neuro-motor assessment reveals one or more affected areas in the nervous, muscular or skeletal systems responsible for body motion, causing difficulties in mobility and, at times, communication.

The impact of the disability varies from one person to another. For example, people with paralysis of the lower limbs will require a wheelchair for mobility, but will have no difficulty writing or throwing a ball. However, they will be unable to reach a book on the upper shelf at the library or turn on a light switch. Students with paralysis of the upper limbs will experience serious issues with coordination and gripping, leading to difficulties writing and handling objects.

Organic impairment

Students with an organic impairment are those whose medical assessment reveals one or more affected areas in the vital organs (respiratory, circulatory, digestive, nervous, muscular systems, etc.), which can cause a reduced tolerance to effort or lead to

² Human Resources and Social Development Canada, *A way with words and images*, p. 2, 2006 and Public Works and Government Services Canada, *The Canadian Style*, p. 260, 1997.

³ <http://www.afe.gouv.qc.ca/en/pretsBourses/deficiencesFonctionnelleMajeure.asp>

greater absenteeism. Students with an organic impairment require medical assistance, technological support and adapted services.

The table below presents the main disabilities based on their origin.

Motor impairments			Organic impairments
Neurological conditions	Muscular conditions	Muscular skeletal conditions	
Friedreich's ataxia	Muscular dystrophy	Birth defects	Cystic fibrosis
Paraplegia and quadriplegia Cerebral palsy		Amputations Arthritis	Diabetes Hemophilia
Traumatic brain injury* Epilepsy*		Spina bifida	Asthma

* A guide on traumatic brain injuries and a guide on epilepsy are available at the Special Needs Services.
[Translator's note: Adapt the above note to your cégep's reality]

Source: MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION. *Guide pédagogique — Le handicap physique*, Québec, 1985.

Degree of impairment

The degree of impairment will depend on the area of the brain affected (cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injury) or the vertebral level involved (spinal injury, spina bifida). Ensuing conditions will be referred to as paraplegia (paralysis of the lower limbs), hemiplegia (paralysis of the right or left side of the body) or quadriplegia (paralysis of the trunk and limbs).

With degenerative diseases, such as muscular dystrophy or Friedreich's ataxia, the degree of impairment will depend on the stage of the disease. It is important to consider the stage of the disease, since students' capabilities will diminish over time, reducing their pace of study.

Consequences of a physical disability and impact on a student's academic experience

Possible consequences of a physical disability

While finding their way around campus in a wheelchair, with a walker, crutches or devices, students may at times encounter structural barriers. In addition to these limitations, other technical difficulties can also compromise their mobility: a flat tire on their wheelchair, a dead battery, poor adjustment or breakdown of a device, defective laptop computer, outage in the elevator, heavy snowfall, poorly shovelled walkways, etc. The medical care and rehabilitation therapy they must receive can be another barrier for students with a disability, as this takes away time and energy from their studies.

For example, students who must miss class for a medical appointment or to recover from surgery will generally need to catch up. If the recovery time is not spent in hospital,

a **resource person**⁴ from the Special Needs Services can arrange study periods with students to help them in this respect.

Many physical disabilities cause fatigue. This can be due to the additional efforts students must make throughout the day, the treatments they are receiving or the medications they are taking. Students with cerebral palsy, for example, spend a great deal of energy controlling their body movements in order to carry out their daily tasks. Dressing, eating and taking books out of their bag are all actions that require significant effort. **A personal or classroom assistant and an adapted schedule are recommended in such cases.**

On the cognitive front, students with a physical disability are no different from other students. They may present certain specific traits in terms of their visuo-motor coordination, pace of work, ability to concentrate, attention span, memorization, and perceptual, reasoning and generalization skills.

Clearly, a student with a disability never has the full range of limitations at once.

Consequences of a physical disability on a student's academic experience

The majority of students with a physical disability require slightly more time to perform certain tasks. Coordination problems and a greater susceptibility to fatigue do not allow them carry out activities at the same pace as other students.

Moreover, students with a disability often work with specialized equipment (computer, communication board, etc.), which is generally more time-consuming.

Writing can also represent a major challenge for these students. In some cases, they have difficulty with their hand-eye coordination, making their penmanship difficult to read. It can often be noted that after a few minutes of writing, students with a disability will become tired faster and require time for relaxation or stretching exercises. Computers are a good solution to this problem.

Oral and written communication

Students with oral communication problems are those who are unable to convey their messages due to a physical or physiological impairment. Problems with communication can include issues with both language comprehension and speech, as is often the case with persons with aphasia. Aphasia can affect language skills in several ways and in varying degrees. Students with this disability may have difficulty establishing and maintaining relationships with their peers, reporting facts in a coherent manner or communicating their ideas, which may be disorganized. These students may require an assistant to help them understand the situations and events around them. Teachers should make eye contact when speaking with them. They can also help them by providing well-organized material. However, people with communication disorders do not always require technical aids.

Students with a disability use non-verbal communication to replace or enhance speech. For students unable to speak, there are two alternate modes of communication: sign

⁴ Translator's note: This generic term is being used throughout the text to designate the person who provides academic guidance to students with disabilities (French *intervenant*). If necessary, please change throughout text to suit your cégep's reality.

language, which is used by those with a hearing impairment, and graphic communication, which is used primarily by people with cerebral palsy.

The graphic communication mode involves a grid table with pictograms, ideograms, phonemes or graphemes. Students use their head wand or finger to point to the word or message they wish to convey. The other party must then repeat aloud the words or symbols indicated. This communication method requires the fixed attention of the other party, who must always be in proximity to the user of the communication system in order to see and understand their messages.

For several years now, the use of voice synthesizers and digitalizers has allowed people deprived of speech to use words to communicate orally. As for adapted laptop computers, they are used to compose and convey written messages.

These devices help students access the world of communication. They have a major impact in terms of both cognitive and language development. On the social front, they help students integrate into the community and allow them to participate more fully in student life.

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Attitudes to adopt

We should always keep in mind that the goal of education is to promote student independence. Cégep is the place where students should be able to make use of this skill. Generally speaking, when students with a disability have access to **and use** the necessary resources, their performance will be similar to that of other students.

The transition to college is an important step in the lives of all young adults, including those with a physical disability. All college students are required to adapt to a new way of life, a much more diversified curriculum and increasingly abstract concepts. Students with functional limitations, however, experience additional challenges. Mobility within the cégep and the presence of a classroom or personal assistant are examples of difficulties their disability may entail. They must understand the role of these people in their study program. In college, students also typically have more teachers. This means having to adapt to each of them, their teaching style and their specific academic requirements.

It is important to know that prejudicial attitudes on the part of those around them are often the biggest hurdle to the social integration of persons with a physical disability. We should remember that the problems they experience are not always related to the disability itself. In fact, as a result of the disability, which we briefly described above, persons with a physical disability may have developed a tendency to isolate themselves or to show reservation in their contacts with others. They may also prefer the company of the same people and wait for others to approach them rather than making the first move.

Support

Role of teachers

Teachers who have students with a disability in their classroom can expect to meet with them more regularly outside class compared to other students. Teachers will also be required to work closely with the **counsellor⁵** in charge of students (behaviour, integration, exams and accommodations, etc.) to ensure that they always have access to the right services at the right time.

⁵ Translator's note: This generic term is being used throughout the text to designate the person at the Special Needs Services who is responsible for welcoming and integrating students with disabilities (including arranging for services to facilitate their studies) (French *répondant*). If necessary, please change throughout text to suit your cégep's reality.

Additional details

Support should never involve repeating a course.

Support involves clarifying certain points, obtaining additional explanations or discussing special accommodations to make, such as adapting exams.

Role of resource persons

Academic support

- ⌘ Assist in reviewing material presented in class (brief overview);
- ⌘ Help plan assignments and exams and manage study time;
- ⌘ Provide assistance in understanding instructions;
- ⌘ Perform any other intervention, as required;
- ⌘ Follow up with teachers and make them aware of the student's issues;
- ⌘ Promote the optimal development of students through personalized activities;
- ⌘ Establish services for students and ensure that these are delivered appropriately.

Evaluations: exams and assignments

Exams need to be adapted to the needs of students with a disability, without, however, compromising academic standards. Academic performance must always be measured using standardized, objective criteria.

Written exams

Students with a physical disability may require slightly more time for exams. However, if they need their classroom assistant to record answers on the exam or if they use a computer in class or in the adapted classroom, the time period can be further extended.

Time factor

Given their slower rate of reading and writing, it has become standard practice to offer:

- ⌘ **150 per cent more time** for essay-type questions in class or during an exam (lengthy text or lengthy reading beforehand);
- ⌘ In certain particular cases, the additional time given can be further extended. Teachers are **advised** to talk to students and the resource person about exams and possible accommodations before the start of a course. They make for valuable resources when it comes to adapting courses.

Remember that the Special Needs Services team is always available to advise teachers on assignments, exams, adapted classrooms, documents, audio recordings (cassettes, MP3), text enlargement, etc.

Where to hold exams

In order to maximize the potential for success, promote better concentration and prevent fatigue, students with a physical disability should have the opportunity to take

their exams in a room reserved for this purpose, under supervision. This is generally discussed with the student and the counsellor in charge of the student.

Internships and field trips

Internships are excellent opportunities for students to experience their chosen careers. Teachers should consult the resource person or a member of the Special Needs Services team and those responsible for the internship sites and field trips to obtain information about available resources, ask questions about the physical environment and note any obstacles that students with a physical disability may encounter.

Academic standards

It is important that all academic evaluations be the same for all students, whether or not they have impairment. An “A” must have the same value regardless of the student who earned it.

Students with a functional limitation have the same right as all other students to experience failure as a driver of personal growth.

Teamwork

Certain disciplines often require teamwork. In this respect, teachers can play a fundamental role:

☞ They can gradually encourage students to participate and find a suitable role or responsibility for them.

They can also serve as a link between students and a team of open-minded classmates, who agree to work with them. However, students with a disability will be required to work and abide by the same rules as the other students, without being carried by the team.

Laboratory work

In most cases, students work in the lab with another student or in small groups. It is therefore important to try to choose a lab partner or group open to the student with a physical disability, rather than using a random selection process. A match with an empathic person will help the student with a disability both academically and socially.

In many cases, accommodations aimed at ensuring the physical accessibility of the lab will enable most students with a disability to accomplish the required tasks on their own, this being the ideal solution.

However, in some circumstances, this solution may not be appropriate given a particular student’s functional limitation. In this case, the student may need what is referred to as “procedural help.” This usually entails help in handling objects or materials, for example in science labs where students must use various materials to carry out scientific experiments, during computer labs, language labs, etc., or when assistance is required during physical education or art classes.

Before implementing this service, however, students need to discuss it with their teacher and the person in charge of the Special Needs Services. Those who provide procedural help, referred to as classroom assistants, will be required to demonstrate aptitudes in handling and understanding the content of the lab work.

Procedural help

Students who use the procedural help service must:

- ↻ prepare the theoretical component of their lab work (read the goals and instructions of the lab in advance);
- ↻ tell the classroom assistant all the tasks that need to be completed and assist him or her, as the case may be;
- ↻ note the results of the experiment and make the necessary adjustments if the results are not those expected;
- ↻ write the lab report.

The classroom assistant will:

- ↻ procure the material required;
- ↻ prepare the work table;
- ↻ carry out the instructions given by the student, without commenting on these instructions;
- ↻ provide visual observations on the experimentation and its results, as the case may be;
- ↻ put away the material in the appropriate place.

Classroom assistants can ask the teacher or a technician to clarify or validate the results, since both they and the student with a physical disability form a team, like any other lab partners.

Classroom arrangement

Generally, teachers allow students to select their seat in the classroom. Even if the content of the course does not require any specialized teaching material, certain points must nevertheless be considered. This includes making sure there is available space for a wheelchair, a suitable work table and seating for assistants, as the case may be. Also, if students need to work with an electrical device, they need to be seated near an electrical outlet.

Instructional materials

Instructional materials are not problematic for students with a physical disability.

Technical support

The devices described below are generally covered by the Régie de l'assurance-maladie du Québec (RAMQ). The *Programme d'aide pour les personnes handicapées physiques* supplies mechanical, electronic, optical and other similar devices free of charge to persons with a disability in order to assist them with reading, writing and mobility in non-familiar environments.

In addition, the **Cégep de Sainte-Foy** makes available to students devices that are either too bulky to carry from home to school or are not covered by the RAMQ.

[Translator's note: Adapt the above paragraph to your Cégep's reality]

To compensate for the effects of a disability, two types of measures are generally used: assistants and technical aids. Assistants help students perform various activities, such as dressing, eating, taking notes and handling objects during laboratories (chemistry, physics, biology, etc.). Technical aids, on the other hand, are accessories that facilitate the accomplishment of a task.

Technical aids

Technical and electronic aids are essential to the autonomy of persons with a disability. Here are a few examples:

- ↻ Wheelchair, walker, cane, crutches, orthosis, prosthesis, etc. for mobility purposes;
- ↻ Access ramps to bypass stairs;
- ↻ Elevators large enough to accommodate a wheelchair and featuring a control panel at the correct height to provide access to all floors;
- ↻ Wheelchair-accessible washrooms;
- ↻ Identified parking spaces near main entrances;
- ↻ Laptop computers for taking notes in class or writing exams;
- ↻ Communication boards, optical pointer, head wand or voice synthesizer to communicate;

- ⌘ Adapted classroom equipped with specialized devices (computers with adapted keyboards, adapted tables and chairs, etc.) made available to students who are unable to write exams and do their work in a regular classroom.

Assistants

Students may require a temporary or permanent assistant to provide procedural help, give support or take notes.

ASSISTANTS

Role of personal assistants

Assistants are familiar with the issues affecting the person with a disability. Their role is to facilitate student access to all the information related to the theory presented in class, to teamwork and to one-on-one meetings. They also help students use available resources on campus (media centre, cafeteria, etc.).

When needed, personal assistants provide help with:

- ⌘ dressing and undressing at school;
- ⌘ mobility on campus;
- ⌘ personal hygiene (when necessary);
- ⌘ meals (on campus);
- ⌘ classroom activities for all courses on the student's schedule;
- ⌘ individualized work outside class for a time period equal to the regular course schedule;
- ⌘ note-taking (in the case of permanent assistants);
- ⌘ reading and writing both in and after class: page turning, underlining passages upon request, writing text dictated by students, helping with computer use;
- ⌘ any other similar tasks directly related to the studies.

Assistants are available for work and assignments to be done at school (meetings with teachers, teamwork, laboratories, etc.), **but not for** homework or leisure activities.

It is important to differentiate personal assistants from both classroom assistants and teachers. While they are constantly present, personal assistants are not there to record or remember the theory or contents of the course, **nor are they there to provide academic support.**

Personal assistants must never agree to take on any of the students' responsibilities for their learning. They must also refrain from acting in a way that would give students with a disability an unfair advantage over their classmates.

Personal assistants are there to facilitate contact between students who have difficulty with verbal communication and their teachers and fellow classmates.

In brief, personal assistants should and must never interfere in the student's learning process.

Their job does not involve:

- ☞ encouraging students to request additional information from their teachers;
- ☞ asking teachers to repeat what they believe was not understood by the student;
- ☞ asking teachers questions on behalf of the student;
- ☞ answering the teacher on behalf of the student;
- ☞ booking appointments for the student;
- ☞ reminding the student of assignment deadlines, exam dates, readings or homework.

Timely assistance

Timely assistance is offered when students require help at a specific time of day or on a given day, for example for undressing upon arriving on campus or for research at the library, etc.

The need for this service is evaluated by the person in charge of the Special Needs Services.

Ongoing assistance

Ongoing assistance is made available only to **students presenting a major disability** that significantly compromises their autonomy (physical, communication). This service compensates for their limitations by facilitating the pursuit of their postsecondary education. Before arranging for this service, the person in charge of the Special Needs Services will meet students to evaluate their needs in this respect.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND SERVICES

To provide services to students with a disability, we require a medical certificate with recommendations, if possible. The involvement of external resources in evaluating student needs (e.g. IRDPQ) is greatly appreciated.

There are various accommodations and services to help students compensate for their limitations.

The following services are available:

- a letter of explanation to teachers;
- a note-taking service;
- additional time for exams;
- access to an adapted classroom;
- an adapted schedule (depending on medication being taken, level of fatigue, etc.);
- access to a resource person to point out errors or assist them with specialized software programs (when recommended by a physician or other health care professional);
- adapted teaching aids (homework help service, supervision of assignments, etc.);

- academic support (work methods, organization skills, time management with an agenda, etc.);
- adapted evaluations;
- use of an electronic dictionary;
- use of a digital recorder;
- mentoring;
- regular meetings with teachers;
- assistance with mobility, toileting, eating and class work;
- loan of adapted material.

CONCLUSION

Understanding students with disabilities means, first and foremost, grasping the complex nature of the relationship between them and their environment.

We hope this brochure has provided the basic elements to help you better understand students with a physical disability, and that the measures described will allow you to resolve some of the challenges that may arise.

If your job entails contact with students with a disability and you have identified certain needs as a result of this interaction, whether they relate to a student or your own role, please do not hesitate to use our services.

Thank you. We look forward to hearing from you.

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