

# REFERENCE GUIDE

## TO ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN A UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

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## INTRODUCTION

Quebec universities are having to cope with an ever-growing population of students with disabilities (SWD). Indeed, their number has risen from 2,360 in 2005 to 9,189 in 2014 (AQICESH, 2014). This growth is due essentially to so-called *emerging* disabilities, i.e. learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity, mental health disorders and, to a lesser extent, autism spectrum disorders. Whereas university professors<sup>1</sup> are relatively familiar with addressing the needs of students with *more traditional* disabilities (physical, organic and sensory impairments), they now have to address the needs of all students, no matter what their disability. The challenge is a major one, as students with *emerging* disabilities have support and accommodation needs that differ substantially from the needs of students with a traditional disability.

To meet this challenge, Student Disability Services advisers perform a remarkable job of supporting and working with professors to facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities and contribute to their success without compromising instructional quality. However, a recent study on the representations of 613 professors in respect of students with disabilities (Philion et al., 2016 a) showed that many professors are hoping for more guidelines so that they can better appreciate and understand which accommodations best meet which needs in a context of courses, exams or internships.

This *Reference Guide to Accommodations for Students with Disabilities in a University Context* is intended to serve that purpose. As a complement to the *Cadre de référence et pratique d'usage de la conseillère et du conseiller aux étudiants en situation de handicap en enseignement supérieur* (AQICESH, 2014) and the report by the Groupe de travail sur les étudiants en situation de handicap émergents (2014), it is built on extensive experience in the field (more than 20 years), a review of the scientific and legal literature, a questionnaire completed by 290 students and, finally, a consultative process in which 160 professors from across the Universités du Québec network took part. This consultative process highlighted the professors' concerns with respect to certain accommodations and aimed to identify solutions, where necessary, that while mindful of each student's individual needs, ensure that each study program's specific objectives and requirements are met. Although this guide outlines possible accommodations that can be implemented, it must be borne in mind that every situation is unique and there are no hard and fast rules.

In order to properly understand the criteria that determine which accommodations must be provided to students with disabilities, **the first section** of this guide presents: (1) an introduction to the legal framework governing the obligation of non-discrimination and the resulting duty to accommodate; (2) a definition of students with disabilities; (3) the mandate of Student Disability Services and the role of advisers with respect to the identification and implementation of accommodations; and (4) the responsibilities of students and professors in respect of these

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<sup>1</sup> The term "professor" is used to designate all teaching staff at universities, i.e. professors and lecturers, in order to simplify the text.

accommodations. **The second section** presents examples of accommodations that can be implemented in the context of courses and exams. Owing to the complexity of issues underlying the accommodations that can be provided in the context of internships, a second guide will be devoted exclusively to that topic.

# 1 BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Legal framework

This section presents the legal framework that governs the responsibilities of educational institutions in respect of students with disabilities. It is important to bear in mind that this framework is evolving constantly because it derives not only from the statutory wording, which is relatively fixed in time, but mostly from the interpretation of that wording by the courts. As interpretation is itself influenced by practice and doctrine, it is essential to understand that this guide is in no way a definitive answer to the countless issues that the duty to provide reasonable accommodation may raise and will continue to raise. In this regard, it is important to realize that institutions have first and foremost an obligation of non-discrimination. As non-discrimination is the end being sought, accommodation is the means to that end.

The Canadian and Quebec charters of rights and freedoms prohibit any form of discrimination on the grounds of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability. The Quebec charter further prohibits discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy, sexual orientation, civil status, political convictions, language or social condition:

**15.** (1) Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

(2) Subsection (1) does not preclude any law, program or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups including those that are disadvantaged because of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

– Section 15, *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Part I of *The Constitution Act, 1982*, being Schedule B of the *Canada Act 1982* (U.K.), 1982, c. 11)

**10.** Every person has a right to full and equal recognition and exercise of his human rights and freedoms, without distinction, exclusion or preference based on race, colour, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, civil status, age except as provided by law, religion, political convictions, language, ethnic or national origin, social condition, a handicap or the use of any means to palliate a handicap.

Discrimination exists where such a distinction, exclusion or preference has the effect of nullifying or impairing such right.

– Section 10, *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* (R.S.Q., c. C-12)

In addition to the *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*, Quebec also enacted *An Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social,*

*school and workplace integration* (R.S.Q., c. E-20.1), which defines a handicapped person as follows:

“handicapped person” means a person with a deficiency causing a significant and persistent disability, who is liable to encounter barriers in performing everyday activities.

– Section 1, *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration* (R.S.Q., c. E-20.1)

As regards persons with disabilities, the charters recognize their right to be treated equally, which implies accounting for their individual limitations. In order to enforce this desire for equal treatment, the courts came to establish the notion of duty to provide reasonable accommodation. Notwithstanding the fact that the case law is evolving, the duty to provide reasonable accommodation establishes that post-secondary institutions do not have an obligation of result, but rather an obligation of means. These institutions have no responsibilities with regard to the success of students with disabilities, but they are responsible for providing them with the means to achieve success equivalent to those of other students, in consideration of their disability and provided that such means do not constitute an undue hardship.

The role of the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec is to “promote, in the training programs of university, college and secondary level educational institutions and organizations responsible for vocational training, the inclusion of elements dealing with the adaptation of interventions and services for handicapped persons and, at the request of such institutions or organizations, advise them in that regard.”<sup>2</sup>

To promote inclusion is therefore to promote the right to equal access, which consists in providing students with various means to succeed without compromising the requirements associated with program outcomes and objectives and without this constituting an undue hardship for the institutions. In subscribing to this logic of inclusion, most universities have developed an internal policy to promote inclusion.

## 1.2 Right to privacy and protection of confidential information

The legislative framework recognizing the right to privacy is reflected in section 5 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* (R.S.Q., c. C-12), the *Civil Code of Quebec* (R.S.Q., c. CCQ-1991) and the *Act respecting access to documents held by public bodies and the protection of personal information* (R.S.Q., c. A-2.1). Except under special circumstances (e.g. when a student presents a danger to himself/herself or to others and the danger is imminent), the legislative framework specifies that neither an adviser nor any other

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<sup>2</sup> Section 25 (e.1). *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration* (R.S.Q., c. E-20.1).

professional may disclose information in a student's file without obtaining the prior consent of the person concerned, preferably in writing.

### 1.3 Duty to provide reasonable accommodation

The duty to provide reasonable accommodation is intended to ensure that students with disabilities have the opportunity to demonstrate they meet the course or internship requirements and objectives without being disadvantaged because of their disability; however, this duty must not create an undue hardship for the institution.

By definition, accommodation is a different means of achieving the goal being sought. Consequently, the duty to provide reasonable accommodation never means that an institution must implement an accommodation that would compromise the academic requirements. Nor does the duty to provide reasonable accommodation mean that the accommodations being implemented must exactly match those requested by the student. In all circumstances, it is the institution's responsibility to ensure that the core course or internship requirements are met, and the means to that end must not impose undue hardships on the educational institution. According to Ellefsen (2015), Director of Legal Affairs for the Fédération des cégeps, the notion of undue hardship relates to the idea "of a severe, major barrier, either pedagogical, administrative or financial," that makes for an unreasonable or undue accommodation. The Supreme Court has delimited the notion of "undue hardship" as follows :

More than mere negligible effort is required to satisfy the duty to accommodate. The use of the term "undue" infers that some hardship is acceptable; it is only "undue" hardship that satisfies this test.

This notion is assessed by taking the specific characteristics of each situation into account, particularly with regard to the organization of services, the financial and material resources available, safety and security, and the rights of others (Ducharme and Montminy, 2012). Since the notion of undue hardship must be construed in its context and, at the end of the day, the courts must make their rulings on a case-by-case basis, the authors cannot guarantee that the examples provided in this guide will constitute a reasonable accommodation under any circumstances. If unsure or in doubt, it is essential that your institution's legal department be consulted.

## 1.4 Students with disabilities

### 1.4.1 Evolving terminology

The terminology used to describe persons who are entitled to accommodations has evolved in recent decades. Whereas before 1960, these persons were often referred to as "invalid," "crippled" or even "retarded," they are referred to today by the expression "*personne handicapée*" in French (Fougeyrollas, 2010) or "persons with disabilities." Although this term seeks to reflect a better understanding of the notion of disability (Ducharme and Montminy, 2012), it has the effect of perpetuating the association of disability with an intrinsic characteristic, thus associating the disability with the impairments or handicaps that mark an individual and that need to be

compensated for or require adaptive measures for the person to fully integrate into society (ibid.). In the 1990s, in the United States and Great Britain, a redefinition of “disability” began to emerge, no longer with a medical connotation but rather a social one, and understood in terms of processes of social production (Winance, 2004). In 2001, the World Health Organization followed suit by replacing its classification based on impairments and handicaps by a definition based on the environmental factors producing the disability, which factors result in restricting the activities of persons with disabilities (WHO, 2001). Since 1997, supported by the work of Patrick Fougeyrollas (1995, 1997, 2002, 2007), France and Quebec have created the International Network on the Disability Creation Process (INDCP), which proposes going beyond the separation between medical and social models of disability and embracing a dynamic model that focuses on the interactive nature of environmental and individual-specific factors and the individual’s participation in society.

In Quebec, this model resulted in the publication, in 2009, of a policy statement by the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec (OPHQ) titled “*À part entière : pour un véritable exercice du droit à l’égalité,*” which promotes the creation of an environment conducive to the inclusion of diversity (OPHQ, 2009), including student diversity (Ducharme et al., 2012). Drawing on the INDCP model, the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse published an opinion paper titled *Les accommodements des étudiants et étudiantes en situation de handicap dans les établissements d’enseignement collégial* (ibid.) in 2012. This opinion paper guides reflection on inclusive education in post-secondary institutions by reminding the institutions’ stakeholders of their responsibilities to students with disabilities in respect of reasonable accommodations (ibid.). For the past few years, the DCP model has been strongly recommended in universities, particularly through the *Cadre de référence et pratiques d’usage de la conseillère et du conseiller aux étudiants en situation de handicap* published by the AQICESH.

#### 1.4.2 Various disabilities

Although the expression “*students with disabilities*” has made its entry into universities and the spirit of the DCP model is being advocated, a disability’s medical nature is maintained by the obligation to resort to a diagnosis for an accommodation to be implemented. Consequently, in universities, in order to gain access to accommodations or any other supports, all students must be diagnosed with one or more permanent or temporary conditions, including but not limited to: hearing impairment/deafness; visual impairment/blindness; speech or language disorder; chronic health disorder including brain injury; sensorimotor and locomotor disorder; learning disability; attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity; mental health disorder; or autism spectrum disorder. Each of these conditions is described in an appendix. They are grouped depending on whether they belong to the category of *emerging* conditions or the category of *traditional* conditions.

## 1.5 Mandate of Student Disability Services and adviser responsibilities

The mandate of Student Disability Services is to help each student, no matter what their disability, to pursue their education in conditions equivalent to other students. Their mandate is founded on two considerations:

- (1) All students registered with Student Disability Services meet the admission requirements for their respective university. The proposed supportive measures, strategies and accommodations are intended to make instruction accessible, in full compliance with the requirements, specifics and outcomes of the courses and study programs;
- (2) Students with disabilities are impacted in a variety of ways, including in terms of expressing their symptoms. In order to identify the problems and challenges that may be associated with a particular disability, we have compiled answers to an accommodations questionnaire completed by 290 students (see Table 1). Although a minority of students with disabilities are in need of no accommodations or more or less sporadic accommodations, about 75 percent (Phillion et al., 2016 b) of them require accommodations to overcome problems in writing their exams or in fulfilling their course-related requirements.

As the needs of learners are distinct and evolve on the basis of the teaching/learning context, it is crucial that the accommodations available are monitored/assessed. A Student Disability Services adviser will determine, together with the student, which accommodations and supports are required for each student under his or her responsibility. The choice of the accommodations and supports will be determined so as to minimize the barriers to learning for the student with a disability.

To determine these accommodations and supports, the adviser will:

- consider the recommendations contained in the documentation completed by a health care and social services professional governed by the *Professional Code*;
- identify the repercussions of the disability on the student's education;
- develop an individual accommodation and support plan that reflects, based on the available information, the specifics and outcomes of the study program; and
- evaluate and adjust the plan to the extent possible, each semester.

The adviser generally outlines this body of accommodations and supports in the form of a letter. When warranted by the proposed accommodations and supports, it is usually the student's responsibility to submit this letter to the persons (professors, agents, coordinators or internship supervisors) involved in decision-making in respect of the accommodations or supports that need to be provided or else in their implementation.

When the accommodations proposed by the adviser are perceived by the professor to possibly create an undue hardship (by compromising the core course requirements, for example), the student is invited to discuss them with his/her professor. If necessary, the professor may contact the student's adviser and examine alternate solutions. A frequent example of a discussion of this nature among stakeholders (students, professors and

advisers) involves access to spell-check software in courses where one of the core components is learning the written language:

- when *writing skills* refers to a competency that the software performs (usual and grammatical spelling) and acquisition of that competency cannot depend on recourse to a technological aid, access to the software cannot be provided;
- when *writing skills* refers to a competency that the software does not perform (structuring thought) or else may or may not rely on a technological aid, access to the software is provided.

Section 1.8.1 entitled “Distinguishing subject-specific competencies from cross-curricular competencies” provides more information on the notion of core requirements.

**TABLE 1**  
PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN RELATION TO DISABILITIES

Problem in terms of...*	Emerging Conditions						Traditional Conditions				
	ADD/H	Dyslexia	MHD	ASD	BI	Dyscalculia	Auditory	Health	Motor	Visual	Language
Taking courses full-time	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Taking 3-hour courses	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		
Taking evening courses	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		
Completing assignments/ exams in allotted time	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Planning and organizing	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Staying attentive/focused	X	X	X	X	X	X		X			
Self-correcting	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Taking multiple-choice exams	X	X		X		X	X				
Communicating needs to professors	X	X	X	X	X						X
Taking notes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Working on a team	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Writing: grammar, syntax and spelling	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Reading and understanding fluently	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Articulating words/ sentences					X		X	X	X		X
Interpreting non-verbal language				X							
Writing, incl. by hand		X				X		X	X		
Reading printed characters										X	
Discriminating certain sounds of speech		X			X		X				X
Making oral presentations			X	X	X		X		X		X
Memorizing abundant notions	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X
Understanding or following oral/written instructions	X	X	X	X	X				X	X	
Understanding complex/ abstract concepts	X	X	X	X	X	X					X
Managing pain or fatigue	X		X		X			X	X		
Managing daily care					X			X	X		
Managing personal challenges	X	X	X	X	X			X	X		X
Moving					X			X	X		
Handling in a laboratory setting	X								X	X	

\*The above list essentially captures the problems identified by 290 students who answered a questionnaire on accommodations in a university context (Philion et al. 2016 b).

ADD/H: Attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity

MHD: Mental health disorder

ASD: Autism spectrum disorder

BI: Brain injury

## 1.6 Exam administration responsibilities for students with disabilities

Although the organizational structure of exam administration for students with disabilities may differ significantly across institutions, every university is responsible for managing and implementing accommodations. As a result, professors may suggest implementing an exam-specific accommodation for a student (e.g. allow extra time) from among those identified in their accommodations policy, although professors do not have to assume this responsibility. Clearly, however, all professors, as employees of the university, are obliged to allow students with disabilities to benefit from a reasonable accommodation.

In each institution, the unit responsible for exams administers them in compliance with strict ethical rules as regards, for example, plagiarism, the appropriate use of information technologies, and confidentiality. All of the unit's staff is subject to these rules, and exam invigilators in particular, who are often students specially trained with regard to their responsibilities.

To facilitate exam administration, professors are generally notified by email that the disability of one of their students will require that the student sits the exam in a room specifically designated for students with disabilities. The email will specify that if an accommodation compromises the course requirements, the professor can get in touch with a Student Disability Services adviser by email or by telephone to examine possible solutions. The email will also invite the professor to submit the exam to the exam administration unit within the prescribed timeframe so that the student can sit his/her exam when scheduled, generally at the same time as the other students in the group.

## 1.7 Responsibilities of students

Although there is no obligation for students to disclose their disability, they are responsible for disclosing their needs to the university's Student Disability Services adviser and to the persons concerned (professors, module director, internship coordinator, staff at the internship location, etc.) so that there is sufficient lead time to implement supports and accommodations for the objectives and requirements specific to each course (or internship) in the student's study program to be met. While it is important to bear in mind that each situation is unique, students who neglect to disclose their situation and corresponding needs and then fail to earn a passing grade should not subsequently be allowed a grade reappraisal or a re-evaluation on the basis that they did not exercise their right to accommodations in a timely manner.

There are many reasons, however, why students may hesitate to register with their university's Student Disability Services or notify professors of their support or accommodation needs. Foremost among those are the following: fear of being labelled and judged negatively by the professor; a desire to get by on their own for once in their life; and not self-identifying as *students with disabilities*. This explains, as regards the management of exam-specific accommodations, why some exam administration units avoid identifying students by name when sending the email to professors. These units send professors an email informing them that such or such an accommodation will be made available to x number of students on the basis of their specific conditions and needs.

- Finally, students are also responsible for enquiring about their program requirements and understanding the contributions, but also the limitations, of the accommodations available in the context of courses or exams. For example, Education students need to know that they can use computer supports (e.g. spell checker) when sitting exams for subject-specific courses that do not entail learning the written language, specifically its syntax and spelling components, but that computer supports cannot be used in a written language certification test or in the context of an internship, particularly in situations where students must demonstrate their ability *to communicate adequately in writing*.
- Nursing students need to know that they can sit most exams with earmuffs to avoid distractions; however, in the context of an internship, they will not be able to use earmuffs and they will need to make decisions and act in a potentially noisy environment.

## 1.8 Responsibilities of professors

Because the same disability impacts each student in very different ways according to their experience and the program’s characteristics and teaching context, it is important that professors who want a better understanding of a support or accommodation request engage in a dialogue with the student in question.

As mentioned in the section titled “Exam administration responsibilities for students with disabilities,” if the accommodation or support requested by the student compromises the core course requirements as clearly detailed in the course outline, the dialogue will focus on alternate accommodations and, if necessary, the Student Disability Services adviser will be asked to participate. Examples of alternate accommodations are presented in the second part of this guide.

With the exception of postponing an exam (see part 2), which may necessitate the preparation of a new exam—a situation generally subject to institutional rules for lecturers—exam-based accommodations require only that the email be answered and that the exam be submitted to the unit in charge.

### 1.8.1 Distinguishing subject-specific competencies from cross-curricular competencies

In determining what accommodations should be proposed in respect of core course requirements, cross-curricular competencies must be differentiated from subject-specific competencies.

Cross-curricular competencies are often defined as the *know-how* and *soft skills* that are needed for the appropriation of subject-specific skills. Their use facilitates the construction and comprehension of subject-specific skills, their validation and their transfer in different contexts (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). They are essentially: the ability to select, analyze and organize knowledge; the ability to reason logically by making plausible inferences, developing an argument and solving problems; the ability to exercise critical judgment; the ability to create, invent and innovate; the ability to work with others; and the ability to communicate effectively. *Writing skills* as an expression of the ways of thinking are also a cross-curricular competency that

can become a subject-specific competency when a constituent element of a study program, as in the case of literature or education.

Subject-specific competencies relate to the appropriation of knowledge tied to an academic discipline or subject matter. This often, but not necessarily, arises from precise, necessary ways of demonstrating one's acquired learning or performing a task. Health sciences are a case in point, where students have to auscultate a patient to determine the patient's heart condition. The same is true for counselling, where students have to demonstrate their ability to lead a consultation session with a patient. By splitting competencies this way, evaluation methods can be examined and adjusted as necessary. For example, is demonstrating the ability to complete an exam within the allotted time a cross-curricular competency required by the program? Or, is *writing error-free without the support of a spell checker* a core subject-specific competency? This is tantamount to determining when *writing skills* is defined as a *subject-specific competency to possess* and when it becomes a *cross-curricular competency to be utilized*.

Roberts (2013, p. 52) invites professors to answer four questions:

- (1) What is being tested (what knowledge, what subject-specific competencies) specifically by this task?
- (2) Does the nature of the task enable this knowledge and these competencies to be tested?
- (3) If yes, does it have to be done in one way only?
- (4) If so, why?

Although the professor who actually teaches a course is responsible for determining what knowledge and competencies are core for passing the course, reflection on this issue would merit being extended program-wide. Broader reflection would support examining how the department's teaching staff might (partially, in a personalized way) adopt a pedagogy of inclusion inspired by Universal Instructional Design (UID), a concept that arose in the United States. It is interesting to note that many academic counsellors from different universities trained in the UID approach can contribute to this reflection by guiding professors in developing UID-inspired teaching methods. The UID approach proposes nine guiding principles for promoting academic achievement at university (Bryson, 2003) among all student profiles, whether or not they have a disability:

- (1) accessibility of course notes in different formats (Internet or by email);
- (2) flexibility of study and learning strategies (group-based, auditory and visual reading of notes, online discussion forums, use of adapted software);
- (3) clear and simple instructions presented in writing and orally;
- (4) varied materials (computer-assisted presentations, CD-ROMs, audiovisual documents, texts written in bold characters);
- (5) evaluation situations that target students' competencies rather than their problems, that provide flexibility in the learning evaluation process;
- (6) reduction of physical constraints, for example, by use of a computer for those lacking fine motor skills;

- (7) adapted use of classroom space;
- (8) constitution of a learning community (study groups, discussion forums, team assignments, etc.); and
- (9) a teaching/learning and communication climate conducive to reflection on learning needs.



## COURSE AND EXAM ACCOMMODATIONS

This section begins with a discussion of course-based accommodations, followed by a look at accommodations in the context of exams. It is important to point out that this paper deals exclusively with accommodations where professors and academic management bodies (modules, departments, and faculties) have a role to play in collaboration with Student Disability Services. It does not cover supports that are the responsibility of other institutional bodies, for example architectural accessibility, or supports provided by student services: tutoring, writing assistance, daily care or interpreting.

### 1.9 Course-based accommodations and supports

Table 2 provides examples of accommodations or supports that address challenges encountered by students with disabilities in the classroom or in their courses. The accommodations are presented by order of importance as determined by the number of challenges that they help to address. For example, access to a computer or adapted software can serve to address 16 challenges.

The description of each accommodation or support outlines, where applicable, the constraints raised and examples of possible solutions. These examples, proposed by the professors who took part in the consultative process for the initial version of this paper, are provided for information purposes only and do not exclude any other solution more in line with the course or program context. It is important to remember that the key rule when choosing and implementing accommodations is that they enable the course objectives to be met. As a result, they need not correspond in every detail to the measures proposed for all students.

As indicated in the first part of this paper, Student Disability Service advisers are responsible for determining the accommodations that are provided to each student on the basis of their specific needs and in consideration of the course requirements. It is important to point out that, in accordance with strictly defined criteria, some accommodations may also be provided to students who, though they do not have a disability *per se*, are dealing with especially difficult personal situations (e.g. the death of a parent). Moreover, although some accommodations (e.g. dropping a course after the cut-off date) are generally regulated by guidelines and procedures specific to each university, a course provider can use his/her own professional judgment to propose accommodations that take exceptional situations into account when they impact the life of one or more of their students.

**TABLE 2**  
**COURSE-SPECIFIC ACCOMMODATIONS OR SUPPORTS BASED ON CHALLENGES FACED BY STUDENTS**

<b>Accommodation</b>  <b>Challenges Met</b>	Computer, technological aids	Notetaking support	Extra time for assignments	Restricted number of courses	Assignments in alternate format	Classroom/lab accompaniment	Dropping a course after cut-off date	Accessible materials	Interpreting Microphone Transcriber
<b>% use according to 290 students*</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>5%</b>
Taking courses full-time		X	X	X					
Taking 3-hour courses		X							
Taking evening courses		X							
Completing assignments in allotted time	X		X	X					
Planning and organizing	X	X	X	X					
Staying attentive/focused	X	X	X	X					
Self-correcting	X	X	X						
Taking notes	X	X							
Working on a team					X				
Writing: grammar, syntax and spelling	X	X	X	X	X				
Reading and understanding fluently	X	X	X	X	X				
Articulating words/sentences	X				X	X			
Interpreting non-verbal language					X	X			
Writing, incl. by hand	X	X	X	X		X		X	
Reading printed characters	X		X	X		X		X	
Discriminating sounds of speech	X	X	X		X				X
Making oral presentations					X				
Memorizing abundant notions	X	X		X			X		
Understanding/following oral/written instructions	X	X	X						
Understanding complex/abstract concepts	X	X	X	X					
Managing pain/fatigue	X	X	X	X	X		X		
Managing daily care			X	X		X			
Managing personal challenges			X	X	X		X		
Moving						X			
Handling in a lab setting						X			
Making fine motor movements	X					X			

*\*Data from questionnaire on accommodations, completed by 290 students with disabilities. The percentage is the number of students who said they had used the accommodation in question.*

### 1.9.1 Use of a computer and technological aids

The use of a computer with or without technological aids (adapted software) helps address numerous problems. Even though, in the technology era, the use of computer tools sometimes creates classroom management issues, which have led some professors to ban them, it must be remembered that for many students with disabilities these tools constitute an accommodation essential to their academic success.

### 1.9.2 Notetaking support

Taking notes requires extreme concentration, as students must listen while at the same time extract what is important and write it down. As can be seen in Table 2, many types of challenges (problems) justify notetaking support. We present the three forms of notetaking that are most commonly proposed to students, each complementary to the other. This accommodation does not exempt students from attending their courses except in the case of health or mobility issues.

#### I. Professors' course notes available via university portal prior to courses

By professors' course notes, we mean the content that professors present to students during their teaching activity, generally in the form of PowerPoint presentations.

##### Associated constraint

It must be recognized that professors are not always able to submit their course notes prior to each course. Many submit them after the course. Also, some professors simply do not have course notes to provide students with.

##### Alternatives

- Offer to meet with students who have difficulty understanding the notions seen in courses and answer their questions during scheduled office hours.
- Suggest a reading list relating to the course content prior to the course.

#### II. Courses recorded using a digital recorder or a smart pen

These are two ways in which courses can be recorded. The more traditional tape recorder is being replaced by digital voice recorder pens, which let users take down notes while recording synchronized vocal comments, then convert them into digital written format. Software then lets users review and listen to the written recording.

Some professors allow their courses to be recorded, provided students agree in writing not to use the course content other than for personal studies. In some universities, there is a document (agreement) that students must sign and submit to the professor when requested to do so.

#### Associated constraint

Some courses, for example those with a focus on personal or professional development, may not lend themselves to being recorded owing to the confidential nature of the comments that are made.

#### III. Peer notetaking

Since having to re-listen to a course recording doubles the listening time, some students prefer, when possible, to ask a classroom peer to act as a notetaker. The student may ask for the professor's support by getting the professor to state at the start of the course (while keeping the student's anonymity) that one of the students in the classroom needs a notetaker and invite students who are willing to share their notes to write down their name and contact information on a sheet of paper for that purpose. The professor will then give the sheet of paper to the student at the end of the course. Some students get financial aid to pay a notetaker, which gives them access to a notetaker of their choice, whether or not enrolled in the course. In that instance, confidentiality issues must be taken into consideration once again.

#### 1.9.3 Extra time to complete assignments

Many cognitive, emotional or physical disabilities can affect the ability to complete assignments within the prescribed time lines. Although some professors feel it would be preferable to suggest that students limit the number of courses (light course load) they take each semester, financial constraints (e.g. access to scholarships conditional on full-time student status) may not make this alternative practicable.

#### Associated constraint

This accommodation is difficult, if not impossible, to provide when the assignments are part of weekly teaching activities where feedback is given in the classroom at a specific date.

#### Alternatives

- Suggest that students do a smaller number of assignments (e.g. 7/10), while ensuring that the seven assignments are sufficient to evaluate whether the course requirements have been met.
- Suggest that students do one assignment for the semester in lieu of weekly assignments.

#### 1.9.4 Smaller number of courses or special course load

Some students are only able to take a certain number of courses in one semester. Unless this were to cause undue hardship, students cannot generally be denied access to a study program on the basis that the program has to be taken full-time. However, since many study programs have well defined criteria as regards the number and sequence of courses that have to be taken, students need to be made aware of the consequences that a lighter course load will have on their university

career, especially when certain courses are offered only once a year or every other year. They will need to plan on a career spread over a number of semesters.

### 1.9.5 Assignments in alternate format

Various disabilities may warrant giving students the possibility of completing assignments in an alternate format. The most common alternatives are presented below.

#### I. Exemption from team assignments

Working on a team requires strong social, communication and emotional skills. When those skills are compromised, contributing to teamwork is also compromised. This is particularly the case for certain students with:

- Asperger syndrome, which impacts their social skills and thus compromises their contribution to teamwork;
- stuttering, which causes rejection by their peers since this disability impacts the ability to effectively communicate their ideas verbally;
- a mental health or anxiety disorder, which may complicate the management of exchanges and tasks for all members of the team.

#### Associated constraint

For some programs, working on a team is a core competency that has to be developed. As a result, being exempted from team assignments, even if replaced by an individual assignment or an exam, is not practicable.

#### Alternatives

- Professors may, for example, identify, with the student and to the extent possible in collaboration with the other students on the team, a role or a responsibility that he/she is capable of performing and that makes an important contribution to the advancement of the team's work.
- Tasks are split among the members of the team. Once the assignment is completed, the team as a whole can opt for a single evaluation or individual evaluations. If the second option is elected, the common table of contents indicates besides each component which student was responsible for that component.

#### II. Written assignment in lieu of an oral presentation

This is an accommodation made available to students who have trouble expressing themselves orally because of different types of speech limitations (stuttering, dysphasia, muscular dystrophy, etc.) or social limitations (social phobia, generalized anxiety, etc.).

### Associated constraint

For some programs, being able to make oral presentations is a core competency that has to be developed. As a result, being exempted from making an oral presentation and replacing it by another evaluation method is not practicable.

### Alternatives

- Propose one or more rehearsals with a fellow classmate or a Student Disability Services adviser.
- Allow the presentation to be done on video or recorded.
- Evaluate the student in front of a restricted audience (a few peers and the professor).

### III. Oral presentation in lieu of a written assignment

Although technological tools are relatively effective at overcoming writing difficulties, some students may need this accommodation. This is the case, for example, of a student with moderate to severe dyslexia who needs two to three times more time than his/her peers without disabilities to complete a written assignment and, at the end, have his/her text edited to ensure that the meaning is maintained. Offering a student to give an oral presentation allows the student to devote more time towards demonstrating mastery of the course content and, where necessary, his/her ability to compare, organize, argue and evaluate.

#### 1.9.6 Accompaniment (classroom and laboratory)

Various problems associated with certain disabilities require that students be accompanied to the classroom. This includes students with reduced mobility, difficulty managing their daily care on their own, or speech problems. Although most students with a visual impairment have access to a companion to help them with handling activities in a laboratory setting, a peer may be called upon to fulfil this role.

#### 1.9.7 Dropping a course without a fail grade after the cut-off date

This is an exceptional accommodation made available to students who have a documented condition or a condition under investigation and who encounter unforeseen problems. Students can ask to withdraw from one or more courses. Their ability to meet the requirements for the courses in which they are enrolled will determine the number of courses that have to be dropped. When the problems are known and foreseeable, students can and must drop their courses the same as all other students before the cut-off date.

#### Associated constraint

Students need to enquire about the consequences of dropping one or more of their courses on their university career: some courses are prerequisites to others and offered only once a year or every other year.

#### 1.9.8 Accessible materials

Students with a visual impairment need their course documents (course outline, texts, books, exams) to be transposed into an accessible format (audiodigital, electronic, large print or Braille). For the documents to be transcribed by Student Disability Services (or a related unit), it is important that the professor provide the documents, including a required reading list, within an amount of time allowing for transcription.

#### 1.9.9 Interpretation, real-time transcription or FM system

Students who are hard of hearing or deaf may require sign language interpretation services. To facilitate the interpreters' job, professors are invited to submit their course materials (course outline, books, articles) so that interpreters can prepare for interpreting the content, which may necessitate the development of new signs.

In addition, some students who are not familiar with sign language require the support of a transcriber, thus enabling them to obtain in writing everything that is communicated during the course, in real time via their computer. Transcription also makes up for the fact that Quebec is experiencing a shortage of sign language interpreters. This way, students for whom interpretation services are unavailable can rely on transcription.

Finally, some students with a hearing loss require that the professor wear a microphone, which picks up the voice of the speaker and transmits it via radio waves to the listener (student) wearing a miniature FM receiver. The student is generally responsible for providing the professor with the microphone.

### 1.10 Exam-based accommodations

Table 3 presents the accommodations that address the challenges encountered by students in an exam setting. As for the previous section, the accommodations are presented by order of importance as determined by the number of challenges that they help to overcome. For example, access to a separate space and extra time serve to address 18 challenges.

As in the section on course-based accommodations, the description of each accommodation outlines, where applicable, the constraints raised and the alternatives proposed by professors who took part in the consultative process for the initial version of this paper. They are suggestions that can guide readers' reflection towards other solutions better adapted to meeting their course objectives. It is important to remember that the key rule when choosing and implementing accommodations is that they enable the course objectives to be met. As a result, they need not correspond in every detail to the measures proposed for all students.

**TABLE 3**  
EXAM-SPECIFIC ACCOMMODATIONS BASED ON CHALLENGES FACED BY STUDENTS

<b>Accommodation</b>  <b>Challenges met</b>	Separate space	Extra time	Computer, technological aids	One exam per day	Alternate formats	Modified schedule	Reader or scribe	Memory aid	Postpone exam	Earmuffs	Calculator
<b>% use according to 290 students*</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>1%</b>
Taking evening courses	X	X				X					
Completing exams in allotted time	X	X	X								
Planning/organizing	X	X	X								
Staying attentive/ Focused	X	X	X	X		X				X	
Self-correcting	X	X	X	X							
Taking multiple-choice exams	X	X			X						
Writing: grammar, syntax and spelling	X	X	X		X						
Reading/understanding fluently	X	X	X		X						
Articulating words/sentences	X	X	X		X						
Writing, incl. by hand	X	X	X								
Reading printed characters	X	X	X								X
Memorizing abundant notions	X	X		X				X			
Understanding/following oral/written instructions	X	X		X			X				
Understanding complex notions	X	X									X
Managing pain/fatigue/medication	X	X	X	X	X	X			X		
Managing daily care	X	X	X	X	X	X					
Managing personal challenges	X	X	X	X		X			X		
Making fine motor movements	X	X					X				

\* Data from questionnaire on accommodations, completed by 290 students with disabilities. The percentage is the number of students who said they had used the accommodation in question.

### 1.10.1 Access to separate space

This is the accommodation most frequently provided for all students who need extra time or when a student needs an accommodation that cannot be provided by the professor. Two types of space are possible:

- **Space for one student:** This is a space reserved for one student when the condition requires that he/she be alone (e.g. Tourette syndrome, environmental allergy, use of voice processing software, or talking calculator).
- **Space to accommodate 2 to 10 students:** This is the space provided most frequently. Students in need of a quieter environment can mitigate distractions by using earplugs or earmuffs.

### 1.10.2 33 to 50 percent extra time

This is an accommodation provided frequently for all disabilities that impact a student's ability to finish an exam within the allotted time. It is also an accommodation made available by professional associations that require an exam to join the profession, including accounting, health sciences (physiotherapy, occupational therapy, nursing, and medicine) and law.

#### Associated constraint

The only constraint relates to the extra time made available to students so that they can take quizzes generally scheduled at the start or end of the course. Given its frequency and duration, this accommodation (between 5 and 10 extra minutes) is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to implement. On the one hand, this measure requires students to travel, often long distances, to take the quiz at the university's exam administration unit, due to the fact that this unit is generally located at a distance from the classrooms where courses are held. On the other hand, professors have trouble submitting the quiz within the time frames prescribed by this unit for students to take the quiz.

#### Alternatives

- The professor gives an extra five minutes to all students.
- The professor offers an extra five minutes to the student to complete the quiz either before the start or at the end of the course.

### 1.10.3 Access to a computer and technological aids

*(voice synthesis software such as WordQ and Médialexie, Antidote)*

This is an accommodation frequently provided to help students structure their text and correct their errors on the basis that students already use these technologies in all spheres of their lives and many will continue to do so in their professional careers.

- It is provided when writing proficiency is a cross-curricular competency.

- In evaluation situations where it is a subject-specific competency, access to these learning technologies can be offered as regards the writing aspect, but not the aspect relating to grammar proficiency.
- Some professors refuse this accommodation on the basis that they do not penalize students for grammatical or spelling errors. It is important to point out in this regard that a computer and technological tools also help structure thought, from a syntax perspective. Many students with disabilities use it for this purpose.

#### 1.10.4 One exam per day

This is an accommodation frequently provided when a student has to sit two exams necessitating 30 to 50 percent extra time, back to back, which is extremely demanding both cognitively and physically. One of the exams is then postponed to a later date, as determined in collaboration with the professor, in consideration of the student's exam schedule. Ideally, the exam is postponed to within the same exam period or at least during the same semester, which reflects the fact that a large percentage of courses are given by lecturers hired on a semester basis.

##### Associated constraint

The professor often has to write a new exam, which explains why the exam may be postponed longer than the student would like. In addition, some professors already have to write a new exam for a rewrite session at a scheduled date. Some professors prefer not having to write a third exam, as designing equivalent exams is a long and arduous task.

##### Alternatives

- Professors indicate exam dates in their course outline so that students can report a scheduling conflict at the start of the semester and thus allow professors to adjust their calendar of teaching activities and exams accordingly.
- The student writes the exam at the rewrite date scheduled for all students who have to rewrite the exam.
- Suggest to the student that he/she write a take-home exam or do a written assignment in lieu of the exam. Note that a take-home exam generally corresponds to a written assignment (short or long development), but completed in a shorter time frame (a half-day to more or less two days). The professor determines the content and the amount of time allotted to complete it.

#### 1.10.5 Alternate formats

Two type of requests are generally made:

##### I. Avoid multiple choice exams

This accommodation is relatively frequent for students with an attention deficit or dyslexia, which may result in errors of inattention or interpretation due, in particular, to the quantity of details to consider or decode.

#### Associated constraints

The professor has to prepare a new exam which may, additionally, cause the exam to be postponed for the student.

#### Alternatives

- Suggest to the student that he/she write a take-home exam or do an assignment in lieu of the exam (see 2.2.4).

If it is difficult to replace this exam format:

- Some professors suggest, without actually altering the exam format, that fewer marks be awarded to the “multiple choice” section and more marks to the “short-phrased answers” section;
- Other professors let the student identify his/her answer selections by a short statement for questions that may be confusing.

#### II. One exam format

Request for a standardized format, for example an open-book exam, a take-home exam, in one or more courses. This extremely infrequent, not to say exceptional, accommodation may be provided when a student cannot attend classes for an extended period of time, due to health reasons for example.

#### Associated constraint

The exam format cannot be altered in certain evaluation contexts, such as in a laboratory setting or in the translation field.

#### Alternatives

- Suggest the exam be postponed (see 2.2.9)
- Suggest an equivalent assignment
- Suggest a take-home exam (see 2.2.4)

#### 1.10.6 Modified schedule (same day)

This is an accommodation provided to students whose physical condition (multiple sclerosis, etc.) or neurological condition (ADD/H, etc.) makes it difficult to sit exams at the end of the day or in the evening.

#### Associated constraint

If a student cannot sit an exam at the same time as the other students in the class, most professors feel they have no alternative but to create a new version of the exam. This additional work may cause the exam to be postponed.

## Alternatives

- Plan so that the end of the time allotted to the student with recourse to this accommodation for writing his/her exam overlaps with the start of the exam in the classroom. Since most students who request this accommodation also ask for extra time, then depending on the length of the exam, this allows them to start the exam two to four hours earlier than their fellow classmates.
- Suggest that the student do an assignment in lieu of the exam or write a take-home exam (see 2.2.4).

### 1.10.7 Access to a reader or a scribe

This relatively infrequent accommodation is provided to students for the duration of their studies if they have, for example, a fine motor impairment or a speech disorder, whether or not combined with dyslexia, which makes the use of certain technologies impossible, voice synthesis software for example.

In this instance, the roles of readers and scribes are clearly defined:

- Readers cannot reformulate a question to facilitate its understanding;
- Scribes must limit themselves to write down what is dictated by the student.

Some students, including those with a dysphasia, may require the interpretation of an exam question or exam instructions. The professor (or the professor's teaching assistant) is then invited to interpret it.

### 1.10.8 Access to memory aids

This accommodation is provided infrequently to students with a brain injury or any other disorder causing memory disturbances. It is provided only when the courses focus essentially on comprehension, problem-solving, reflection and development of critical thinking.

The content of the memory aids is then determined by the student and the professor. In order to ensure that the student has access only to such aids, this accommodation may require that:

- each sheet that the student intends to use a memory aid be signed by the professor;
- the exam administration unit returns to the professor the exam accompanied by the sheets used as a memory aid.

### 1.10.9 Postponement of exam

This accommodation is provided to a student with unforeseeable problems, for example where caused by a disability whose symptoms vary unexpectedly or a disability currently being investigated or newly diagnosed by an accredited professional. Exams may be postponed in either of two ways:

#### I. Postponement during semester

The professor agrees with the student on a date for rewriting the exam in consideration of the student's ability to prepare adequately and the professor's ability to put together a new exam. If the exam must be written by a student at the exam administration unit, the student will need to complete the adapted exam request form and plan on a time frame as prescribed by the unit (e.g. seven business days).

#### II. Postponement to next or later semester

This accommodation is provided to, amongst others, students with a mental health disorder or a physical condition that limits their ability to complete their semester. The postponement date must be discussed with the student and the staff involved (Student Disability Services adviser, professor, module officer, department director) only once the student is fit to sit the exam.

##### Associated constraints

- The professor must prepare a new version of the exam, possibly postponing the exam to the point where the student's ability to meet the requirements of the current semester is compromised.
- If the course is taught by a lecturer, postponement to the next or a later semester becomes particularly complex.

##### Alternative

- Suggest that the student write a take-home exam or complete a written assignment in lieu of the exam once his/her situation has improved (see 2.2.4).

#### 1.10.10 Earmuffs or headphones with music

This accommodation is provided to students who need to buffer ambient noise in order to mitigate external auditory distractions or manage their stress by listening to music.

#### 1.10.11 Calculator

Although students who have difficulty grasping abstract mathematical concepts do not enrol in science programs, they may take one or two courses (statistics or economics) that require they demonstrate mathematical skills. A calculator is then an essential accommodation. In addition, persons with a visual impairment may need a specialized calculator (e.g. with a voice function).



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### “Traditional” disabilities

#### **Visual impairment (VI)**

The term “visual impairment” refers to a broad range of conditions, from low vision to total loss of sight. Severe visual impairment is recognized when visual acuity in each eye, after correction by means of appropriate ophthalmic lenses, excluding special optical systems and additions greater than 4.00 dioptres, is not more than 6/21, or the field of vision in each eye is less than 60 degrees in the 180-degree and 90-degree meridians, and, in either case, the person is unable to read, write or move about in an unfamiliar environment.

#### **Hearing impairment (HI)**

A hearing impairment exists when minimum hearing ability is 25 decibels. Severe hearing impairment is when the ear having the greater hearing capability is affected by a hearing deficiency evaluated, according to 1989 standard S3.6 of the American National Standard Institute, to be an average of at least 70 decibels, in aerial conduction, on any of the 500, 1,000 or 2,000 Hertzian frequencies.

#### **Motor impairment (MI)**

Motor impairment is recognized when it results in significant, persistent limitations for an individual in the performance of their daily activities: malformation or abnormality in the skeletal, muscular or neurological systems responsible for body motion.

#### **Organic impairment (OI) including brain injury (BI)**

Organic impairment is recognized when it results in significant, persistent limitations for an individual in the performance of their daily activities: disorder or abnormality in the internal organs forming part of the cardiorespiratory, gastrointestinal and endocrinal systems. Although brain injury is a so-called *emerging* disability, it falls within the category of organic impairments and can have severe physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioural consequences.

#### **Speech and language disorder (SLD)**

Individuals with a speech and language disorder are those whose impairment results from a neurological disorder (e.g. aphasia, dysphasia or audimutism, brain dysfunction) causing significant, persistent communication disabilities.

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<sup>3</sup> Most of the definitions come from the report by the AQICESH (2014-2015). Some have been added to on the basis of the *Guide à l'intention du personnel enseignant de l'UQO* (Philion et al., 2013).

## “Emerging” disabilities

### **Learning disabilities (LD): dyslexia, dysorthographia and dyscalculia**

The expression “learning disability” is a generic term that encompasses a set of neurologically-based disorders that specifically and severely impair certain cognitive abilities involved in foundational academic learning such as reading, writing and arithmetic. Foundational learning provides skills essential to all other school and academic learning activities, with the result that a given learning disability may have a severe impact in the fields where the deficient skill is required. The most common learning disabilities are dyslexia, dysorthographia and dyscalculia.

Dyslexia is a specific learning disorder that relates to reading. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent recognition of written words and by poor spelling. As a result, dyslexia is systematically associated with dysorthographia. Difficulties with identification and production of written words are such that they significantly impair the skill of understanding texts as they are read or writing coherent texts.

Dyscalculia is a learning disability related to logical-mathematical reasoning. It impairs the understanding of concepts, the use of numbers and the memorization of numerical facts.

### **Mental health disorders (MHD)**

Mental health disorders are complex and multifaceted, with a range of inherent characteristics—chronic or short-term, mild or severe—that cover a broad spectrum. The term mental health disorders is usually used to refer to persons with diagnoses such as generalized anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder, clinical depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), schizophrenia, alcohol or drug addiction, suicidal tendencies, eating disorders, personality disorders, or phobias. Mental health disorders are those listed in the DSM-V or ICD-10 (or more recent editions).

### **Attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity (ADD/H)**

Attention deficit disorder, with or without hyperactivity, is a neurological problem that affects five to eight percent of children/teenagers and three to five percent of adults. It is characterized by high levels of inattention accompanied or not by hyperactivity and impulsiveness, which results in difficulty inhibiting and controlling ideas (inattention), actions (physical restlessness) and behaviours (impulsiveness).

### **Autism spectrum disorders (ASD)**

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) group together, in an inclusive category, autism or autistic disorder, Asperger syndrome and pervasive development disorder not otherwise specified. ASDs are generally characterized by impairments or abnormalities in one or more of the following four skill areas: socialization, communication, play and imagination, and range of interests and behaviours.

