

National Educational Association of Disabled Students



Right On!

**2004 National Conference
Proceedings Report**

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Friday, November 12, 2004

Opening Reception

Welcome by Rachael Ross, NEADS

Rachael Ross, President, NEADS, welcomed the delegates to the 2004 NEADS conference and offered remarks about the work done by NEADS in the past year and about the Association's ongoing projects. She then thanked the conference sponsors and the members of the conference planning committee, and introduced the evening's speakers. Here is the text of her remarks:

As President of the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS), I am pleased to welcome you to our tenth national conference *Right On!* and to our country's capital city, Ottawa. This year's conference promises to be an enriching event for our membership, our community of graduates and students with disabilities, as well as our community partners and allies. It is an opportunity for us to engage people in the key topics that drive our projects and organizational work.

Over the past two years, the NEADS board of directors and staff have worked to have the agenda of post-secondary students and graduates with disabilities heard in many facets of political, financial, educational and vocational life across the country, as well as internationally. Our priority has remained for 18 years to advocate for full access to education and employment opportunities for post-secondary students and graduates with disabilities in Canada.

This past year, NEADS has ventured to the exciting arena of international advocacy. The association has been actively involved with the discussions in New York City at the United Nations on the *UN Convention on the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities*, with particular interest in Article 17 on Education.

We also continue to build strong relationships with our networks of national advocating bodies, governments, other NGOs, service providers and grass-roots campus organizations to better inform us and serve our membership. We achieve this through partnerships, collaborations, research and project work, by sitting on an array of boards and committees, by our presence and participation at conferences across the country and by the relationships built by our board members in their provinces.

Our project work allows us to concentrate on particular issues identified by our membership. Currently, we have two projects focusing on full access to education: *The Inclusion Project*, a groundbreaking initiative that is examining how accessible college and university extra-curricular activities are for students with disabilities, and *Access to Academic Materials for Print-Disabled Post-Secondary Students: A Partnership of Users and Service Providers*. This project aims to survey the support for academic materials in formats of choice across Canada, and recommend changes that can be implemented by governments, service providers, schools and libraries.

Employment continues to be an issue of interest and concern to post-secondary students and graduates with disabilities. In 2003, we released our newest publication, *Access to Success: A Guide for Employers*, and launched an innovative job site called NOWS – the NEADS Online Work System. Once a project, NOWS has become a pillar in our organization, connecting students and graduates with disabilities with progressive employers looking to hire Canadians with disabilities. Finally, our website (www.neads.ca) continues to be an invaluable resource to many Canadians.

This year's conference, *Right On!* should prove to be an exciting and informative one. The title was chosen to signify our right as Canadians to equal access to education and employment, and to emphasize the value of human rights in these areas. The workshops integrate these concepts by presenting an array of ideas and perspectives from a number of countries.

Our Conference Planning Committee, chaired by Jason Mitschele, has worked extremely hard over the past two years to bring you this event. I thank them for their excellent work, and Jason Mitschele for his dedication to the conference planning.

My hope is that you will all leave *Right On!* inspired for positive change; armed with the skills and ideas needed to affect change in your communities and your own lives. Enjoy the conference!

Welcome Message from Cecilia Muir, Social Development Canada

Cecilia Muir, Director General, Office for Disability Issues, Social Development Canada, said that she was honoured to be attending the opening reception on behalf of the Minister of Social Development Ken Dryden, who she said is very committed to the issues of people with disabilities.

Muir expressed appreciation for the work of the conference planning committee and specifically the work of Frank Smith, who ensures that NEADS has a strong voice within the Office for Disability Issues (ODI).

Rights of access, legality, education, and employment are all rights that NEADS is supporting for its members, Muir said. The Government of Canada wants a country in which citizens with disabilities can benefit from all that Canada has to offer—as learners, as workers, as volunteers, and as family members. Learning—for all Canadians—is a key priority. The Government wants to ensure that people with disabilities have a place within Canada's learning agenda so that they can help to grow Canada.

Muir gave some examples of federal commitments to learning: The 2004 budget introduced a new upfront grant of up to \$2000 annually for students with disabilities. Also, a new disability support deduction provides better tax recognition of the costs of disability supports (for example, sign language, attendant care, and audio books). People with disabilities can now deduct the costs of those supports from income tax. And the Government plans to do more in terms of supports, because that is where more progress

is needed in Canada.

Discussing the importance of education and skills development for people with disabilities, Muir noted that Social Development Canada (SDC) supports NEADS through the ODI with that goal in mind. This funding supports the NEADS mandate to develop resources for members, students, educators, and employers. She promised that additional information on the initiatives that the SDPP supports would be presented at interactive workshops during the conference.

“As students with disabilities, you probably already know about overcoming challenges,” Muir said. “The fact that you are pursuing post-secondary education shows real resilience and commitment.”

Muir congratulated NEADS for its good work and wished the conference delegates continued success in achieving their goals.

And Now, a Word From our Sponsors

Miguel Aguayo, Senior Human Resources Consultant at CIBC, also welcomed conference participants at the opening reception. He said that the financial institution is honoured to sponsor the conference. As a person with a disability, a person who works with people with disabilities, and a former student, Aguayo commented that his time at the conference would be a new and interesting experience for him.

Rachael Ross concluded the evening by recognizing the sponsors of the 2004 conference—in particular the leading sponsor, BMO Financial Group.

Saturday, November 13, 2004

Opening Plenary

Welcome by Conference Chair Jason Mitschele

Jason Mitschele, Conference Chair and Ontario Representative, NEADS, opened the plenary by enthusiastically welcoming all participants. He also expressed appreciation to the volunteers—headed by Jennifer Dunn, Project Consultant, NEADS—and asked for a big round of applause for them all.

Mitschele said that, with 204 conference attendees, this year set a record for participation in the NEADS national conference. In addition, a record number of francophones (26 delegates) were also participating. Mitschele particularly welcomed a participant who was attending on a scholarship supported by NEADS: Tara Walter. Tara came to the conference from Lethbridge Community College, in Lethbridge, Alberta. Mitschele also welcomed Sue Jackson, who was attending from the University of the Arts London, in London, England.

Mitschele noted that the present conference had been two years in the making. He expressed deep appreciation for the generous sponsorship of BMO Financial Group (Leading Sponsor); CIBC (Platinum Sponsor); TD Bank Financial Group and Scotiabank Group (Gold Sponsors); and Canada Post, AbilityEdge, and General Electric Canada (Bronze Sponsors). He also thanked the NEADS conference planning committee, and expressed special appreciation to Frank Smith. Mitschele also thanked Chris Gaulin, the NEADS Website Architect; Heather Grant of Golden Planners; and Rachael Ross, President of NEADS.

Mitschele then briefly reviewed the conference proceedings and reminded attendees that elections for a new board of directors would be held on Sunday. He encouraged newcomers to consider running for the board, and gave instructions on the process for nominations.

Clint Davis, BMO Financial Group

Mitschele next introduced Clint Davis, Co-Director, Diversity and Workplace Equity, BMO Financial Group, a long-time friend and partner of NEADS.

Davis extended a warm welcome to all attendees and said that it was an honour to be participating in the conference for the first time. His colleague, Stephen McDonnell, a senior member of the team, was attending the conference for a third time.

Davis noted that diversity and equity initiatives, together with promotion of services, play a fundamental role in the success that BMO has experienced in developing an equitable workplace. The company focuses on managing the link between business strategies and “people” strategies. Diversity and workplace equity make “good business sense and [are]

the right thing to do,” he said. BMO’s long-term success depends on attracting top talent from community organizations. Its workforce planning is supported by partnerships with organizations such as NEADS. Davis said that he was looking forward to meeting all of the delegates, and he invited everyone to drop by the BMO exhibition booth.

Mitschele thanked BMO’s McDonnell for longstanding and continuing support of NEADS.

Chris Sutarno, Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB)

Chris Sutarno, National Mentorship Coordinator, Employment Accommodation Services, CNIB, introduced a new mentorship program at CNIB. MentorMatch is an Internet-based service that connects blind or visually impaired Canadian job seekers with a blind or visually impaired professional working in their field of interest. MentorMatch is a collaborative effort between CNIB and the American Foundation for the Blind. Sutarno expressed his appreciation to NEADS for the opportunity to launch the new program at the conference.

Sutarno presented some discouraging statistics regarding the challenges that people with disabilities have in finding and securing employment. In 2002–2003, hirings of people with disabilities actually decreased. And the unemployment rate for job seekers who are blind or visually impaired rose. Attitudinal barriers and a lack of knowledge in the workplace about how to accommodate barriers have to be contended with. Job seekers often experience frustration and self-doubt when engaged in a job search.

Mentorship can help in all of those areas. “With MentorMatch, one person’s experiences become another person’s education,” Sutarno said.

The word “mentor” expresses the idea of having someone with more experience share his or her expertise with someone of less experience. Mentors can provide suggestions for job accommodations, and, by personal demonstration of success in the workplace, they can significantly motivate a protégé. Because of that relationship, mentors can also improve their own self-esteem and can learn new communication skills.

MentorMatch currently has 50 available mentors, representing more than 400 occupations, including lawyer, counsellor, physical therapist, music teacher, bank teller, real-estate broker, and e-learning instruction designer. Mentors are available in every province.

Social Development Canada’s Opportunities Fund provides funding for MentorMatch. An individual can register as a mentor or as a protégé. The MentorMatch database can be found by visiting www.careerconnect.org/cnib.

Sutarno concluded his presentation by providing examples of famous mentor–protégé relationships, such as those between Tina Turner and Mick Jagger, and between Michael Jordon and Phil Jackson. Sutarno called on the participants to think about what a protégé

could accomplish with the right mentor.

Chair Mitschele then brought the plenary to a close, joking that he would soon be signing up to be mentored as a rock-star groupie!

Theme 2: Inclusion in Campus Life

Moderators: Alison Beattie, Alberta Representative, NEADS; Lena Cook, Saskatchewan Representative, NEADS

Jennifer Gillies: University Students with a Disability—The Transition to Inclusion

Students with disabilities are being recognized as a vital part of the diverse university community, said Jennifer Gillies, Master of Arts Student, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, University of Waterloo. Specialized services provide important support, both academic and personal, to students and help them to foster social networks and to overcome barriers. But minimal research has been done on whether such services are meeting student needs.

The transition from high school to university is particularly challenging for students with disabilities, who may have to work harder than other students and who may therefore have less time to socialize. Lack of social opportunities is a concern because recreation and leisure can help with the transition to university by enhancing personal competencies and reinforcing a feeling of inclusion.

Gillies' study qualitatively examined how a small group of students with disabilities integrated into the life of a large university in southwestern Ontario. The study considered how certain factors—such as use of services available to students with disabilities, and recreation and leisure participation—increased a sense of inclusion in university life.

Two key research questions guided the study:

- How do university services assist students with disabilities in transitioning and integrating into university life?
- What is the role of recreation and leisure in facilitating integration into the university community?

A letter of introduction was mailed to about 70 students with disabilities who were entering the university in the year of the study. Gilles received responses from four female students with varying disabilities.

The study used a two-phase interview process. In the first week, questions focused on frosh activities, current living arrangements, recreational and social opportunities that the students planned to pursue, services that they were aware of and planned to use, and things that had been helpful thus far in the transition.

Six months later, the second interview addressed the progress of integration. That interview followed up on questions asked in the first interview. For example, students were asked about the services they had accessed and the social plans they had followed up on. The aim was to explore the relationship between goal setting and goal attainment.

A comparative pattern analysis then compared categories across each interviewee's experiences, suggesting several common patterns. Two key patterns, or themes, emerged:

- Becoming part of campus life
- Goal achievement and adjustment

The University of Waterloo's Office for Persons with Disabilities proved to be a key formal support for becoming part of campus life. That service was the focal point of student integration within the university. It increased communication and understanding between students and professors, and it provided support and resources. However, reliance on the office and on other formal supports sometimes caused stress and anxiety, because students felt a lack of control over certain issues.

Social and informal supports included frosh week orientation, residence, clubs and teams, and leisure activities. Recreation and leisure helped to relieve stress and improve health, in turn helping students to achieve their goals for a successful transition.

The study found that, for the most part, the interviewees had established and met their goals. Constraints included lack of time, money, and ability. Goals changed as the students became more immersed in university life. For example, one participant commented that she had made enough friends; she did not have to go out to clubs as she had anticipated.

Participants felt successful in their transition when they were able to overcome obstacles, do well academically, and make friends. They used the variety of services provided and reported competency in their personal abilities. They felt that they worked more and longer than others, furthering their experience of time pressure, but they also experienced feelings of self-efficacy.

The influence of self-efficacy on behaviour is a framework outlined by Albert Bandura, who theorized that people develop a sense of how they are doing by recalling past achievements. When they experience success, they feel a greater level of self-efficacy. People with high self-efficacy are believed to have increased self-esteem and to be better able to manage situations: they have greater mastery over their environment and their disability alike. Informal and formal supports contribute to this.

The "supports and barriers" model of self-efficacy indicates that the availability of supports positively influences the experience of self-efficacy and, in turn, the ability to integrate into a university community. Barriers include time pressure, impairment, communication challenges, and a sense of dependency on others. Such barriers can potentially negatively influence the sense of self-efficacy and can limit academic and social success.

A critical factor is the availability of support services. In Gillies' study, the students used support services to overcome barriers.

The study findings indicate that aspects of university life—including support services, opportunities for leisure, and peer support—all played an integral role in the participants' successful transition into the university community. The study found that, for students with disabilities, inclusion is tied to access to special services and to the effectiveness of those services. Students who have access to effective services exhibit more confidence and are better adapted to the university milieu.

Jennifer Dunn: Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in College and University-Sponsored Activities—The NEADS Project

Jennifer Dunn, Project Consultant, outlined the NEADS Inclusion Project, explaining that the two partner associations for the project are the Canadian Federation of Students and the Canadian Organization of Campus Activities.

The objective of the project is to determine how accessible extracurricular activities are to students with disabilities. That objective differs from those of past NEADS projects, which have focused on academic issues and the transition from high school to post-secondary education. This project is the first in Canada to look at the accessibility of such activities at the post-secondary level. NEADS believes that extracurricular activities are a vital part of post-secondary education, and the organization decided to examine the issue.

To assist in finding appropriate solutions, the project will outline specific barriers faced by students with disabilities. The eventual goal is to create a training package for campus programmers and to identify concrete practices (including known “best practices”) that will make activities more accessible.

Many benefits accrue to participation in extracurricular activities. Participation fosters personal growth, increases health and wellness, builds social and professional networks, introduces and improves skills, promotes a sense of belonging, allows for exploration of personal interests, and contributes to increased commitment to school and academic achievement.

In phase I of the study, researchers sent a two-page questionnaire to campus programmers nationwide, asking questions about their activities. Researchers also met with programmers from four Saskatchewan institutions.

Results showed that the most popular activities were orientation activities, intramurals and sports events, and pub events. Programmers had assumed that their activities were accessible because the buildings were accessible. But because students with disabilities tend not to come forward with their concerns, the programmers had not considered the many needs of these students. Problems also arose with off-campus venues, which were not always accessible, and with transportation to and from those locations. Planners said

that they were willing to accommodate students on a case-by-case basis as required, but that making all activities totally accessible was not really feasible.

Of the planners surveyed, 88% indicated that most or all facilities were accessible. Many student unions were willing to make accommodations if they were aware of the specific needs. Among respondents, 72% did not see barriers to making activities more accessible, and 58% had access to funding to make activities more accessible (although only 39% said that accessibility was considered when planning student elections).

Dunn mentioned these practical tips for greater accessibility:

- Provide event material in alternative formats.
- Advertise using a variety of methods.
- Provide sensitivity training for leaders of clubs and organizations.
- Include students with disabilities in planning and running events.
- Ensure that the event location and the washrooms are accessible.

In phase II of the project (currently underway), a survey is being distributed to students with disabilities. The survey asks about students' participation in extracurricular activities and the kinds of barriers that they have encountered.

Preliminary results show that many students lack the time to participate in extracurricular activities due to the demands of their academic programs. Some were not interested in the activities available. Some noted that interpretation was not available outside the classroom. Many mentioned that clubs were located in older buildings that are not accessible. A few said that transportation barriers prevented them from participating in activities held off campus.

A training workshop was held just before the conference to discuss ways of making activities more accessible. Next steps will include the development of both online and offline training materials for campus programmers. Included will be two accessibility checklists that can be used for activities and events. The materials list the things that campus programmers can do to make events more accessible. A form that students with disabilities can fill out to request accommodations for accessible activities will also be circulated, as will a list from across Canada of best practices and ideas for promoting accessible activities.

Mahadeo Sukhai: Building a Collaborative Network—The University of Toronto Experience

Mahadeo Sukhai, President, Graduate Students' Union, University of Toronto, discussed the developing awareness of disability issues and campus inclusion at the University of Toronto. He began by offering a philosophical perspective on the “worlds” of disability activism, commenting that such activism comes in two forms:

- A mainstream movement is composed of organizations, coalitions, and groups who are loosely working toward the same goals.
- “Ambassadors-at-large” represent the best that people with disabilities have to offer, but choose not to become formally involved.

Collaboration, feedback, and tension exist between the two groups. The student movement in general (not just among students with disabilities) can be very monolithic and can take a “with us or against us” attitude. However, action on disability issues can occur outside the students-with-disabilities movement.

The students-with-disabilities movement has strengths and weaknesses. Its strengths include its large numbers, organizational ability, coalition-building, long-term movement building, and potential to access money. Its weaknesses include questions about whether it is fully representative and whether it exhibits a “lowest common denominator” factor—that is, can it create a unified voice without resorting to the “lowest common denominator”?

People who function as ambassadors-at-large also have strengths and weaknesses. They can talk to people in person and are in sole control of their lobbying tactics. Their good reputation precedes them, and they can lead by example. Also, they can integrate into campus organizations without being assimilated.

One of the problems is that after ambassadors move on to other activities, no structure is available to continue their work. Little permanence or money is attached to their activities. Ultimately, the work conducted by ambassadors-at-large boils down to “one person’s worldview.”

At the University of Toronto, those two worlds work in partnership. A friendly environment created by ambassadors-at-large has led to the creation of a students-with-disabilities movement. That movement, in turn, fosters an environment for mentorship and individual self-advocacy.

In the last three years, awareness and action with regard to disabilities issues at the University of Toronto have increased, and the situation has improved. The systemic approach that created the change involves collaboration between students, service providers, administration, staff, and alumni.

The student approach has been to establish a presence for students with disabilities, to

raise awareness, to provide education, to establish lobbying strategies, and to lead by example. Much of the success has come from seizing opportunities and understanding the system. Building a network involves learning what people do, who to talk to, how to approach them, how governance works, and how to lobby effectively. The strategic use of rallies can also be effective.

Sukhai mentioned that the University of Toronto has created a vision statement for an inclusive campus. He also discussed the planning process required by the 2001 *Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA)*, which legislates public sector and scheduled organizations in Ontario to develop annual accessibility plans. Plans must identify barriers and outline initiatives to address them.

In year 2 of its *ODA* planning process, the University of Toronto established a global advisory committee with 40 members, including people with disabilities. That group coalesced into seven subcommittees and a coordinating committee. The committee work lasted from February to July 2004 and resulted in a 98-page report on the 2003–2004 initiatives. It also presented 40 initiatives for 2004–2005. The initiatives focused on attitudes (disability issues and orientation training, for example), physical issues (universal design seminars and chemical sensitivities, for example), technology, and instructional design.

Student involvement resulted in a number of elements being put into place, including *Breaking Down Barriers 2004* (a conference series), a poster awareness campaign, a statement of commitment to people with disabilities, and the Access Centre.

Breaking Down Barriers, now in its second year as a conference, has developed into a model of localized grassroots disability awareness and education. It is designed for long-term self-sustainability and includes delegates from the community outside the university.

The poster awareness campaign showcases 11 students from various constituencies following various programs of study and with various disabilities. The students are mainly ambassadors-at-large who volunteered to be highlighted. This campaign would not have been possible just four years ago.

A groundswell in accessibility has been occurring at the university, with many additional projects distinct from the *ODA* plan. The additional initiatives include accessible chemistry teaching labs, redesigned and upgraded accessibility websites, and a disability anthology.

Self-organization has an associated “critical mass.” Four years ago, a few people at the university were working on accessibility issues in isolation. Today, many people are working in loose concert, promoting a welcoming climate, and laying the groundwork for further action.

The system has some problems: No firm commitment of resources has been obtained

from the provincial government or from institutions and departments. Institutional inertia is also in play. For example, how do equity and accessibility meld with the University of Toronto meritocracy and concerns about the dilution of standards? Some administrative indifference—and even resistance—exists, as does a degree of community indifference, based on the fact that students with disabilities represent just 2% of the university population. But 2% is a large number of students, given that the total student population at the university is about 70,000. Sukhai emphasized that having equity simply as a principle is not enough: action must also be taken.

Sukhai discussed the creation of the Graduate Accessibility Committee (GAC), whose mandate is to improve the quality and accessibility of the graduate school experience for students with disabilities. This research, policy, and lobbying group succeeded in having a Graduate Students' Union accessibility policy passed in April 2003. The GAC has participated in a number of taskforces and committees and has developed a personalized and targeted lobbying strategy, with an extensive network of contacts.

Another important organization at the university, Students for Barrier-Free Access (SFBA), was founded in 2002. It performs advocacy and outreach on behalf of students with disabilities. Recently, it launched the Access Centre, funded by a levy from the Students' Administrative Council. The Access Centre was established in response to the *ODA* planning documentation, which identified barriers experienced by students with disabilities that could be addressed through the creation of such a centre. The Centre's governance model ensures that its board has majority student representation, including members of student government.

Sukhai concluded that a collaborative atmosphere at the University of Toronto has developed over the last three years. The creation of the SFBA Access Centre was a big step forward and a marker of the permanence of the movement.

Discussion

A participant noted that understanding is often lacking among faculty members regarding students with disabilities, adding that a mechanism is required to ensure that information reaches individual faculty members.

Dunn said that training materials generated through the NEADS research project have been widely circulated and are available online. Student union representatives should be able to take the information to faculty members. Jennison Asuncion, also involved in the Inclusion Project, noted that the project would be asking for people to help distribute training information at the “micro” level.

Asked what to do when “institutional inertia” or a resistance to changing a situation to ensure better accessibility is encountered, Sukhai said that publicity and “poking and prodding” can be effective ways of getting changes made. Limitations may exist with regard to the possibility for change (for example, an inaccessible building may be impossible to modify); but, in those cases, alternative solutions should be sought.

Dunn remarked that student unions and activity planners are often not aware of the needs of students with disabilities. It can be helpful to let them know so that they can respond. Asuncion noted that NEADS is designing guidelines for accessibility.

Asked about approaching student clubs, Asuncion said that “you have to engage them in conversation” and build awareness regarding students with disabilities and their needs. “It’s a joint responsibility.”

Sukhai added that organizations should also include, in their promotional materials, contact information specifically for people with disabilities who wish to participate. Asked about student unions that fail to adequately promote their activities, Sukhai said students with disabilities may choose to organize their own information network. However, he added, they may also decide to be more direct about what they need—even going to the press if necessary.

A participant commented on the problem of bureaucracy in the process of securing accommodations at universities. Services for people with disabilities can do only so much.

Sukhai agreed that such service offices are in a difficult position: they are part of the university system and cannot speak out. It therefore becomes incumbent on other organizations to raise the concerns. Another effective method is for individuals to share their experiences with others, thereby raising the necessary awareness.

A participant asked about methods of getting a macro view of advocacy activities at the University of Toronto.

Sukhai noted that a number of students with disabilities choose not to register with the Office of Disability Assistance, preferring to work one-on-one with a department or a supervisor. Obtaining an accurate estimate of the percentage of students with disabilities is therefore difficult. Based on general population statistics, up to 15% of students at the university may have disabilities—that is, more than 10,000 people at U. of T. But only a minority of those have made themselves known. To meet the needs of as many people as possible, the students-with-disabilities movement at the university has tried to consider and synthesize as many perspectives as possible.

Asked about the value of campus housing for people with disabilities, Gillies said that the participants in her study had benefited from living on campus in terms of social life, transportation, safety, and other factors.

Referring to SBFA at the University of Toronto, a participant asked how to ensure continued student involvement once an organization is established.

Sukhai responded that, to ensure a permanent membership recruitment tool, students staff the Access Centre. The Centre can generate a leadership succession plan based on those

who are interested and involved.

Asked who is responsible for ensuring money is spent accountably, Sukhai said that a governance group handles the role. The group includes students and other members of the university community. From the beginning, the system was set up to be accountable and transparent.

Asked how the Centre rates success, Sukhai said that key performance indicators are in place and should be part of the annual report to the ODA on the success of the Centre.

Another participant asked if any studies had looked at inclusion in campus life for students at smaller universities, community colleges, or institutions in rural settings.

Asuncion said that the NEADS study took an investigative approach across Canada, but did not include an urban–rural analysis. The necessary data are available, but such an analysis was not part of the study mandate.

Asked about the low level of participation in her study, Gillies agreed that further study with a greater number of students would be good. She acknowledged the limitations in interviewing only four volunteers, but she noted that recruitment is very challenging because privacy must be respected.

Discussing the potential for students with disabilities to “stick together,” Sukhai said that such self-segregation is not generally an issue. The Accessibility Centre at the University of Toronto provides space for socialization, but students with disabilities do not tend to “stick together”—if anything, they often do not identify themselves as students with disabilities.

Gillies said that her study had revealed a blend of opportunities for students with disabilities, from generalized to segregated activities.

Theme 3: Access to Academic Materials for Print-Disabled Students

Moderators: Joby Fleming, Past-President, NEADS; Robin Drodge, Newfoundland and Labrador Representative, NEADS

Introduction

Joby Fleming welcomed the participants to the workshop. He noted that the federal government’s Social Development Partnerships Program sponsored the workshop, and also sponsors the NEADS project, Access to Academic Materials for Print-Disabled Post-Secondary Students: A Partnership of Users and Service Providers.

Robin Drodge provided a brief descriptive overview of the workshop: Access to information is a fundamental right of all Canadians. Given that only 3% of the world’s

literature is available in multiple formats, post-secondary students with print disabilities depend on programs, service providers, and librarians to obtain the information and materials they need to meet their course requirements. For people with disabilities, program completion at the post-secondary level is the most direct way to ensure employability and integration into the economic and social mainstream of Canadian society.

In December 2003, NEADS began work on a new project initiative: Access to Academic Materials for Print-Disabled Post-Secondary Students: A Partnership of Users and Service Providers. NEADS is working on that initiative with the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada and the Council on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians. The overall goal is to provide, to those French and English post-secondary students who cannot access academic materials using conventional print formats, the information, services, and materials required to meet educational and career goals.

Carolyn Wiebe: The Journey of Alternative-Format Textbooks in Manitoba—How Co-operation Works!

Carolyn Wiebe, Accessibility Advisor, Disability Services, University of Manitoba, explained how the Disability Services (DS) office at the University of Manitoba and the office of Special Materials Services [SMS (part of Manitoba Citizenship and Youth, Government of Manitoba)], have created a positive and effective working relationship based on co-operation and shared work. The DS office outsources all production of alternative-format materials. Thus, her presentation formed part of a joint effort with Susan Doerksen.

First, the student registers with the DS office. A DS advisor downloads the student's list of required books. If no texts are listed for a course, the advisor contacts professors or their departments to obtain the lists. Next, the DS office sends the text list to SMS by email. SMS searches databases in the United States and Canada to determine the availability of texts and then provides the resulting information to the DS office. The DS office in turn informs the student.

Several concerns have been raised about the system:

- Many of the books ordered are older or American editions.
- Significant delays are experienced in waiting for instructors to select their texts.
- Sometimes, instructors change editions or texts after an order has already been placed.
- The response time from the DS office can be too long.

These concerns require that instructors improve their text selection process. On the other hand, students are unhappy with response times from the DS office, but do not always tell the office when problems occur. Two related questions are these:

- Why can only students with visual disabilities have texts produced for them in Manitoba?

- What about students with other disabilities?

On the positive side, SMS and the DS office have an effective co-operative and collaborative working relationship, checking the status of orders and reminding each other when something fails to arrive or texts are not sent. Once the text information is known, the process is very quick. Another positive aspect is that students have one “go-to person” if they encounter problems.

Susan Doerksen: The Journey of Alternative-Format Textbooks in Manitoba—How Co-operation Works!

Susan Doerksen, Coordinator for Post-Secondary Alternative Format Textbooks, Special Materials Services (SMS), Government of Manitoba, explained that SMS not only provides e-text (Word, ASCII, RTF, HTML, PDF), audio (analog, MP3, WAV), large-print, and Braille and e-Braille resources, it also lends equipment. Production resources include two recording studios, two tactile specialists, several narrators, five part-time editors, and a large-print facility. SMS also keep a “special formats” library from which it loans titles across Canada.

The journey from the search for a text to production first involves determining the availability of the title. SMS searches various databases—for example, those at the National Library of Canada database, at the Association of Education Resource Centres, and online at Bookshare.org. If the text is found, it can often be borrowed through interlibrary loan. However, problems are encountered with cross-border loans, because books sometimes are lost.

Frequently, the option of actually producing the book must be considered. SMS consults with the DS office about producing the text for the student.

Production involves these steps:

- Obtain a print copy of the text.
- Order the publisher’s disk, which can take up to a month and which sometimes leads to problems with file-type incompatibility and missing information.
- Notify the National Library of Canada to facilitate file sharing.
- Produce the alternative format, which often requires editing even if having the publisher’s disk makes scanning unnecessary.
- Deliver to the student, sometimes in instalments.

SMS receives feedback from students, teachers, and government agencies. It also stays in touch with students.

Changes in file formats are an issue. Something new is always on the horizon. New formats are allowing greater accessibility and ease of production and use. U.S. publishers are being encouraged to produce in an XML-type format that can be more easily adapted to Braille, e-text, and so on. Talks are ongoing in Canada with regard to building a depository of publishers’ disks. SMS has created an FTP (file transfer protocol) site and a

web OPAC (online public access catalogue) for sharing files. Finally, new software and playback or storage devices with more features and greater capacity—such as Apple’s iPod—are becoming cheaper and more available.

Doerksen recommended checking out the Illinois project at www.mitbc.org/services/digital.shtml. The SMS website can be found at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/blind/index.html, and the online catalogue at smscat.merlin.mb.ca

Doerksen provided copies of her presentation in both Braille and large print.

Trent Copp: Alternative-Format Lending: A Roadmap to Utopia

Trent Copp, Library Assistant (Special Needs), McMaster University, discussed the “steps to Utopia” for alternative-format texts. Explaining the pros and cons of various formats, he said that audio, Braille, and large print are familiar but costly, labour intensive, and cumbersome. They also have a limited market. On the other hand, e-text is both cost- and labour-effective and is often available in the public domain. It can be read with screen readers and magnifiers such as Kurzweil and JAWS, or with other free or less costly limited-feature alternatives.

Copp recommended a website with recordings for students with blindness and dyslexia: www.rfbd.org. However, Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic (RFB&D) provides American editions only. Institutional production is inefficient and fails to take advantage of inter-lending. Student self-production takes away valuable study time. McMaster University has a Resource Services Library that coordinates inter-lending through the Amicus, LOUIS, and CNIB catalogues, for example. But financial resources continue to be a problem when materials need to be produced. Time is also a major issue. Copp noted that, typically, he must start working in October to fill student needs by January.

On the positive side, major publishers now have online request forms, and new editions are increasingly more likely to be available as e-text. McMaster has also found it useful to provide assurance to publishers through an e-text contract that students sign, agreeing not to copy the material for other use. The use of e-text reduces the need for storage space and alternative-format production, the layers of administrative involvement, and the need for volunteers. And, although technology intimidates some students, and screen readers cannot handle math and diagrams, advancing technology is addressing those barriers.

Copp’s roadmap to Utopia includes educating software companies and smaller publishers, promoting the benefits of screen readers, pressuring faculty, and adopting legislation. Publishers are currently able to provide e-text for approximately 65% to 75% of requests.

Copp closed with a positive message of awareness and co-operation from Oxford University Press, a major textbook publisher. He offered his email address (spneeds@mcmaster.ca) to participants who might want to contact him.

Kimberley Gerritsen: Unique Challenges—Living with an Invisible Print Disability

Kimberley Gerritsen, Graduate Student, Masters of Education in Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies, University of Calgary, spoke about her personal experience with print disability. Her print disability is the result of a learning disability (LD) rather than of a visual impairment. She described LD as a disruption in the learning process, which has four stages:

- Receiving information via the senses
- Processing the received information in the brain
- Turning the result into memory
- Expressing what is remembered

Visual processing deficits come in four main types:

- Visual figure–ground deficit: Difficulty seeing a specific image within a competing background, difficulty picking out specific lines on a page, or words on a line
- Visual sequencing deficit: Difficulty seeing things in the correct order, seeing letters or words in reverse
- Visual discrimination deficit: Difficulty seeing the difference between two similar objects such as c's and e's, n's and m's, etc.
- Depth perception deficit: Difficulty perceiving how far away an object may be

Gerritsen asked a volunteer from among the workshop participants to read a story entitled “The Farmer and the Mule”, which was written out this way:

*The Farner the amb Mule: A baradle told of farner ownep who olb mule.
The nule mule stanb eoulp on the dotton. The farmer heard mule braying-
whatcver mvlcs bo when ...*

She explained that the text showed how a person with an LD and a related print disability (difficulty seeing the difference between two similar objects, such as “p” and “b” or “u” and “v”) would see words on a page. In the story, the happy ending communicated the moral: What seems like something that could bury a person can actually help, because life is about how we handle adversity.

Gerritsen concluded her presentation by outlining the three available options for accessing print material in audible format:

- Organizations such as RFB&D, public libraries, and the CNIB
- Paying readers or enlisting the support of volunteer readers
- Technology, such as the Zoomtext program, which is designed for people with a visual impairment. Kurzweil is a program designed for people without a visual impairment.

Gladys Loewen: CADSPPE Focus Group Outcomes—Access to Information for Students with Print Disabilities

Gladys Loewen, Manager, Assistive Technology–BC, presented the outcome of the previous day's focus-group meeting at the University of Ottawa of the Canadian Association of Disability Service Providers in Post-Secondary Education (CADSPPE). The goals were to establish a clear picture of the issues involved in supporting print-disabled students and to identify tasks for a five-year plan. Gladys is a member of the NEADS Access to Academic Materials Project Steering Committee.

The group wrote this vision statement during the meeting: “To ensure equal and timely access to academic information in post-secondary educational environments.”

Focus-group participants identified these signs as indications that the group's vision of success would have been achieved:

- Students have the information that they need at the right time, in the right place, and in the right format.
- Disability service centres and self-identification are no longer necessary.
- Courses are not offered unless universal design (UD) is practiced.
- UD principles permeate post-secondary environments.
- Student satisfaction is evident by the smiles on faces.

Barriers to achieving those identified signs of success include attitudes of faculty, administration, and publishers; legal, institutional, and federal regulations and procedures; and students being required to produce their own materials, thereby losing critical study time.

The group also identified some of the goals and recommendations:

- Use existing networks and services such as national databases and interlibrary loans.
- Improve existing networks such as AMICUS and CWIP (Canadian Works in Progress).
- Require publishers to provide an accessible electronic file for all textbooks sold in post-secondary bookstores.
- Develop national “best practices” guidelines.
- Establish an e-mail list in order to share ideas.
- Develop and promote a universal standard for production so that material can be shared across institutions.
- Shift to the paradigm of UD as a philosophical framework.

Key recommendations included establishing a five-year plan, and focusing on changes to the environment, rather than on individual accommodations. The players responsible to achieve those goals are CADSPPE, NEADS, disability service providers, students, institutional administrators and faculty, publishers, the legal environment, and the federal government, specifically Library and Archives Canada and the Council on Access to Information for Print Disabled Canadians.

These next steps were identified:

- Circulate the proceedings of the focus group.
- Provide NEADS with a copy of the proceedings for its Access to Academic Materials Project.
- Have CADSPPE's board and members discuss and establish future actions.

At the end of her presentation, Loewen said, "We are embracing a systemic change and plan to continue promoting universal access."

Vince Tomassetti: Comparing Formal and Informally-Produced Digital Texts

Vince Tomassetti, Vision Technology Specialist, Assistive Technology–B.C., explained that the objective of alternative-format text is "Access to the right information at the right time and in the right place." Until that ideal of accessibility and independence is reached, students must be better informed so that they can plan accommodations.

But how do accessibility and independence relate to the objective?

Tomassetti discussed that question in terms of whether e-text is produced by the student or professionally. Students should have the choice of spending time to produce material or spending time reading and studying, Tomassetti said. Some factors to consider include print layout, production resources, and the end user.

Print layouts can contain columns, tables, foreign languages, special symbols, graphics, and non-standard fonts that optical character recognition (OCR) technology ignores or finds difficult to reproduce.

Production resources are affected by the quality–time trade-off. A student who "does it himself (or herself)" may have the text sooner, but visually impaired students cannot edit scanned work, which may be incomplete or may contain inaccuracies. Even some publishers' files may not be complete: they may be missing graphics, for example. Moreover, time spent producing the book could be better spent reading other notes or books. Also, spending time to read poor quality material is inefficient.

The end-user factors include the nature of the print disability, the technology and technological skills available to the student, and the student's course load, time demands, and learning style.

In closing, Tomassetti suggested replacing the terms "accessibility" and "independence" with "usability" and "efficiency."

Interactive Session

Tomassetti walked through an on-screen demonstration of scanned output from OCR and Kurzweil technology. He explained that OCR scanners ignore graphics. A visually impaired person would therefore still need someone to type descriptions of the graphics. On the other hand, Kurzweil software allows a sighted person to see the image of the page on a screen.

Copp explained that publishers' online request forms are accessible mainly to administration or professors only. Some students have managed to contact the authors for e-text versions.

Responding to a question about the weaknesses that exist in the system, Copp noted that timeliness was a major problem. A non-disabled student can switch courses much more easily than a disabled student can.

A delegate commented on the inequality of access across Canada, noting the Manitoba situation. Doerksen said that Manitoba produces alternative formats for students from kindergarten to high school. The problem lies with the post-secondary level. She encouraged post-secondary students to organize, protest, and lobby the provincial jurisdiction.

Loewen said that all post-secondary institutions have to be creative in finding solutions. Gross differences across institutions exist, and students must become better consumers by asking questions before choosing a particular institution.

Tomassetti recommended the CNIB library as a useful and accessible e-portal. Delegates noted that students need to be more aware of their rights and how to access them.

Employment Workshop 1

Clint Davis, Co-Director, Diversity and Workplace Equity; Nicole Dunn, Human Resources; and Stephen McDonnell, Senior Business Partner, Diversity and Workplace Equity, all from BMO Financial Group

The presenters of this session spoke about useful ideas for the transition from school to work, from the perspective of BMO Financial Group, an employer with a long-time commitment to diversity. The agenda included an introduction to BMO and a set of tips for job seeking and starting a job. The keywords to take away were “research,” “prepare,” and “develop.”

For the World You Live In

Clint Davis, Co-Director, Diversity and Workplace Equity, BMO Financial Group, noted that BMO is the oldest financial organization in Canada. It provides diversified investment and banking services and views its commitment to diversity as a strategic, competitive advantage. Davis emphasized that BMO hires on merit, expects contributions

to its workplace, and puts a high priority on productivity, performance, and consistent profit for shareholders.

BMO operates a task force on the employment of people with disabilities and has conducted research on the topic. Davis highlighted some misconceptions about disabled people:

- That they can't do the job
- That they need costly special treatment
- That they are unsuited to certain jobs
- That they ask for more sick leave
- That they can't handle overtime

In fact, the research shows that

- 80% of accommodations can be achieved at reasonable cost.
- disabled people don't take a disproportionate amount of sick leave.
- technological improvements in workplace accommodations have broadened the range of jobs open to employees with disabilities.

Davis encouraged the students to remind employers of their *abilities*.

Disabled students often lack part-time job experience to cite on their résumés, and so Stephen McDonnell recommended that they accumulate experiential learning, such as internships, co-operative work placements, job shadowing, and community outreach (for example, with the Canadian Paraplegic Association). He also emphasized building a CARE team—a network of four or five “coaches,” such as teachers, disabled services providers, and so on.

Davis then listed BMO's key corporate values (care, diversity, respect, accountability, and innovation), noting that those values represent a fundamental philosophy by which BMO lives. Those values are not a program from which budget can be sliced.

Job-Seeking

Davis next explained that the first step in a job search is to research the company. Research includes reading the annual report and learning about the company's business, structure, corporate values, community activities, financial health, strategies for growth, and, importantly, commitment to diversity.

Second, job seekers have to create résumés that accurately describe and successfully market their skills. A résumé is an inventory of work-related experiences, education, and achievements. It must create a strong, positive impression; leave no gaps between employment dates; and be simple, clear, and easy to read. Two pages are normally sufficient. Sentences should begin with action words, rather than “I.” The résumé should also state career objectives. Job seekers also need to remember that a résumé is a living document that must be periodically updated. A fundamental point is that it should contain absolutely no errors.

McDonnell added that a résumé should also highlight volunteer experience, leadership skills, extracurricular activities, and awards or recognition received. It should emphasize how the job seeker has delivered projects on time, been involved in the community, and built good relationships with others. Job seekers should also maintain contact with professors and supervisors—the CARE team—and ask them for letters of reference.

The third step is the interview. McDonnell recommended using the interview to determine if the position is the right one. He emphasized making a request for accommodations ahead of time. A good employer should be happy to provide them—or may even proactively ask about special needs. In an interview situation, the job seeker has the right to request confidentiality and a responsibility to recognize personal boundaries regarding disclosure. Because 95% of communication is nonverbal, McDonnell strongly suggested talking to references and practicing interviews with the CARE team, people who can “say hard things to you.” He also suggested deciding beforehand what to wear and practicing the trip to the interview site. Taking along extra résumé copies is also a good practice.

Davis listed the four essential Ps of the interview:

- Prepare—Know your skills and abilities, your strengths and weaknesses.
- Participate—Ask insightful questions.
- Practice—Rehearse with a friend or colleague.
- Perception—Make good first impressions, which are often lasting.

Starting the Job

In terms of accommodations, McDonnell emphasized the importance of understanding personal boundaries regarding disclosure. Also, in articulating the needs attributable to the disability, people with disabilities should avoid understating *abilities*. Focus on abilities and on getting the job done, because all companies want to hire based on those attributes.

During the orientation, learn the company’s culture and values, request a tour, and review company literature such as the human resources policy and the public accountability statement. Ask if the information is available in an alternative format. McDonnell reminded the students that orientation is a process rather than a single event; it can continue even after years of employment.

Davis spoke about active participation and career development. He recommended asking questions, getting to know the manager and team, networking, being responsive, and knowing what is expected from employees. Building a successful career is part of the current job. Working toward advancement is about learning and growth; sharing team, department, and company goals; showing independence and self-sufficiency; and taking opportunities to achieve full potential.

Davis also emphasized being proactive, getting involved, and “performing, performing,

performing.” Talk to the manager to create a career development plan, and revisit that plan regularly. Find a mentor and establish networks—for example, with the company’s diversity council. And again, performance is crucial. Davis suggested keeping skills current and developing, with the manager, a set of mutually agreeable performance expectations.

In closing, McDonnell quoted from Confucius: “Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.” He said that the transition from school to work is extremely challenging. Barriers do exist, but he recognized the huge dreams and ambition of the students and encouraged them to live by Confucius’ statement.

Conference Banquet: Keynote Address

Jim Derksen, Past President, CCD’s Human Rights Committee

NEADS conference chair Jason Mitschele introduced Jim Derksen at the Saturday evening banquet.

Derksen was born in 1947 in Morris, a small farming community in Manitoba. He began using a wheelchair after being disabled during the polio epidemic of 1953. Since that time, Derksen has founded the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD), the Canadian Disability Rights Council (CDRC), and several other disability rights self-representative advocacy organizations. He spoke about the history of the disability movement in Canada.

Derksen expressed his pleasure at being able to attend the conference and at seeing such a large group of young people with leadership qualities and potential. He said that he was impressed and encouraged by what he was seeing and by the quality of the speakers and the workshop agenda.

Derksen reflected on the fact that he has been involved with the disability movement for a long time—since 1972. He has a lot of stories to tell, and many experiences of being involved in strategic decisions that were made over the years.

Derksen said that, when he was born, people with disabilities were seen in a moral framework. It was understood that people with disabilities were relegated to the role of beggar. Throughout the world, including Canada, disabled people were seen as the deserving poor, with limited options in life. For example, individuals with certain disabilities became watch repairers; those with blindness worked on chairs or piano repair. Helping organizations at that time were charities. Many have evolved and still behave like charities. One of the important aspects of charities was that more of them were located in urban environments, and laws and institutions began to be created to warehouse people with disabilities. People with disabilities were considered morally inferior, and state charities tended to keep people in poverty in their place.

The second kind of framework was the medical framework. An idea evolved that people

with disabilities were threats to the gene pool because they were biologically inferior. Having a disability reflected poorly on one's family. Words such as "badly bred" and "not of good stock" were used to imply biological inferiority. The killing of people with disabilities was a general practice from coast to coast. Sterilization was also practiced. Often, individuals were not told that they had been sterilized.

Another aspect of the medical model was to "fix" what is "broken." For example, people affected by polio were put into braces and told that they could walk again. The medical profession did not want to be reminded of its failures when expectations about results failed to come to fruition. One framework focuses financial resources on finding cures; another framework focuses on transforming society so that people with disabilities can function there.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, as a result of the civil rights movement and women's movement, the importance of the need to change language became clearer. Language needed to be changed so that issues could be seen in a different light. Examples are the phrases "black is beautiful" and "black power."

Language change underscored the radical notion that the problem was not with individuals, but with the way in which society perceived them. People began to become aware that because the social environment was constructed by humans, it could also be deconstructed. It was not immutable; it could be tested and criticized. Thus, in the 1970s, human rights codes began to emerge. Nova Scotia was the first province to encode a right not to be discriminated against in employment services or in the provision of goods and services. No such thing as accommodation yet existed.

Derksen next gave several examples of human rights case law involving people with disabilities. He noted the importance of human rights protection and the need to take complaints to the Human Rights Commission. The problem is that cases are settled individually there, and so the system doesn't change.

In 1980, the Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped -- now called the Council of Canadians With Disabilities -- was formed. Strength in numbers derived from the recognition that joining together in common bonds of understanding and experience, rather than remaining separated by differences. Subsequently the group could have a stronger influence on public policy. As a result, in 1980–1981, the Parliament of Canada introduced the Obstacles Report, with 130 recommendations for changing infrastructure such as transportation and communications to enable better integration of people with disabilities into society. That report was a major historical turning point.

At the same time, a decision was taken to form national and international groups to counter the difficulties that had been experienced in organizing local and provincial groups. As a result, organizers were able to influence the content of the World Program of Action, and the standardization of equal opportunity. Work at the national and international levels furthered the work "on the ground."

Considerable energy was also put into providing input to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Derksen was seconded to Parliament to serve as an advisor for the Obstacles Report. A formal recommendation was made to embed the Charter of Rights and Freedoms into the Canadian constitution. Derksen talked about how his group used certain tactics such as following committee members to the washrooms, and sitting behind parliamentarians on the committee “day after day after day.”

Derksen provided several case examples of Supreme Court decisions on equality rights. In one situation, he and his colleagues formed an alliance with an organization representing women’s legal rights: LEAF. Together, they were able to persuade the Supreme Court to take an approach designed to protect groups that are persistently vulnerable to discrimination. Another case involved the right of a deaf married couple to interpreter services during the birth of their twin children in a hospital in British Columbia.

Derksen also mentioned the Latimer case, in which, in the face of contrary public opinion, the court recognized the need for equal protection under the law and the value of an appropriate sentence for the murder of a child with a disability.

Derksen pointed out the important work that Steve Estey is doing with the new United Nations (UN) Convention to protect and promote the rights and dignity of people with disabilities. He challenged the conference delegates to actively work to move that convention into the system and to achieve ratification. The vertical and horizontal strategies for activism that were used 20 years ago still apply to the new convention and to what happens in Canada—despite the existence of the Charter and the Code. Derksen said that CCD is very interested in this project. The UN convention is bringing to light dreadful situations that exist in institutions for disabled people around the world. Bringing those situations to light is very important.

Sunday, November 14, 2004

Theme 1: Human Rights

Panel 1 Moderators: Jason Mitschele and Jennifer Finlay

Krystine Donato: Human Rights and Students with Disabilities in the Post-Secondary Setting

Krystine Donato, Graduate, Honours Program, Child and Youth Studies, Brock University, said that, historically, students with disabilities have been excluded from post-secondary education. Usually they had two choices: a specialized educational setting, or the job market.

A study done in the mid 1970s showed that people with disabilities were applying to post-secondary institutions, but that most had physical disabilities. There was a big gap: students with learning disabilities or mental health issues were not attending.

After the 1990s, a greater proportion of students with disabilities had a learning disability, a health-related disability, or a mental health issue. Not only has higher education witnessed an increase in the number of students with disabilities, the range of the disabilities has also expanded. Legislation and social policy support the right of students with disabilities to pursue education and recognize the students' need for empowerment and self-determination.

Movements in Canada and the United States have made education more accessible for students with disabilities. Canada's disability movement has been clearly defined by the inclusion in the Canadian constitution of equality guarantees for people with disabilities.

Donato reviewed disability legislation in North America, including Section 504 of the U.S. *Rehabilitation Act* of 1973, and Ontario's Bill 181, an education act passed in the 1980s. The *Americans with Disabilities Act* of 1990 focused on more accountability in the United States. The *Ontarians with Disabilities Act* of 2001 was introduced in an effort to "mainstream" life for people with disabilities. That act gave post-secondary institutions a crucial role and tried to increase quality of life for people with disabilities.

Discussing her research in the area of human rights and education for people with disabilities, Donato said that most of the existing literature tends to point fingers, focusing on areas of concern rather than on what works. Students, faculty, and service providers point at each other and talk about what the other party should do. Donato explained that her proposed research will explore perceptions of barriers and experiences with accommodations among students with disabilities and faculty members at one Ontario university.

When looking at the barriers students with disabilities face in post-secondary institutions, issues range from physical access to institutional policy. Donato said that her thesis

would shed light on some of the issues. The goals for the research are to provide a description of the experiences and the anticipated needs of a group of post-secondary students with disabilities and to provide a description of the experiences and challenges of faculty members who are attempting to accommodate students with disabilities.

These are the anticipated outcomes of the research:

- To help academic administrators develop policies that support accommodations for students with disabilities.
- To inform faculty about the needs of students with disabilities so that the faculty become more effective in their instructional accommodations.
- To inform students about the challenges faced by faculty so that the students can more effectively self-advocate.

Steve Estey: The United Nations Human Rights Framework

Steve Estey, Chair, International Committee, Council of Canadians with Disabilities, noted that, of the 600 million people with disabilities in the world, 400 million live in countries of extreme poverty. People with disabilities who are attending post-secondary institutions in richer countries need to remember that statistic and to participate in human rights work.

Estey discussed the overall United Nations (UN) human rights framework and the evolving human rights and disabilities framework. Those two trends have brought countries to the point where they are now discussing the creation of a human rights convention for people with disabilities.

Estey outlined the development of a system of core human rights treaties at the UN. One of the first documents passed after the formation of the UN was the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which talks about the rights of all human beings on the planet. Those rights include (for example) rights to freedom, dignity, security, and equal treatment.

From 1948 to the late 1970s, six core human rights treaties were developed. Those treaties are now referred to as the UN “human rights architecture.”

In the mid-1970s, a realization developed in the UN system that the treaties did not take into account the differences in humanity—differences in the ways that people experience their human rights. The UN then began to develop four thematic human rights treaties focusing on racial discrimination, torture, women, and children.

A process has now been underway for a number of years to incorporate the disability perspective into international instruments. Estey presented a brief history of that process from the early 1970s to the present. The first call for a new convention on people with disabilities came in 1987, at the mid-decade review of the UN Decade of Disabled Persons.

After several more calls for a convention, the government of Mexico introduced a resolution into the General Assembly in 2001. That resolution called for the creation of a committee to look at whether a convention should be created. That more indirect approach succeeded, and the committee's first meeting was held in 2002 in New York. At the end of the process, no consensus had developed in the committee about whether a convention was needed. Another meeting was held and, at that meeting, a resolution was passed to draft a convention for discussion (though no consensus had been reached that a convention was necessary).

Even lacking a formal consensus, momentum is now building and a convention seems inevitable. In January 2004, a working group met and prepared the first official draft text. Two two-week meetings since then have been convened to read through the draft document.

The challenges for 2005 and beyond are these:

- To find consensus that cuts across the diverse interests of people with disabilities
- To entrench judiciable human rights, without binding with a programmatic focus
- To ensure an effective monitoring mechanism
- To maintain an effective voice in change
- To translate global human rights into local benefits

Jamie Fillion: The Special Admissions Process: A Model in Inclusionary Practice

Jamie Fillion, Manager, Disability Services, Nova Scotia Community College, explained that Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) has moved from 130 students self-disclosing and accessing services in 1999, to 700 students this year. That change has given the college an opportunity, as the youngest college in Canada, to set up a good model for dealing with students with disabilities.

The college takes a learning approach to education and has created a model to adapt that approach to students with disabilities. Rather than creating a modified curriculum for students with disabilities, the college focuses on providing appropriate services so that each student can follow a program of study based on their interests. The new model reflects a shift in attitude.

In 1996, the Nova Scotia government introduced the *Special Education Act*. The act states that every child has the right to an inclusive setting, but community support is lacking, and a gap exists in opportunity and access after Grade 12. The situation precipitated the introduction of the special admissions process at NSCC.

NSCC programs are totally inclusive, and everyone enters their program of choice. The college has an 85% retention rate for students with disabilities. That compares with an average student retention rate of 73% for all of Canada.

At NSCC, students with disabilities self-disclose in their acceptance package, rather than on their application form. That approach ensures that the students are not excluded, and it builds a level of trust. The college also arranges for accommodations to follow students for three years after college, into the employment setting.

The biggest shift has been from the idea of reasonable accommodation and duty to accommodate to the idea of just “being ready” and “making it happen,” said Fillion. The focus is social inclusion and opportunity to participate.

Some of the biggest barriers have been attitudinal, including fear on the part of faculty. Fillion said that she teaches a course on accommodating students with disabilities. In that class, students and faculty can learn from each other about their fears.

Commenting on the merits of universal instructional design, Fillion said that “it’s not about access to information—it’s about access to learning.” Everyone has a responsibility to participate: the institution, staff, and students.

People often want a “cookbook” on how to deal with students with disabilities, she said, but the best approach is an individualized one. “The student tells us what works ... and we put this in the context of learning in that environment.”

The comprehensive approach taken by NSCC includes these elements:

- The Special Admissions Process (an individualized approach to accommodation)
- Universal instructional design
- The “Smart Steps” transition program (an interactive program in which high-school students with disabilities learn self-advocacy and career planning)
- Assistive technology and tutorial labs
- Community partnerships
- A mentoring program

In the future, movement to increase opportunity through community partnerships and advocacy will continue, and professional development for faculty in universal instructional design will increase.

Bill Holder: The Drought in Accommodation Jurisprudence

In his presentation, Bill Holder, Discipline Counsel, Law Society of Upper Canada, examined four questions from a legal perspective.

Is there a right to education?

With respect to post-secondary education, said Holder, the answer is no. He cited ongoing issues in access to post-secondary education, including huge tuition increases. Such increases affect people with disabilities in particular, because they disproportionately represent the poorest group in Canada. People with disabilities currently graduate at half the rate of other students, and increasing tuition costs will

exacerbate the problem.

Is there a right to accommodation?

The answer to this question is yes: People with disabilities have the right to receive the same services as everyone else.

What is meant by the concept of undue hardship?

Accommodation must be provided unless providing it causes “undue hardship.” Undue hardship is defined as the point of inviability, insolvency, or bankruptcy of a business.

How do students with disabilities enforce their rights?

When confronted with a new case, a lawyer will research previous cases to look for precedents. The lawyer will then write letters on behalf of individuals that have not received accommodations. The letters will cite the previous cases and ask for the same accommodations. The more case law in a specific area, the more predictable the outcome will be.

Discussing accommodations in employment, Holder explained that the obligation to provide accommodations is triggered when someone asks for them. Individuals should make a written request so that proof of when the request was made is available later. The letter should include a reference to existing human rights legislation. That reference will remind the employer that a legal entitlement exists and that the requester also has a right to be free from reprisal or retaliation for making the request.

If the employer asks for evidence, the person seeking accommodations should provide a note from a medical practitioner. The note should set out the restrictions or functional limitations. The note does not have to provide diagnostic information.

If an employer asks that the employee see a company physician, the employee may wish to seek legal advice to ensure that personal privacy is protected.

Many people do not know the accommodation measures they need. They only know their functional limitations. In that case, the employer has the obligation to determine the necessary accommodations. The employer may even have to retain an expert to look at the job duties, medical restrictions, and available assistive devices. The person seeking the accommodations has a duty to co-operate in that process.

With 25 years of jurisprudence on the record, lawyers are confident about entitlement and rights in employment for people with disabilities. But they know considerably less about accommodations in education. The last major case was decided in 1993, when Nigel Howard won his case against the University of British Columbia (regarding sign interpretation for courses). Lack of sufficient jurisprudence makes the outcome of cases in the area of education considerably less predictable. Universities may consider

themselves immune to this kind of accountability, which may raise a problem for students.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission is expected to publish guidelines on education this year. Those guidelines may be useful for students trying to understand their rights in post-secondary institutions.

Being a complainant is not easy, Holder said. Students will find it hard to fight a legal dispute—especially one that may not be resolved until after graduation. But, if more cases are decided by tribunals, benefits will accrue for future students. Better precedents are needed, and universities and colleges “need to become more alive to the right to accommodation.”

Discussion

Jason Mitschele remarked that NEADS is looking forward to taking a more proactive role in the field of human rights. The organization is in a true transitional phase, and the present conference has brought the human rights theme home. NEADS has been involved in the UN convention process and will continue with human rights work.

A participant asked Fillion about work programs for students in Newfoundland. Fillion replied that Newfoundland has a good system, with a “birth-to-grave” approach to disability supports. She mentioned two post-secondary institutions in Newfoundland that have many students with disabilities and that provide accommodations to those students. The institutions also offer programming to students who do not meet the requirements for admission.

Asked how she has succeeded in educating faculty about the needs of students with disabilities, Fillion explained that her course is one option in a larger, mandatory professional development program. Her course is popular because it provides practical, applied information.

Another participant asked Estey what people could do to contribute to the momentum in favour of the UN convention. Estey explained that member states are very engaged in the process, but that they often try to water down the convention. The CCD is trying to work with disability organizations across the country to look at the convention in detail. Engagement at the provincial level is also important, because the provinces and territories are often the ones that deliver services or enforce rights for people with disabilities. The Government of Canada is engaged in an ongoing negotiation with the provinces, and NGOs must mobilize at the provincial level.

Jim Derksen agreed about the importance of voicing support for the UN convention at the provincial level. Provinces and territories need to understand that the electorate wants Canada to engage in the convention. If those governments hear nothing from disabled peoples’ organizations at the provincial level, “that silence will enable a variety of mischief, from ignoring the convention to trying to sabotage it or prevent it from moving

forward.”

Estey added that students can help by researching the issues and contributing to the body of understanding through newsletters such as *Convention Yes* (which can be found at Disabled Peoples’ International at www.dpi.org).

Asked about where other countries stand in relation to the convention, Estey noted that Mexico launched the convention process. On the other hand, the United States has said that it will not sign the convention, but neither will it block the process.

A participant from Nunavut commented that human rights for people with disabilities are a huge concern in the North. This participant emphasized the need for advocacy groups, including NEADS, to become more involved in the North.

Asked about the possibility of starting a class-action human rights complaint in the North, Holder explained that class-action law may vary by province or territory, but that in Ontario, human rights complaints must be filed by individuals. Similar cases may be heard as a group, but a group hearing is not the same as a class-action suit. Human rights cases are not taken to court, but in Ontario are handled by a Human Rights Commission and tribunal.

Another participant suggested that NEADS could bring a human rights case against the government as a provider of education, for inadequate funding of accommodations—based on the premise that service providers must be non-discriminatory.

Holder explained that human rights cases cannot be brought by third parties (for example, NEADS acting on behalf of students). Taking governments to task with regard to universities is also harder, because universities are not really delivering government services.

Noting that accommodations are usually provided on an individualized basis, with each person being treated as unique, a participant asked Holder if it is harder for an individual human rights case to set a precedent for others. Holder explained that human rights cases are decided based on more general principles. He added that, if a student loses a case, the overall cause is unlikely to be hurt. Cases that have failed have typically failed on their own merits: not because of the principles in question, but from a lack of evidence regarding the needs of the student. Human rights cases on accommodations are generally among the strongest possible cases that can be brought, he added. They have a high degree of success because institutions and businesses have great difficulty proving that they face undue hardship. They are therefore “worth the risk.”

Asked who determines the need for accommodation, the student or service provider, Holder said that precedent on that issue is lacking. The duty to accommodate comes into play when, lacking accommodation, a condition of inequality would exist. Fillion added that most universities and colleges have official definitions of appropriate accommodation.

Asked why NSCC had been so successful in its programming, Fillion said that the college is young. It therefore lacks the baggage and bureaucracy of older institutions, and it has an innovative president and a great staff. NSCC is also supported by a province-wide approach involving the government and the broader community. That approach is part of a larger shift to view Nova Scotia's large population of people with disabilities as an economic force rather than as participants in a social welfare system.

Panel 2 Moderators: Rachael Ross and Natalie Osika

Rachael Ross introduced the workshop theme, and provided a workshop description. Natalie Osika introduced the panel members and moderated the question-and-answer session.

The World Health Organization estimates that, of the entire global population, at least 10%, or 600 million people, have some form of disability. As more people with disabilities seek to enforce their rights to full citizenship, education and entry into the work force both become key issues.

People with disabilities continue to be faced with barriers to full participation in society. Those barriers impede fundamental access to education and employment, subjecting persons with disabilities to discrimination, poverty, substandard housing and care, and even abuse. By nature, such barriers are systemic, socio-economic, attitudinal, cultural, and physical. Failure to address and remove the barriers seriously violates the rights to equality and human dignity shared by all.

Terri Hulett: Relationship Between Higher Education and Human Rights

Terri Hulett, Consultant, Inclusive Solutions Corporation, established her business to provide disability consultation in the area of higher education and employment. Hulett is also a member of the National Federation of the Blind: Advocates for Equality.

Hulett began her presentation by looking at the issue of accommodation and human rights. She said that individuals have a right to education and a right to be accommodated. She questioned where a student's role as self-advocate stops and where the role of post-secondary institutions begins. Hulett specifically mentioned the need for post-secondary students to be focused on their studies, rather than having to spend significant time scanning materials. A duty to accommodate exists.

Hulett made three recommendations to students working with disability services offices:

- Identify the actual barrier.
- Identify the accommodation needed.
- "Shoot for the stars."

Hulett gave examples of legal cases of attitudinal barriers and discrimination, and of "need to accommodate" that went to the Supreme Court of Canada. She reminded

participants that post-secondary institutions, the student body, and society in general are all responsible for education rights. She proposed that it is better to educate students about their human rights and to involve unions, NEADS, and on-campus groups, than to try to define or outline accommodations.

Hulett supplied statistics that demonstrate why public knowledge about human rights complaints is so lacking, and why the voices of people with disabilities are not being heard. For example, of 2000 human rights complaints in 2001, only 500 went to resolution or the investigative stage. Only 4% of the 2000 went to a board of inquiry (where the complaint becomes public knowledge).

Hulett noted the importance of educating individuals about how to create, at home, files that track and log experiences, providing proof for a complaint. She said that, as part of the solution, student unions and clubs should take on leadership roles, move accommodations away from the idea of social assistance, and give students with disabilities the tools that they need to be advocates.

Marcia Rioux: International Trends in Disability and Rights: Putting the Disability Rights Lens onto the Policy Agenda

A new human rights paradigm has emerged in relation to disabilities, said Marcia Rioux, Graduate Director, MA (Critical Disability Studies), York University. Human rights principles include equality, self-determination and autonomy, inclusion, interdependence and solidarity, dignity, justice, and non-discrimination. Many people with disabilities in Canada were not given an appropriate education and continue to be excluded from schools. Separate is always unequal.

Rioux provided an overview of the changes that have occurred during the past 40 years. In 1948, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* for all people was followed up by a number of national opportunities that began to redefine disabilities away from the charity aspect and toward an understanding of the structural implications. The International Year of Disabled Persons was decreed in 1991. In 1993, the Standard Rules were adopted; and in 1997, the World Plan of Action for Disability underwent a review that forced governments around the world to evaluate what they had been doing with regard to people with disabilities in their respective countries.

In 1999, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region organized an interregional seminar and symposium on International Norms and Standards in Relation to Disability. Also, an Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities was held. Since 1948, momentum has been building to see disability as a human rights issue—an issue of social justice and oppression.

From 2000 to 2004, a whole series of events involving the UN High Commission on Rights suddenly shifted the balance toward a human rights paradigm and away from the medical model. The connection across countries is very strong, and a fundamental shift has occurred in the way that people see themselves in their societies.

Rioux called on participants to step forward to support the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. She quoted Mary Robinson, UN Human Rights Commissioner: “Disabled persons frequently live in deplorable conditions, owing to the presence of physical and social barriers, which prevent their integration and full participation in the community. Millions of children and adults worldwide are segregated and deprived of their rights and are, in effect, living on the margins. This is unacceptable.”

Having rights as goals means that services, supports, programs, and funding allocations are not ends, but are instead means to social and economic integration and to legal and social rights. The changed focus also means changing laws, changing admission requirements, and changing scholarship procedures. Rioux’s impassioned call was this: “It is a revolution, and it’s your revolution!”

Rioux referred to the UN *Standard Rules 1994*, saying that the principle of equal rights implies that the needs of every individual are of equal importance, that those needs must be made the basis for planning societies, and that all resources must be employed so as to ensure every individual an equal opportunity for participation. Furthermore, nation states have a responsibility to create the legal bases for measures that will achieve full participation and equality of persons with disabilities. States must ensure the participation of organizations of persons with disabilities in the development of national legislation and ongoing evaluation.

Rioux said that, to exercise rights in society, an individual must be educated. A sustainable human rights framework recognizes that disability is a result of social, legal, and economic status; that a broad set of factors contributes to exclusion and the loss of human rights; that respect for diversity contributes to well-being; that people must be supported to exercise their rights; and that people need a sense of fairness in their communities and societies.

Rioux completed her presentation with a quote from Albie Sachs from *Protecting Human Rights in South Africa* (1990): “No one gives us rights. We win them in struggle. They exist in our hearts before they exist on paper. Yet intellectual struggle is one of the most important areas of the battle of rights. It is through concepts that we link our dreams to the acts of daily life.”

Elizabeth Winkelaar: Disability Studies—An Inclusive Discipline?

Elizabeth Winkelaar is a graduate student in the School of Canadian Studies at Carleton University. Her research is largely concerned with a Disability Studies perspective on the historical, social, political, and cultural framework of Canadian Studies, especially the lives of women with disabilities in Canada.

Winkelaar said that the Women’s Studies component of the School of Canadian Studies taught her about feminism and about personal experience being political. The same holds

true for race and gender issues. She began to understand issues of oppression and how theory can affect social policy. Media, culture and disability, and citizenship issues were things that interested Winkelaar. She was heartened to see that disability programs were emerging in universities in Canada. She realized that academy, research, and activism were all needed to make change.

Winkelaar also observed that professors are beginning to include issues of disability when they talk about race, gender, and citizenship. The history of the disability rights movement is very important, because it is about history, culture, and theory. Mobilizing disabled people for political action is about building healthy communities.

Winkelaar noted that access to buildings or washrooms is a huge issue of social integration and isolation. Certain socially constructed barriers go beyond a simple medical analysis.

For its National Strategy for the Integration of Disabilities, Canada has received kudos from the rest of the world, including an International Disability Award. However, the discontinuity between the federal, provincial, and territorial governments needs to be addressed, as do financial supports. In 2004, at the Disabled Peoples' Summit, Reg Alcock, president of the Treasury Board of Canada, said, "Winnipeg is the 'heartbeat' of the disability movement in Canada." Desmond Tutu said, "The fundamental law of a human being is interdependence." And Bono said, "The world needs more Canada."

Winkelaar closed with the words "Paix" and "Solidarity."

Sue Jackson: Just Coming Through the Door is Hard

Sue Jackson is an instructor in Disability Supports at London College of Communication, University of the Arts London, the largest art and design educational institution in Europe. In the United Kingdom, recent legislative changes and strong government policies have opened up universities to groups that have traditionally been excluded. The present time is key to effecting improvements, both in the provision of supports and in the institutional culture for students with disabilities.

Jackson's special interest is students with mental health difficulties. She wants to ensure that their right to education is respected and that they are not disadvantaged by their disability. They position themselves within a social model of disabilities, focusing on how institutions need to change and adapt to minimize institutional barriers. The focus is on structural and cultural change within the universities, including changes in teaching methods.

The purpose of the Disability Discrimination Act [DDA (2002)] was to give disabled people access to learning opportunities. "Disabled" includes visual, hearing, mental health, and learning difficulties. The DDA gave colleges and local education authorities new legal responsibilities: disabled students could no longer be treated less favourably on account of their disability. For example, discriminating against disabled applicants is

unlawful, and websites must be accessible to people with disabilities.

Traditionally, higher education in the United Kingdom was elitist. “Widening participation” is another word for inclusion. It is a key tenet of Labour Government policy and ties in with the social inclusion project. The project is not just about increasing numbers; it is also about reaching disadvantaged groups in the United Kingdom. Because the issue is primarily one of social class, doors are opened for more progress on disability issues.

Jackson presented several case studies of people with mental health difficulties. For example, “student Dan” was experiencing depression. Dan could be both verbally and physically aggressive. Dan had not disclosed his mental health difficulties to staff, because he was concerned about the stigma. Jackson was able to empower Dan to disclose his ability so that reasonable adjustments could be made. Jackson also reminded staff that they could not treat Dan less favourably. The staff continued to be concerned about this student, and about the amount of extra time needed to work with him.

Jackson offered a number of suggestions for helping students with mental health difficulties overcome barriers to higher education. She suggested staff training, raising awareness, and threat of legislation; adapting the curriculum and providing emotional and study support.

Jackson said that one in three students may have a mental health difficulty during university in the United Kingdom (in the general population, the number is one person in four). Students often feel isolated and friendless.

Jackson offers small support groups and pastoral care. Student feedback has been positive and Jackson shared comments from students that she has assisted: “I am glad to have been able to tell the truth to one person at the London College of Communication.” “I appreciate all the assistance you have given me to date, and it is reassuring to know that there is help at LCC should I ever need it.”

In closing, Jackson asked any participants who were interested in mental health topics to please introduce themselves to her.

Discussion

One participant asked how to deal with a problem with a professor. A panel member suggested the participant first check out existing policies at the university. Other suggestions included going to the provincial Human Rights Commission, checking out the report *Opportunity to Succeed* from the Ontario Human Rights Commission, involving the student union or student affairs office, and checking out the campus Employment Equity office.

Another participant noted that British Columbia has no Human Rights Tribunal; cases there have not been resolved for more than two years. Panel members pointed out that

having precedent-establishing post-secondary school cases heard is important. If complaints are not filed and pressure is not put on governments to allocate more money, then the disability movement will be moving backwards.

A brief conversation ensued about the accommodation model, and the need to expand beyond having special places to “shove” disabled students. The issue is being a student, not being disabled.

A participant questioned whether and when taking a Human Rights case to the media is helpful. A panel member responded that media exposure can be very helpful in building momentum and in framing the issue in a way that clearly indicates a need for resolution. A positive result of taking an issue to the media is the support and encouragement that often results when people hear the story.

A participant asked why so few courses on disability are taught at either the secondary or the post-secondary level. This participant noted the need for linkages to be made between education, race, class, culture, and disability. He questioned why no courses focus on issues of minority discrimination.

A panel member responded that much of the work in the area of disability originated in the women’s movement and the civil rights movement in the United States. The disability movement is addressing the last area of oppression for a marginalized group of people, and the movement is still in its early stages. Generating the funds to become a significant lobby group has been difficult because rehabilitation is already highly financed.

Another panel member suggested that the participant keep writing and talking about linkages until someone listens. She suggested making allies out of professors. Another panel member noted that, as members of a cross-disability movement, they needed to learn how to advocate and how to use tools to portray their needs. For example, arguments can be framed in “able-bodied” terms such as pointing out the consequences of a failure to provide the regular student body with textbooks until two months after the start of classes.

Moderator Ross then closed the session by quoting a few statements from the panellists’ presentations that had been significant for her: “Separate is never equal; separate is unequal.” “The personal is political.” “It’s our revolution.”

Employment Workshop 2

Moderators: Jason Mitschele, Conference Chair, Ontario Representative, NEADS; Sanjeet Singh, Vice-President External, NEADS

Jennifer Dillon: The Ability Edge Program

Jennifer Dillon, Ability Edge Coordinator for Career Edge, provided an overview of

Ability Edge, a program piloted in 1999 in six Canadian cities: Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Halifax. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) funds Ability Edge, which is currently available throughout Canada. The program provides 6-, 9-, and 12-month internships for university and college graduates. The graduates apply online to obtain paid internships with leading-edge Canadian companies. Ability Edge participants are supported with job accommodations.

Ability Edge is engaged in multiple partnerships; it works with more than 700 Canadian employers, university and college career centres, and special needs offices. Ability Edge also sustains on-going partnerships with HRSDC and community agencies such as the Canadian Hearing Society, the CNIB, and Line 1000.

Individuals are eligible to participate in Ability Edge if they are high school, college, or university graduates with a disability. They must be eligible to work in Canada, have no previous career-related experience, and have not previously participated in Career Edge.

The Ability Edge program has many advantages. Here are just some:

- The program is targeted, focusing on recruitment of people with disabilities.
- Host organizations are knowledgeable about workplace accommodations and diversity issues.
- The online application process is very accessible.
- Interns gain experience with top employers.
- Intern opportunities are available across many industries.
- Supportive Career Edge staff are available for website assistance and information.

More than 50 internship opportunities are currently available. They include opportunities to work as business analysts, financial service representatives, or human resources officers.

Since 1999, Ability Edge has placed 170 interns. Of those placed, 60% obtained employment with the host organizations. In a three-month follow-up, 73% of participants had secured employment, including 60% who had been hired full-time by their host organization.

Interested people can register online at www.abilityedge.ca.

Dillon encouraged participants to focus on obtaining voluntary or part-time work experience while attending college or university. Employers look for individuals with basic transferable skills. A professional-looking cover letter and a well-presented application are also important. In addition, individuals need to be able to articulately describe the kind of accommodations that they require. Dillon suggested that job seekers try job shadowing before an interview situation.

Dillon passed a flyer out to conference participants. The flyer promoted a career event to be held Tuesday, December 7, 2004, in Toronto. The event is called Connecting Employers to Students with Disabilities, and is being offered by Career Edge in co-

operation with the Canadian Association of Career Educators and Employers (CACEE). Many large corporations such as IBM, Rogers, Sprint, Telus, CIBC, RBC, and TD will be on hand to talk about employment and internship programs. The event is a great opportunity to network with employers and agencies active in diversity recruiting.

Miguel Aguayo: Competitive Advantage

Miguel Aguayo, Senior Human Resources Consultant, CIBC, said that “competitive advantage” makes job seekers unique and leads them to excel. One characteristic that gives individuals a competitive advantage is the attitude that recognizes that life is a journey and that the job being applied for is just one expedition. A job search can be very frustrating, but the recognition that the search is a process—a journey and not a speed race—will shine through and make a difference in an interview.

Another important competitive advantage is the ability to sell oneself. Job seekers must know their strengths and weaknesses. They must be able to describe work situations or training programs, and to emphasize what they accomplished and learned. “You are all you have, your collection of skills.”

Aguayo emphasized the importance of respecting personal boundaries: that is, not to apply for jobs that are not a match to personal interests and skills. Knowing what “fits” and what does not is important.

When applying for a job, the applicant must be comfortable with making a bold, confident entrance. Feeling comfortable with oneself and with selling oneself by describing skills and abilities are both important. Aguayo recommended that applicants practice hearing themselves speak about their skills.

One mistake that job seekers frequently make in interviews is to talk about the future—of what they will do—rather than to talk about their accomplishments and lessons learned to date during part-time jobs or volunteer work. “Performance, not promises, stands out.”

Next, Aguayo talked about staying true to personal values. Ethics and speaking the truth are important. Showing integrity builds trust. Integrity is respected. Pay attention to personal values and respect them. For example, be prepared to say that a particular job is not a match in terms of values, and be consistent about actions in past situations.

Aguayo recommended bringing ideas and ideals to the table and giving evidence that past actions were successful. Success is not for the timid. Success requires risks; no achievement comes without risks. However, it is also important to avoid risks that offer low returns.

In summing up, Aguayo said that having a competitive advantage means knowing oneself, one’s accomplishments, one’s capacity, and one’s limitations. Having a competitive advantage also means having the ability to perform in the interview, being able to describe past accomplishments, staying true to personal values, and knowing

one's career goals.

General Membership Meeting

Rachael Ross, President, NEADS (Chair)

Alison Beattie, Secretary/Treasurer

1. A Report on Activities and Project Work

Rachel Ross reported on NEADS activities and project work over the past two years. Two projects are currently under way:

- The Inclusion Project (“Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in College and University-Sponsored Activities”)
- Access to Academic Materials for Print-Disabled Post-Secondary Students: A Partnership of Users and Service Providers (ATAM)

Both projects focus on full access to education for disabled students.

Ross then spoke about the NEADS Online Work System (NOWS) initiative, a new job site that connects students and graduates with disabilities to progressive employers who wish to hire Canadians with disabilities. NOWS has over 500 post-secondary students and 43 employers registered. It is currently looking to increase the number of employers. The web address for NOWS is www.nowcs.ca. NOWS can also be reached from the NEADS website at www.neads.ca.

Ross also noted that NEADS has recently become involved in the process to develop a new UN Convention on the Human Rights of Disabled People. NEADS participated at the UN ad hoc meeting in New York City earlier in 2004. This exciting venture into the international arena will deal with legislation and activities surrounding human rights and accommodations, and the NEADS involvement is very important. The Canadian delegation prepared and presented a position paper on Article 17, which deals with education. NEADS will be attending another meeting in New York in 2005. Ross emphasized that all NEADS members have the ability to be involved in this UN convention.

Another new initiative is a partnership with *Jobpostings* magazine, a publication supported by the Government of Canada that specializes in employment opportunities for students. This fall *Jobpostings* launched a new Disability Issue to serve students with special needs. The Disability Issue will publish twice annually, in September and January, with 15,000 copies being distributed to more than 100 Canadian universities and colleges. NEADS endorses this publication and advises on content. Ross noted that the magazine has free advertising and is looking for publishers, editors, and perhaps even writers.

Ross said that the NEADS mailing list currently holds about 1200 individuals and organizations. In addition to the spring 2004 newsletter, NEADS recently published *Access to Success: A Guide for Employers*. That publication helps to bridge the gap between student job seekers with disabilities and progressive employers willing to bring those job seekers into their workplaces. This book is also available online.

Concerning the NEADS website, Ross said that, as a national organization, NEADS relies a great deal on web communication. The website has more than 100,000 visitors (downloaded pages) per month.

Finally, Ross noted that several members of NEADS, including Alison Beattie and Jason Mitschele, have recently received awards from the Council of Canadians with Disabilities.

2. Financial Report

Alison Beattie explained that, each year, NEADS submits audited financial statements to the Social Development Partnerships Program (SDPP) of HRSDC. She reported on the financial statements for the fiscal year 2003–2004, ending March 31, 2004, which were made available at the General Meeting.

The statements show revenues of \$227,210 and expenses of \$213,963, for a net revenue of \$13,247. The NEADS operational budget includes organization funding of \$80,000 from the SDPP, \$33,700 from the Office of Learning Technologies (for the CampusNet project), and \$52,500 from the Youth Initiatives Directorate (for the Student Leadership and Employment Forums project). In the last quarter, NEADS also received supplemental funding from SDPP for additional organizational activities. Further revenues came from new projects such as ATAM.

For 2004–2005, NEADS has budgeted expenses of \$272,800. Confirmed revenues for 2004–2005 include \$80,000 in organizational funding, about \$125,000 for ATAM, and about \$78,000 for the Inclusion Project. Project funding comes from the SDPP.

Beattie noted that expenditures for operations and projects are on target so far this year, and NEADS is working to meet its budget projections on all activities.

3. Proposed Amendments to By-Laws

Items 1–4:

The first four items proposed replacing the term “a Disabled Person” with “a

Person with a Disability.” Beattie explained that the change arose from a desire to address the person before the disability. However, how an individual wants to self-identify remains a matter of choice. For example, the UN, the World Health Organization (WHO), and Disabled Peoples’ International (DPI) use the term “Disabled Persons.”

A participant expressed concern that the term “a Person with a Disability” is based on the medical definition of disability. The term emphasizes that the person, and not the surrounding environment and social structures, has the disability. She said that, in her view, the change is totally backward. She therefore strongly opposed it.

Another participant proposed that the board take a membership opinion poll outside of the meeting. Noting that the division within the membership will always occur, Ross proposed using both terminologies anywhere that the original term appears in the by-laws, separating the two with a slash: that is “Disabled Person/Person with a Disability.”

The first delegate noted that the meaning of the term contains political implications. Whereas “disability” is a social concept, “disabled” refers to being disabled by society. She agreed with Ross’s proposal.

The motion was carried in favour of Ross’s proposal.

Items 5–7:

The motion was carried, revising the by-law to reflect the fact that general membership meetings of NEADS are held biennially rather than annually.

Item 8:

The motion to add the word “Canada” to Article VI was carried.

Item 9:

The motion to add the word “Nunavut” to Article VI was carried.

Item 10:

The motion to change the word “annual” to “biennial,” as in items 5–7, was carried.

Item 11:

The motion to reflect the fact that, for Board elections, nominations need just to be submitted in writing to the Administrative Coordinator, with no other conditions attached, was carried.

Item 12:

The motion to reflect the fact that, for Board elections, nominations need to bear the signature of two nominators rather than just one was carried.

Item 13:

Item 13 relates to how NEADS fills a vacant director's position from a given region. Beattie explained that this change was another update to reflect the standard that NEADS is already following. That is, the new Board tries its best to find someone from the region to fill the position. The procedure reflects a commitment by NEADS to truly keep representation from all the provinces.

The motion to make the proposed change was carried.

Further comment:

Referring to items 1–4, a participant proposed using the terminology “a Person Experiencing a Disability,” because “Disability” is a social concept and not something a person has, and because it is obvious that the society is disabling the person. Acknowledging that definitions will always be infinite, Ross noted that the change had already been approved. She invited the members to accept the new definition as is. The participant agreed.

4. Open Forum

A delegate from studying at the University of Alberta, but originally from Africa expressed appreciation for the work of NEADS.

Regarding voting practices, a delegate proposed opening voting so that it can occur at any time once a decision is made, rather than having a fixed time. The change accommodates those who have a tight time schedule and those who may feel uncomfortable about voting during the fixed time. Ross said that some changes may be made to the available voting times. She also assured the members that the Elections Canada officials who handle voting are very impartial and have experience working with people with disabilities.

5. Announcing the New NEADS Board

Past-President Joby Fleming thanked the board, the staff, and the membership, saying that this was his last official role with NEADS after six years. In saying goodbye, he also expressed confidence in the by-laws and procedures in place and in the professionalism of the organization.

Ross thanked the outgoing board members, noting that they had been very hardworking over the last two years. She then announced the new NEADS Board:

- Territories: (Vacant)
- British Columbia: Rachael Ross
- Alberta: Kimberley Gerritsen
- Saskatchewan: Lena Cook
- Manitoba: (Vacant)
- Ontario: Jason Mitschele
- Quebec: Paulo Monteagudo
- New Brunswick: Kristen McLeod
- Nova Scotia: Jennifer Finlay
- Prince Edward Island: Fraser MacPhee
- Newfoundland and Labrador: Terry McDonald
- Open Representative: Mahadeo Sukhai

Closing Plenary

Jason Mitschele, Ontario Representative (Chair)

In wrapping up Right On! Conference 2004, Jason Mitschele thanked the sponsors—BMO Financial Group (Leading Sponsor); CIBC (Platinum Sponsor); Scotiabank and TD Bank Financial Group (Gold Sponsors); Canada Post, GE, and AbilityEdge (Bronze Sponsors). He also thanked the Social Development Partnerships Program, Government of Canada for providing grant funding support through NEADS' project work, which has contributed to the conference.

Mitschele also expressed appreciation to the members of the NEADS conference planning committee, NEADS National Coordinator Frank Smith, all the volunteers, and everyone involved. He also noted that plans are in place to launch live screening of the next conference, which will mark the 20th anniversary of NEADS.

Several participants thanked NEADS and the board for the wonderful conference. One delegate suggested accommodating those with visual impairment by having large print on the overhead slides. Another suggested having candidates give a speech to the members before voting commences.

Acknowledging both ideas, Mitschele explained that two issues arise concerning the latter suggestion. First, it would create an unfair election environment, because some candidates have trouble speaking. Second, the two-day conference is already jam-packed, and little time is available for extra events. He recommended that the candidates and voters do their best to mingle and meet with each other during the conference.

A participant raised the concern that holding the conference at a hotel poses financial difficulties for some. This participant also suggested having more social events. He also noted that the conference has not fully represented the issues of learning disabilities in addition to physical disabilities.

Mitschele thanked the participant for his comments and agreed that a hotel is perhaps fancier than needed. The large numbers at this year's conference made finding a non-hotel facility hard, given access and accommodations requirements for a large group of delegates. However, Mitschele added that various venues will have different logistics problems, and searching for a venue is an ongoing process. He also noted that the conference offers a discounted rate for early registration.

In terms of presentations, Mitschele explained that they are not based on the type of disability, but on the topics submitted by interested speakers. NEADS is committed to inclusiveness, and Mitschele asked the participants to help involve any groups that they feel require greater representation.

Ross added that, as NEADS expands, it will have more subsidy programs to help students overcome financial barriers. She also suggested approaching one's university for support to attend the national conference.

Regarding having more social opportunities, Ross raised accessibility and freezing weather as factors, but welcomed suggestions.

Responding to a delegate's question about increasing international representation at NEADS conferences, Mitschele said that the NEADS website is accessible worldwide, but that cost often determines whether international delegates can come to Canada. Strategies and policies need to be developed to fund such trips.

The same delegate asked about inviting more graduate students to present their own research. Mitschele said that many of the abstracts received in fact involved the students' own research, but greater accessibility should be explored in the future.

Regarding elections, a delegate suggested establishing a capital fund to allow candidates to run a campaign and distribute materials. Mitschele explained that some candidates don't decide to run until they come to the conference and meet people, and so they have little time to get their message out. He encouraged people to make a commitment and to prepare a platform sooner, because the candidate search actually begins six months before the election date.

A participant commented that a poster fair would be a good avenue for people to showcase their research, especially if information can be made available in print and in alternative formats for others to take back to their universities. Mitschele said that the conference planning committee would discuss how to improve accessibility as much as possible, adding that the conference PowerPoint presentations can be requested by email. As well, the conference summary reports will be available in four to six weeks online and in other formats. It's our intention to make the report and information from the workshop presentations available on the Conference 2004 website.

The delegate mentioned that a poster fair could include an interactive discussion with the presenter. Such a presentation is also something that can enhance a student's résumé. From another perspective, she asked if the conference would be interested in presentations from graduate students outside of the disabled community.

Mitschele responded that any presentations that reflect the two issues of disability and post-secondary education are welcome, and that perhaps students outside the disabled community could participate as exhibitors or showcase their research during the opening reception. He said that the conference planning committee would discuss the issue.

Concerning international delegates, the participant suggested having one representative travel to another country as an exchange. Another participant suggested using video conferencing to connect with international delegates and presenters.

Mitschele replied that the web team is working on video conferencing technology. If planning goes as expected, linking with university campuses and other places may be possible in two years or so. It is a matter of getting partners on board to address the cost. General agreement was expressed that, in terms of human rights for disabled people, looking to what is happening internationally is very important.

Regarding encouraging candidates to register earlier for elections, a delegate suggested the incentive of posting the candidates' information on the website if they register by a certain date. Mitschele agreed with that idea.

Following up on the issue of financial accessibility to the conference, a participant suggested that perhaps grad students doing a poster session or a formal presentation could ask their department or professor to help cover the cost. Mitschele expressed hope that this and other possibilities will help increase conference participation and interest levels.

Responding to a question about workshop topics chosen for conferences, Ross and Mitschele explained that the NEADS mandate covers both post-secondary education and students with disabilities. This year's focus has been on the ATAM and Inclusion projects and on current developments at the United Nations. However, past workshop topics have included sexuality, life skills, and transition from high school to post-secondary, among others. The conference planning committee always tries to expand the issues to address topics that are important to students with disabilities.

Acronyms

CADSPPE	Canadian Association of Disabled Service Providers in Post-Secondary Education
CCD	Council of Canadians with Disabilities
CDRC	Canadian Disability Rights Council
CIBC	Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce
CNIB	Canadian National Institute for the Blind
CWIP	Canadian Works in Progress
DPI	Disabled Peoples' International
DS	Disability Services
FTP	file transfer protocol
GAC	Graduate Accessibility Committee
HRSDC	Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
LD	learning disability
NEADS	National Educational Association of Disabled Students
NSCC	Nova Scotia Community College
OCR	Optical Character Recognition
<i>ODA</i>	<i>Ontarians with Disabilities Act</i>
ODI	Office of Disability Issues
OPAC	online public access catalogue
RFB&D	Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic
SBFA	Students for Barrier-Free Access
SDC	Social Development Canada
SDPP	Social Development Partnerships Program
SMS	Special Materials Services (part of Manitoba Citizenship and Youth, Government of Manitoba)
UN	United Nations
UD	Universal design
WHO	World Health Organization