

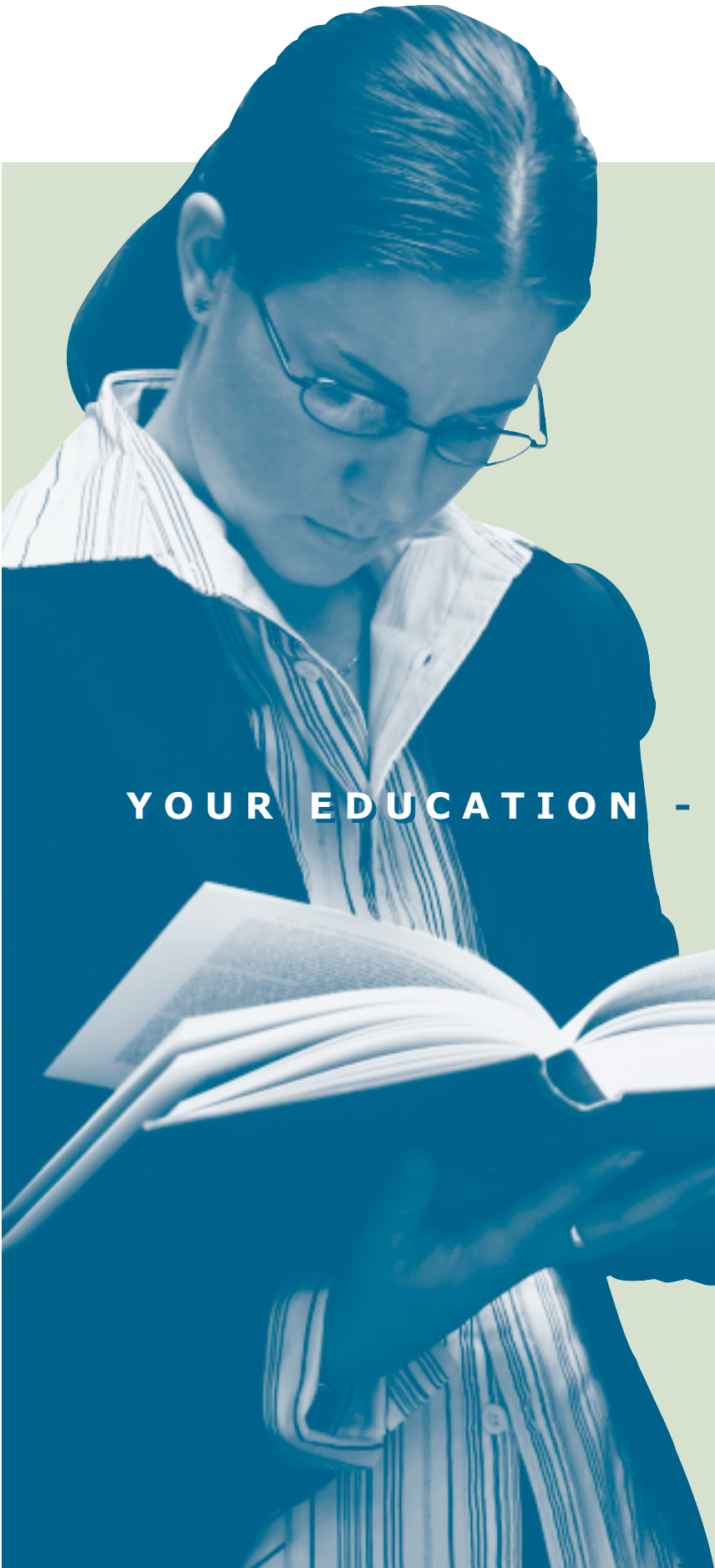


CANADIAN MENTAL
HEALTH ASSOCIATION
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POUR LA SANTÉ MENTALE



YOUR EDUCATION - YOUR FUTURE

A guide to college and university for
students with psychiatric disabilities



**This resource is also
available online at
www.cmha.ca/youreducation**

YOUR EDUCATION - YOUR FUTURE

In association with:
Canadian Association of Disability
Service Providers in Post-Secondary
Education (CADSPPE)

Association of Canadian
Community Colleges (ACCC)



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Table of contents

Acknowledgements	2
Introduction	5
How to use this resource	5
First things first: is college or university for you?	6
Why consider college or university?	6
Is college or university right for you?	6
When is the best time?	7
Finding the support you need	8
Decisions, decisions: choosing your program	9
Choosing a program	9
Skills you need to have	11
Choosing a learning option that's right for you	12
Choosing a college or university	13
Taking the plunge: applying for admission	14
Coming back to school after years away	14
Getting the support you need: services for students with disabilities	15
Disclosure: it's your decision	16
Why disclose?	16
Who should you disclose to?	16
When to disclose	17
What to disclose	17
How to disclose	18
Being your own advocate	19
Paying the bills: how to find the money you need	20
How much money do you need?	20
Where do I get information about student financial aid?	20
What funding is available?	21
Will receiving a loan, bursary or scholarship affect my disability income?	23
Paying for your medication	23
Taking a job to pay your way	23
Registering for courses: choosing wisely	24
Choosing a realistic course load	24
Choosing the right courses	24
Your first few weeks: plan ahead	26
Registering for courses in advance	26
Taking placement tests	26



Avoiding the bookstore rush	26
Visit the campus before classes start	27
Participating in orientation activities	27
Connecting with peer mentors	27
Academic accommodations: how they can help	28
What is an academic accommodation?	28
How do you arrange for academic accommodations?	28
What documentation is required?	28
What academic accommodations do you need?	29
Some typical academic accommodations	29
How will the academic accommodation(s) be put in place?	33
What if an instructor refuses to grant an academic accommodation?	33
What if you don't want to disclose your disability?	33
Making the grade: how to succeed in your studies	34
Use the resources available to you	34
Developing your skills	34
Staying healthy: the importance of a support network	37
Develop your informal networks	37
Take advantage of services on campus	38
Mental health professionals: keeping them in the loop	38
Accepting and managing your illness	39
Managing your illness day to day	39
Stress: how to cope	41
If you're having trouble	42
Contacting instructors	42
Withdrawing from courses	42
Deferred standing and other options	43
Withdrawing from school	43
Getting the care you need	43
Back to school: challenges for mature/non-traditional students	44
Services designed with you in mind	44
If you're considering graduate studies	45
Different expectations	45
Dealing with disclosure issues	45
The ins and outs of financial support	45
You're on your way	46
Web resources	47
Bibliography	51

Introduction



Attending college or university opens up an exciting world of possibilities. It can also be pretty challenging. But if you're living with a mental illness, you've faced challenges before. This resource is designed to make your transition to college or university just a little bit easier. It takes you through all the steps of going to school, providing information and tips for anyone living with a mental illness.

In creating this resource we've gathered information from colleges and universities across Canada. More importantly, we've talked to students with psychiatric disabilities¹ to get their perspective on the rewards and challenges of higher education. Their experiences, thoughts and advice are found throughout the resource.

How to use this resource

The resource is organized into sections, each focused on particular aspects of the college and university experience. You can go through the sections in order, or just skip to the sections that seem most relevant to you. There is a lot of information here, so don't try and absorb it all in one sitting. Read a section or two and then come back to it at another time. Talk to friends and family about what you've read and any questions you may have. You don't need to make a decision about anything right away.

Some of the sections have useful checklists of questions. You may find it helpful to take a piece of paper and spend some time answering them. They are there as a tool to help you think through important issues.

Some sections list additional web resources in the **Check it out** boxes. There is also a listing of useful resources and organizations in the **Web resources** section.

¹ The terms mental illness and psychiatric disability are often used interchangeably. Mental illness actually refers to the illness itself, whereas psychiatric disability refers to the impairment caused by the illness. We use the term psychiatric disability because the focus in this resource is how your mental illness may affect how you perform in a college or university environment. [Adapted from Queensland University of Technology, *Succeeding with a psychiatric disability in a university environment* (Brisbane: Counselling and Careers Service, Queensland University of Technology, 1997), 8.]

First things first: is college or university for you?



Why consider college or university?

"Without some sort of post-secondary education you are limited. I didn't have enough skills really that I could get a good job."

People decide to go to college or university for many reasons.

For some people, a certificate, diploma or degree is a stepping stone to a job or career. In fact, post-secondary education is a basic requirement for many careers and professions.

Other people consider an education an important part of their personal growth. Going to college or university is a chance to learn new things, meet new people, and challenge yourself with new experiences and ideas.

If you are living with a mental illness, going to school can also be an important part of your recovery process. It can provide you with a focus and an opportunity to be out in the world, doing something that isn't about your illness. However, it's important to remember that school is very demanding. You will want to consider whether you are ready to take on this challenge. You can figure that out by asking yourself some basic questions. (See checklist, opposite page)

"For a long time I wasn't really doing anything. I wasn't working, I had been just in and out of hospital, and I really felt like I had to do something. I couldn't just spend more time doing nothing."

Is college or university right for you?

College or university is a whole different ballgame than high school. Expectations are higher. Pressures are greater. You are considered an adult, and held responsible for your own success or failure. Going to university or college may also coincide with your first time living on your own and/or away from home.

"The part that was really overwhelming was coming back to school after I got better. That was really hard because I had experienced that episode of illness. I thought, 'Can I go back? Am I going to be able to go back to the life that I had prior to becoming ill?'"

If you've been out of school for a long time, you may be worried about whether you can keep up. Everyone else may seem a lot younger than you — and a lot more confident!

You'll probably go through a major adjustment period. But you're not alone. It's the same for everyone — with or without a psychiatric disability. And people do adjust, are successful — and enjoy it!

Mental illness ≠ lack of ability

You already know that you can have a mental illness and be smart. Ludwig van Beethoven, Vincent Van Gogh, Winston Churchill, Virginia Woolf and Nobel Prize-winning mathematician John Nash are just some of the people whose mental illness didn't limit their brilliance or their contributions to society.



Students with a psychiatric disability can, and do, excel in school. But your illness may require you to make some adjustments. For example, you may need to consider going to school part-time to help you manage the course workload and the stress of deadlines. Or you may need to look at options like distance education to allow you to complete courses without compromising your mental health. Or you may need to take advantage of certain **academic accommodations** (see pg. 28) to help overcome some of the effects of your illness or the medication you require.

Remember: being successful in school is all about setting reasonable goals for yourself.



"I know I'm smart. I have marks to prove it. I've been on the honour roll two semesters in a row and that makes me feel good. It just makes me feel like an accomplished person."

CHECKLIST: ASK YOURSELF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:²

- Why do I want to go to school? What do I hope to accomplish?
- Is education a priority for me? Is there anything else that needs to be a higher priority for me right now?
- Is my illness sufficiently stabilized to allow me to concentrate on my education?
- What was my previous experience with higher education? Do I have any issues I need to resolve from that experience?
- How much do I know about the demands of academic life, such as registering for classes, navigating a campus, using a computer, taking notes, reading and writing assignments, or taking exams? Do I need to find out more?
- What are my strengths? How can I use those to my advantage?
- What are my physical, intellectual, and emotional needs? Do I know how to meet those needs?
- Do I have the persistence and confidence to face frustrations, get the information I need from school administrators, and advocate for myself if necessary? If not, can I get a support person to help me?
- Can I stick to my educational goals for at least one semester?
- If my situation changes, will I be able to reassess and adjust it accordingly?

When is the best time?

Managing the pressures and demands of school can be challenging for all students. Before you decide to apply for college or university, you need to be sure that now is a good time for you to take it on.

² Adapted from Centre for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, Boston University, "How do I make decisions about my education?," *Handling your Psychiatric Illness in Work and School*, <www.bu.edu/cpr/jobschool/> (19 February 2004).

You may want to talk to someone in a college or university Disability Services Office. (See pg. 15) They can give you a clear picture of what will be expected of you in college or university and what supports will be available to you.



"I think being out in the real world, it kind of helps, because it makes you feel like a person. You're not just a person with a disability."

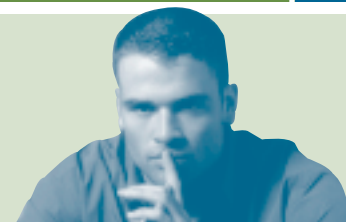
"I'm doing it a course at a time. It's about applying myself, even if I don't get the degree."

Finding the support you need

The good news is that colleges and universities are ready to help you. Most of them have special offices or staff members assigned to help students with disabilities. And you can help yourself. In fact, you need to — by being your own advocate and by figuring out what strategies work for you. This resource should help you make the most of the supports available from your school and the community, and give you ideas about what you can do to help yourself.

You may also want to talk to your doctor to get his/her perspective on whether you are ready to attend school. If you decide that you require **academic accommodations** (see pg. 28) to attend school, your doctor will need to write you a letter to document that need. Keep in mind that you may need to explain to your doctor why you feel school is a good option for you. Be prepared to advocate for yourself.

Decisions, decisions: choosing your program



Choosing a program³

Once you've decided you want to go to college or university, your decisions have just begun. Choosing a program is the next big step and it can take some time. You'll probably need to do some research and gather information to help you make your decision. It's time well spent. The work you do now will help you make some good choices right from the beginning.

Identify your personal interests

Start by trying to identify what interests you. Were there particular subject areas in high school that you really enjoyed? Do you have a hobby that you love that could lead to a career? Have you heard about jobs that sound interesting to you? Find out what courses or programs are available in that area, and what career options are possible.

You may want to consider career or vocational counseling to help you in this process. Some colleges, YM-YWCAs or community service organizations offer this service. Many university and colleges also have learning/study skills centres that can help you assess where your interests and talents lie.

Explore both college and university programs

Think about whether you want to do a program that is more general or one that is focused on a particular occupation.

In general, universities tend to offer programs that provide a broad education (e.g., Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree) or that provide specific professional training (e.g., Bachelor of Business or Bachelor of Journalism degree). Undergraduate degrees take three to five years to complete (attending full-time). University courses usually require more written work, research skills and the ability to reason and deal with abstract concepts.

"I'm doing night classes. That way I can do just one at a time. It works for me."

Community colleges tend to offer programs that provide training related to specific occupations (e.g., Diploma in Graphic Design, Diploma in Dental Hygiene, Chef Training Certificate). Certificates and diplomas usually take one to two years (attending full-time) to complete.

CHECK IT OUT

For some easy quizzes to help you figure out what kind of career might be right for you, visit the federal government's JobsEtc.ca website (www.jobsetc.ca/category_drilldown.jsp?crumb=12&category_id=412&lang=e).

³ This section draws extensively on South Australian Regional Disability Liaison Officer Initiative, *Considering Higher Education? A Planning guide for people with disabilities or medical conditions*, 3rd ed. (Adelaide: University of South Australia, 2002), <www.unisa.edu.au/hrm/Equity%26Diversity/NRDLOI/publications/consider> (29 March 2004), Deciding on a course/subject.



It's important to remember that you don't have to attend school full time. More and more students are choosing to go to school part-time for a variety of reasons — family commitments, financial reasons or simply because they aren't interested in full-time studies. In fact, at some colleges and universities, part-time studies are the norm.

The **part-time option** (see pg. 12) is particularly important if you are living with a psychiatric disability, because it can reduce the pressures associated with attending school and help you to be successful in your studies.

"I chose to do art. Art was a hobby I liked. Basically I'm turning a hobby into a job."

If you're not sure about your direction, you may want to choose a program that offers a range of subject choices and career options. This might help you learn where your interests lie. The downside is that you may end up changing programs further along, which can add time and expense to your education.

Gather information

Gather as much information as you can to help you make your decisions. Some good sources to try:

- Most college and university websites have program descriptions and detailed online course calendars.
- Talk to other students about their programs.
- Talk to people doing the type of work that interests you.
- Contact professional organizations or check out their websites. Sometimes professional bodies regulate who can work in that field and have specific educational requirements.
- Many colleges and universities hold open houses for prospective students. These provide a great opportunity to meet professors and current students and find out about the particular program you are interested in.

- Arrange to meet with an academic advisor or instructor from the program that interests you.
- Compare the same program at different institutions. Remember there can be differences between one institution and another. Course offerings and requirements can be quite different.
- Organize a work or volunteer placement. There's no better way to decide if a career is right for you than to have some hands-on experience.

Consider the admission requirements

As you gather information, pay attention to the admission requirements for the college/university and program you are considering. There will likely be a requirement for a high school diploma or the completion of a specific grade level, and a certain grade point average.

Some programs may also require that you have already completed specific required courses, known as prerequisites (e.g., grade 12 math or science courses). Others have requirements for certain work experience, portfolios of work you have done, etc. Some schools will make exceptions in certain situations. For example, requirements may be waived if you left school several years ago or have a certain amount of work experience. However, you may be asked to write a test as part of the application process. If you need special accommodations to do this, the college or university's Disability Services Office can assist you.

"Go out and find information about the course you're taking. Find out how intense it is, because if you think it's going to be too intense, you want to know beforehand — before you put yourself in a position that's going to make you feel worse about everything."



SKILLS YOU NEED TO HAVE

As you consider what program to take, you will also want to assess your own skills in the following areas:

- *Writing skills*

Many courses, especially those in university programs, require written assignments. You will need to have the ability to research a topic, organize your ideas, make an argument and write well.

- *Computer skills*

Using computers is a fact of life for most college and university students. Many institutions expect students to apply for admission and register for courses on-line. Time-tables and course outlines are on-line. Library catalogues are also on-line, so you will need to use computers to research papers and assignments. If you don't have basic keyboarding and computer skills, you may find it difficult to do the required work. You may want to take a non-credit computer course to improve your skills before enrolling.

- *Study skills*

College and university courses typically require a lot of listening and note-taking in class, as well as many reading assignments. In order to be successful, you will need to develop a number of skills (e.g., the ability to identify what is important and study effectively to prepare for tests and exams).

You may want to consider upgrading your skills before applying to college or university. Many school boards offer adult education programs that include skills upgrading courses. Many colleges and universities also offer skills upgrading courses to students who are thinking about applying for admission. These non-credit courses can be especially helpful if you have been out of school for some time and need to refresh your skills.

Once you're at college or university, your school's learning/study skills centre will be a good resource to help you develop your skills. These centres provide study skills courses and tutoring support, and may be able to suggest options for improving your skills.

Try things out

Been out of school for a while? Aren't sure whether you can meet the demands of college or university? Want to be sure a particular program is for you?

You can always test the water by doing the following:

- Take a non-credit continuing education course. You can do this without applying for admission to a college or university or enrolling in a specific program. If you want to experience a learning environment without the pressure of assignments and testing, this could be a good option.
- Attend a lecture. Some institutions can arrange for you to sit in on a lecture in the program of your choice.
- Take a credit summer course. You'll have the chance to try out the program and spend time at the college or university to see if it feels right for you.
- Audit a course. While you don't do the assignments or exams, and can't receive a credit, you can attend the lectures and do the readings. This usually costs less than registering for a credit course.
- Take a course specially designed for students returning to school. Some colleges or universities offer special courses to help you to upgrade your skills and/or decide whether you're ready to enroll in a program.



Choosing a learning option that's right for you

"At university and college you can take as many courses as you want at the pace that you feel more comfortable. It's not like high school where they made it mandatory for you to take so many different things within a certain time constraint. It's more about creating what works for you and what doesn't."

Full-time vs. part-time studies

You'll need to give serious consideration to whether you want, or are able, to study full-time or part-time. Many students, especially those returning after several years out of school, find that part-time studies are preferable. The amount of studying, assignments and tests required for a full-time course load can put a lot of stress on your physical and mental health. Choosing a **realistic course load** (see pg. 24) can make all the difference to your chances of academic success and your ability to stay mentally healthy.

"I'm an older student and came back this year. I didn't want to overwhelm myself so I just picked one course just to see how that goes. Next year I'll double it or triple it because I'm handling it well."

If you do choose to study part-time and are planning to apply for student financial aid, you will need to be clear on how your part-time status can affect your funding. (See pg. 21)

Classroom vs. distance education

As you choose your program, you also need to consider whether you will learn best in a traditional classroom setting or whether you would prefer to do courses by distance education.

Distance education can take several forms, but usually involves the use of the internet either alone or combined with special software, and audio conferencing, where students and teacher take part in a single phone call.

"It (distance education) really worked for me. Whenever I was feeling well I could go onto the computer, whether it is at 3:00 in the morning or 9:00 in the morning, and look at the course material. It gave me the flexibility that I needed to feel that I could perform...."

Distance education is an important option for students with psychiatric disabilities because it offers several benefits:

- You don't need to move away from home. If you have good supports in place, you may not want to leave them.
- There is no set "class time." You can work on the course at the time of day when your concentration and stamina are best.
- You can avoid dealing with crowds and noise.
- Everything is provided in printed format via email or the internet. This is helpful if you have trouble with oral information or instructions.

However, this kind of learning isn't right for everyone. The lack of structure means you need a lot of self discipline. You also lose the opportunity to connect with other students and the support networks available on campus.

CHECK IT OUT

Canada's Campus Connection (www.campusconnection.ca) lets you quickly check out courses available through distance learning at colleges and universities across Canada.



Choosing a college or university

Finding the course or program that meets your educational needs should be your first priority. If you have several colleges or universities to choose from, then you may also want to consider some other factors when making your decision.

Staying home vs. going away

If your finances allow it, you may have the option of moving away from home to go to college or university. Living away from home brings its own challenges and stresses. You are leaving the familiar for the unknown. You will likely be leaving your family and friends who may be an important support network for you.

On the other hand, leaving home may provide you with a new perspective. And if your home environment contributes to your stress (adversely affecting your mental health), leaving home may be of benefit.

If you are going away, you will need to consider whether you want to live in residence, share an apartment or living space, or find a place on your own.

Residence living is not for everyone. It can help you make social connections, but there is also the stress of living with a large number of people with diverse personalities. You may have to share a room, although it may be possible to arrange for a private room if you are willing to disclose your disability. Noise and late night parties can get in the way of studying and sleep, especially in undergraduate residences. Some colleges and universities may have specified “quiet dorms” — an option worth checking out.

On the other hand, most residences are directly on campus, which provides you with easy access to the library, computer lab, athletic centre and other campus resources. Eliminating travel may eliminate stress, and make it easier for you to get to classes, especially early morning classes.

If you would prefer to share an apartment or find a boarding arrangement, student housing services may be able to help.

Large institution vs. small institution

The size of a college or university may also be a consideration for you. A large institution can be overwhelming for some people — the size of the campus, the number of students and the large classes. On the other hand, some students find the anonymity of a large institution very comforting; it can be easy to blend in and be “one of the crowd.”

Quality of services for students with psychiatric disabilities

In choosing a college or university, you will want to know how well the institution meets the needs of students with disabilities. Many colleges and universities have Disability Services Offices to serve the needs of all students with disabilities. Some have programs or staff members designated for students with psychiatric disabilities. Smaller institutions may not have a specific disabilities office, but provide services to students with disabilities through counseling, health or mental health services offices.

“You may want to go to a school that may be more willing to accommodate you and help you out, because maintaining your health is such a big part of your life.”

Once you have narrowed down your list of potential colleges or universities and determined your top choices, check out what type of services each provides for students with disabilities. Talk to someone with the Disability Services Office or the office responsible for providing these services to see how responsive they are to your specific concerns and needs. The availability of these services doesn’t guarantee your success as a student, but it may play an important role.

Taking the plunge: applying for admission



Application procedures vary between provinces/territories and institutions, and will also vary depending on whether you are applying straight out of high school or have been out of school for a period of time (i.e., a mature student/non-traditional student).

Many colleges and universities now encourage you to apply online. Their websites will include all the information about the documentation you require (e.g., transcripts, letters of reference) and detailed instructions on how to submit your application. You will require a credit card to apply online.

College and university Admissions Offices can also provide you with admissions information, applications and course calendars if you prefer to apply by mail.

If you are taking continuing education courses, you may also have the option of registering by fax or telephone.



Coming back to school after years away

Not everyone takes the same educational path. You may be coming back to school after several years away due to illness or family commitments. Or you may be returning to school to upgrade your skills in order to make a job or career change.

Many colleges and universities have procedures in place to encourage mature, or non-traditional, students to re-enter school. You are considered a mature/non-traditional student if you have been out of high school for more than two to three years and are over a certain age. You may or may not have a high school diploma.

As a mature student you may be:

- Exempt from some admission requirements.
- Encouraged or required to take non-credit preparation courses to help upgrade your skills (e.g., writing skills).
- Required to write tests as part of the admission process, particularly if you did not complete a high school diploma or your marks were low.
- Required to write placement tests once you are admitted to determine what courses you must take in your first year.

Contact the college or university's Admissions Office, or visit their website, to find out about the specific admission requirements for mature/non-traditional students

If you need academic accommodations to write admission or placement tests, you can arrange them with the college or university's Disability Services Office or the organization administering the test.

Getting the support you need: services for students with disabilities



"Having this program here and knowing that there were resources out there to help made a world of difference for me."

One of the most important contacts you will make during your time at college or university will be the Disability Services Office.* Think of the staff in this office as your partners. They will work with you and support you throughout your time in school. They can:

- Help you understand the system and where to go for what services, (e.g., financial aid, academic counselling).
- Help you to set realistic goals for yourself. For example, they can help you decide how many courses you should take.
- Help you arrange academic accommodations based on your disability.
- Advise you on disclosure issues.
- Connect you with on-campus counseling, mental health supports and study skills courses.
- Provide support and help you put things in perspective.
- Help you work out an "emergency plan" — a plan in case you become ill, or find you aren't coping well with school.
- Advocate on your behalf and help you advocate for yourself.

It is important to connect with the Disability Services Office before the school year begins, if possible, or early in the school year. This is especially important if you might need to arrange academic accommodations.

Even if you don't think you will need any of the services they provide, it is still good to make that connection early. Then if you find yourself needing support as the year progresses, you already have the relationship established.

* **DISABILITY SERVICES: WHAT'S IN A NAME?**

The name of the Disability Services Office varies with the institution, (e.g., Accessibility Services, Office for Students with Disabilities). Some institutions may not have a specific disabilities office, but provide services to students with disabilities through their student, counseling, health or mental health services.

Remember: All of your discussions with the Disability Services Office are completely confidential. No information will be shared with your instructors without your permission and no information will be noted on your official record or transcript.

CHECK IT OUT

The National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) provides a searchable directory of disability service providers at Canadian colleges and universities. NEADS Edlink (www.neads.ca/en/norc/edlink/) will help you quickly find a contact name, telephone number and email address for the Disability Services Office at the college or university of your choice.

Disclosure: it's your decision⁴



"I guess I was avoiding stigma. I wasn't aware of the consequences at that point in my life and I just thought I wanted to be with the mainstream. I just wanted to go with the flow — and it was a mistake."

Why disclose?

You probably learned long ago that telling people that you have a mental illness can be difficult. The reality is that everyone has their own reasons for disclosing (telling someone about your illness) or not disclosing. As you prepare for college or university, you need to give some thought to how you want to handle information about your illness. No one else can make the decision for you.

You may decide to disclose:

- To help you get the help you need and deserve (e.g., academic accommodations). (See pg. 28)
- To avoid misunderstandings with your instructors or peers.
- To educate others and reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness.
- To reduce the risk of discrimination. Policies are in place to prevent anyone from discriminating against a student on the basis of his/her disability. The Disability Services Office can advocate on your behalf — but only if they know you're there!

"It's terrifying to disclose. You're thinking, 'Okay, who am I disclosing this to, and what am I disclosing?' There's stigma attached to it, and you have to be really cautious."

- So you can have a plan in place in case of an emergency. It is always harder to disclose when you are in crisis.

On the other hand, there are risks to disclosing:

- People may not understand mental illness. They may have negative stereotypes about people with mental illness, based on their lack of knowledge.
- If someone doesn't understand mental illness, they may discriminate. For example, they may confuse mental illness with a lack of ability.
- Not everyone respects a confidence. They may share the information with others, even if you haven't.

"When you talk about it, it tends to make it easier somehow because it's not something that's dark and in the corner. When you talk about it, it's in the open and it's easier."

Who should you disclose to?

The one obvious office to disclose to is the Disability Services Office. On a practical level, this office will need to know about your illness if you want to access any kind of academic accommodation. They can help you think through whether you want or need to disclose to any other offices (e.g., Registrar's Office, Student Financial Aid Office). They can also help you decide whether to disclose to your instructors and how best to do that. Talk to the staff in the Disability Services Office as early in the school year as you can — they're there to help. Remember: anything you tell them remains completely confidential.

⁴ This section draws on a number of sources: Dowdy, Esmond and Osborne, Ann, *Keys to Success: Strategies for managing university study with a psychiatric disability* (Adelaide: UniAbility Steering Committee of The Flinders University of South Australia, The University of Adelaide and The University of South Australia, 2000); Anna Mungovan and Fran Quigley, *Choosing Your Path. Disclosure: It's a personal decision* (University of Western Sydney and University of Ballarat, 2003); and University of Toronto, *Accessibility Services – St. George*, <www.sa.utoronto.ca/area.php?waid=5> (16 February 2004).



*"I probably wouldn't mind the prof knowing.
I don't know if I'd want the class to know."*

It is important to trust your instincts when it comes to disclosing. Some students choose to disclose to one or more of their instructors, but not to other students. Others decide to tell their peers as they become trusted friends. Some people choose not to disclose to anyone. You need to determine your own comfort level and trust your instincts.

It is helpful to think through why you are disclosing and what you hope to achieve. This is especially important because you need to be prepared for the response — not everyone will be supportive. Not everyone will respond in the way you hope.

When to disclose

If you are comfortable disclosing to the Disability Services Office, it is best to do this as early in the school year as possible. The office is open year-round, and many offices encourage you to contact them before the school year begins.

*"It's always helpful, in my experience,
to let the teaching instructor or the
teaching assistant know ahead of time
rather than later, because then that will
just add to your stress when it comes to
having to disclose when you do need an
accommodation or need some extra help."*

If you require academic accommodations, it takes time to gather the necessary documentation (see pg. 28) and put the arrangements in place. Requesting an accommodation the day before the exam or the assignment due date not only looks bad for you, it may not be possible to arrange on short notice.

Even if you don't think you will need academic accommodations, the disability staff may suggest you put an emergency plan in place, in case you get ill during the year or find that you are not coping as well as you had hoped. While you may never need to use it, it is easier to disclose and plan when you are well, than when you are in crisis.

What to disclose

It's up to you to decide how much you want to disclose. In order to access academic accommodations you simply need to disclose to your instructor that you have a disability. Some students **choose** to go one step further, and disclose that they have a psychiatric disability. It is generally recommended that you don't provide information about your diagnosis to your instructors.

*"I tell them only as much as is necessary.
I don't feel it necessary to tell anyone
anything besides I have a problem."*

Once you have registered with the Disability Services Office and provided any documentation required to access academic accommodations, the staff will work with you to develop a letter which you can provide to your instructors. This letter will say:

- You are registered with the Disability Services Office.
- How your disability affects you as a student.
- Specific accommodations you require.
(Note: some institutions do not include specific accommodation requests in the letter, and suggest you decide on them one-on-one with each instructor, based on the course set-up.)
- Note: the letter does **not** include details about your diagnosis.

*"The really good thing is when you
disclose, you don't need to disclose your
diagnosis or what illness you have."*



Important points to remember:

- **You don't need to provide information about your illness to anyone other than the Disability Services Office.**
- The information you provide to the Disability Services Office is confidential. The office won't share it without your written consent.

WHAT TO SAY IF YOUR INSTRUCTOR ASKS YOU ABOUT YOUR DIAGNOSIS:

"The Disability Services Office has all the documentation. I'd rather not talk about the details of my illness, but my disability means that I have trouble with (name the academic activity). The accommodations that would help me are (name the accommodation). Can we talk about how to put these in place?"

How to disclose⁵

Most instructors are very cooperative about accommodating students with disabilities. The following are some suggestions on how to approach your instructor:

- At the beginning of the semester, make an appointment to meet privately with your instructor during office hours or before or after class.
- Introduce yourself and give your instructor the letter from the Disability Services Office.

"I felt safer when I disclosed on the very first day of the class with the letter... that made it a lot easier for the professors to say, "Yeah, okay — no problem."

"I was never treated any differently by the teachers after I disclosed it."

- Explain your situation so that the instructor understands how your disability affects you as a student. Explain what accommodations or strategies you will need to do your best in the classroom, the lab, or elsewhere to meet course requirements. Discuss alternatives if the instructor can't meet your request.
- Come to a clear agreement. Before you end the meeting, you and the instructor should have a clear understanding of what he/she is willing to do and what you, with help from the Disability Services Office, will coordinate in the way of accommodations and services.
- Thank the instructor. Let the instructor know that you appreciate his/her willingness to work with you and accommodate your disability.
- If you feel an instructor has not understood what you explained about your needs, or does not agree that you should receive certain accommodations, talk with the Disability Services Office as soon as possible. They can help to resolve the issue.

WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR INSTRUCTOR ABOUT YOUR DISABILITY:

"My disability affects my ability to (name the academic activity). If I was able to (name the accommodation) I think I would be able to complete the course requirements for this course."

⁵ Adapted from Mount Royal College, *Disability Services – Approaching Instructors*, <www.mtroyal.ca/disabilities/studentinstructors.htm> (12 April 2004).

Being your own advocate



One of the most important skills you need to be successful in college or university is the ability to be your own advocate. The college and university system operates on the assumption that you are an adult. You are responsible for your decisions, behaviour and your academic success or failure. It is up to you to know what services and support you need and take the steps to get them.

Sound impersonal and uncaring? It can feel that way, but remember that if you take the initiative, people are there to help you. You just have to take the first step.



"I had this desire to succeed and not let this disability get the best of me. I advocated for myself when I was well, so at times when I wasn't well, I simply had to send out an email or telephone a professor and say I needed an accommodation."

Learn to be your own advocate:

- Know and understand your disability/mental illness.
- Know your own strengths and weaknesses, both personal and academic.
- Know your rights and responsibilities as a student with a disability.
- Learn to be assertive — not aggressive or passive. If you don't ask for it, you won't get it.
- Plan ahead. Talk to the Disability Services Office.
- Find a counselor or disability advisor whom you trust — someone you can go to for support and advice.
- Take responsibility for managing your illness.
- Keep a file of important information so you can find it easily when you need it. Include:
 - names and telephone numbers of Disability Services staff
 - copies of any documentation you supplied to the Disability Services Office
 - copies of any letters requesting accommodations
 - telephone numbers for other campus support services such as health services, counseling services, etc.
 - contact information for your psychiatrist or doctor and a list of your medications
 - your course registration and number of credits completed and required
 - documentation for any student loans or other financial aid you receive.

Paying the bills: how to find the money you need



"I applied for a Canada Studies Grant and received a grant. I received \$5000 to buy a computer, so now I have this top of the line computer that has all the software so I can do all my homework from home . . . it's helped me tremendously."

Now comes the bottom line. How will you pay for tuition, residence and books? There are sources of money out there, but you have to know where to look. There are also a few wrinkles you need to watch for.

"It turns out that it's pretty reasonable when you do it one class at a time."

How much money do you need?

It's important to have a realistic idea of what your costs will be. You'll be able to find out the cost of tuition, student fees and residence from your college or university's website or from their Admissions Office.

But those are just the obvious costs. You'll need to remember to factor in costs like rent, utilities

and food if you are living on your own. And even if you are living at home, you will still have costs like books, transportation, clothing, etc. Preparing a budget can help you get a realistic idea of your expenses so you can figure out how much you need for the year.

Where do I get information about student financial aid?

The best source of information on student funding is always the Student Financial Aid Office at your college or university. Information and regulations change fairly frequently, but they will have the latest information. They can:

- Provide you with information on student loans, scholarships and bursaries.
- Provide you with the necessary application forms or the website where you can find them. In some provinces you can apply online for free and avoid the application fee.
- Answer any questions and help you fill in forms if you are having difficulty.
- Provide you with necessary information if you are applying for loans and you are going to school in a different province than your permanent residence.

CHECK IT OUT

The Canadian government has two online tools to help you budget for school. An online Education Cost Calculator (<http://srv650.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/csls/sfp/24/clindex.jsp?langcanlearn=EN>) can help you calculate the cost of your year at college or university. The Online Budget Calculator (same website) can help you plan your budget taking into account both your expenses and your income from student loans, savings, etc.



What funding is available?

CHECK IT OUT

A good resource on all funding sources for students with disabilities is available in an online financial aid directory (www.neads.ca/en/norc/funding/) provided by NEADS (National Educational Association of Disabled Students), a Canadian organization serving students with disabilities.

Student loans

Student loans are offered by the federal government and the provincial/territorial governments. The federal and provincial loans programs are combined in some provinces and territories and separate in others. Some provinces and territories (Quebec, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut) don't participate in the federal program at all, and instead operate their own program.

The good news is there is usually only one application form, regardless of what level of government administers the loan program. Application forms are available online or through your college or university Student Financial Aid Office. You will need to meet certain requirements to qualify for a loan and all the applications have strict deadlines. Check these out well in advance.

All student loans are interest-free while you are in school, but must be repaid when you leave school or graduate.

How full-time or part-time status affects your student loan

The availability of student loans is tied to your status as a full-time or part-time student. Provincial student loans, for example, are only available to full-time students.

However, it is important to remember that for students with a disability, the course requirements for full-time and part-time students are significantly reduced. You can take 40 percent of a full-time course load and still be eligible for a full-time student loan; you can take 20 to 39 percent of a full-time course load and still be eligible for a part-time student loan. Note: Requirements may vary from province to province.

This is important because many students with psychiatric disabilities find it better to carry less than a full-time course load.

CHECK IT OUT

For more information on student loans, visit the federal government's CanLearn website. It provides information on Canada Student Loans and links to the websites for all the provincial/territorial student loans programs. Student loan application forms can be found on these provincial/territorial sites. (www.canlearn.ca/financing/getmoney/govtloans/clindex.cfm?langcanlearn=EN)



CHECK IT OUT

More information on Canada Study Grants is available at:

www.canlearn.ca/nslsc/apply/On/nlStuGra.cfm?LANGNSLSC=en&IT=PUBLIC&row=2#permanent

Applications for study grants can be found on the website for your provincial/territorial student loan program.

Canada Study Grant for Students with Permanent Disabilities/Canada Study Grant for High-need Students with Permanent Disabilities⁶

Two other important funding options are provided specifically for students with disabilities, including students with psychiatric disabilities.

The *Canada Study Grant for Students with Permanent Disabilities* provides up to \$8000 per year to pay for education-related equipment or services that you might require (e.g., a computer, tutors). This grant is awarded on the basis of financial need and proven relation to your disability. To qualify you must apply for a full or part-time student loan. If you are found not eligible for a student loan, you may still be eligible for a grant under certain circumstances.

If you have been allocated the maximum student loan and still can't cover your education and living costs, the *Canada Study Grant for High-need Students with Permanent Disabilities* provides up

to \$2000 per year to help you meet the cost of tuition, books and living expenses. It is possible to qualify for both study grants.

Unlike a student loan, study grants do not need to be repaid. There may also be provincially/territorially-funded grants/bursaries for students with disabilities. Your Student Financial Aid Office can provide you with more information.

Bursaries

Bursaries are also awarded on the basis of financial need and do not have to be repaid. They may be available from your college or university, community groups, service clubs, etc. You will want to talk to the Student Financial Aid Office at your college or university about what is available.

The federal government has a special bursary called the Canadian Millennium Scholarship. You will automatically be considered for this bursary if you fill out the relevant section on your student loan application.

CHECK IT OUT

More information on bursaries is available at:

www.canlearn.ca/financing/getMoney/clbur.cfm?langcanlearn=EN

More information on Canadian Millennium Scholarships is available at:

www.canlearn.ca/financing/getmoney/govtloans/clgra.cfm?langcanlearn=EN

⁶ Many people with psychiatric disabilities don't think of themselves as "permanently" disabled. Psychiatric disabilities tend to be episodic, and many people have long periods of mental health. Try not to let the use of the term "permanent disability" get in your way. These grants are available to help you be successful in pursuing your education!



CHECK IT OUT

This scholarship search site provides an easy way to search for scholarships offered by organizations other than your college or university. (<http://studentawards.com/english/canlearn/>)

The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) offers several scholarships for students with disabilities: Imperial Tobacco Canada Limited Scholarship Fund for Disabled Students and the Mattinson Endowment Fund Scholarship for Disabled Students. (www.aucc.ca/programs/scholarships/alphabetical_e.html)

If you are living in British Columbia, the Canadian Mental Health Association has a scholarship, the Lorne Fraser Educational Fund (www.cmha-bc.org/content/whatwedo/lornefraser/lornefraser.php), especially for students with mental illness living and studying in that province.

Scholarships

Scholarships are usually awarded on academic merit. They may be a few hundred dollars or a significant sum of money, and unlike student loans, they do not have to be repaid. Colleges and universities award a wide variety of scholarships so you will want to talk to the Student Financial Aid Office about what is available. There are also other scholarships available specifically for students with disabilities, including psychiatric disabilities.

Will receiving a loan, bursary or scholarship affect my disability income?

The rules for each type of disability benefit, welfare benefit and pension are different. It's a good idea to let your disability benefits worker know you are considering higher education and find out what rules apply. They can also tell you what supports you are entitled to.

Paying for your medication

Paying for medication can be a real burden, and doing without is usually not an option. Some colleges and universities offer a health plan,

either included as part of your student fees, or at an additional cost. It is worth checking this option out. In some cases, up to 80 percent of the cost of prescription drugs are covered (to a certain yearly limit).

This coverage may only be available to full-time students, but if you are carrying less than a full-time course load you may still want to check to see whether you qualify. Coverage and eligibility may also vary between institutions and from province to province. Note: Some drug insurance programs may not cover medication for pre-existing conditions. It's important to read the fine print.

Taking a job to pay your way

You may be considering one obvious solution to paying for your education — working part-time.

You need to think long and hard before taking this route, especially if you plan to take enough courses to be considered full-time. Trying to complete school work and hold down a job can be stressful for anyone. You need to think realistically about what you can manage. Remember that your well-being is your most important priority.

Registering for courses: choosing wisely



So — you've been accepted into the college or university of your choice and now it's time to register for your classes. If you haven't already talked to the Disability Services Office, now is the time. Even if you don't think you will need academic accommodations, they can help you decide what the right course load is for you. They can also help you think through the types of courses you select, to make sure you choose ones that match your learning style.

"I remember in my first year I started out with four courses and I realized that I couldn't manage and then I had to drop."

Choosing a realistic course load

The number of courses you take each semester will be one of the most important factors affecting your success at school. It's easy to get caught up in the excitement of choosing courses at the beginning of the semester when you're rested and ready for a challenge. But you need to flash forward to mid-term — when the day-to-day reality of classes, assignments, reading, essays and exams will be all too real.

Some important things to consider:

- Lots of students do not take full course loads, for all kinds of reasons. It's the norm.
- Lots of people are also returning to school after many years away. It doesn't matter how old you are now, or how old you'll be when you finally finish your certificate or degree. You've got lots of time!
- You don't need to take a full course load to qualify for student loans. To qualify for a full-time status, you only need to take 40 percent of a full course load. Part-time status requires 20 to 39 percent of a full course load. In both cases you'll have to supply documentation that you have a disability. The Disability Services Office can help you with that.

Note: Requirements for full-time and part-time status may vary from province to province.

- A good rule of thumb is to assume a minimum of three hours of studying or homework for every one hour of class time. If you find studying or writing takes extra time even when you are feeling well and rested, you need to factor that in too.
- Fewer courses mean fewer assignments, exams and readings. That can make a big difference to your stress level and your chances of success.
- It's better to take the time you need to complete your program and do well. If your semester goes well, you can add courses the following semester. That's better than taking too many courses and having to drop them mid-way through.
- Don't compare yourself to other students. Every situation is different. You need to do what works for you.

Choosing the right courses

The type and length of program you are enrolled in will determine how much choice you have when it comes to selecting courses. A two-year college diploma or certificate will likely have more required courses and fewer elective courses than a four-year general arts degree.

"I have to take meds, and my medication has a sedative effect. I can't get up very early in the morning so obviously I could not take a very early class."

Most instructors have course outlines (syllabi) available that describe the course prerequisites, subject matter, format and evaluation. These may be available on the website, from the department office or from the instructor. Make a point of getting copies of these early and use them to select your courses.



Here are some important things to consider:

Prerequisites

Some courses require prerequisite courses (courses you have to take first). For example, you often have to take introductory courses in your first year, in order to take more advanced courses in subsequent years.

"My personal advice is: take it slower rather than quicker because you can always pick up a course in the summer."

Class format

In some classes, the instructor always lectures. Other courses require group work with other students. Others use hands-on learning where you learn by doing. You need to think about how you learn the best. If you find it difficult to listen and process spoken information, a course that relies only on lectures may not be for you.

Class size

Some courses are designed to accommodate very large numbers of students. Some practical courses or seminar courses are designed for smaller numbers of students. You may want to consider class size when selecting your courses if you find noise or large groups of people difficult.

Class schedule

If your illness or medication makes it difficult for you to wake up or think clearly in the morning, a course scheduled for 8:30 a.m. is likely not for you. If you are more alert and have more energy in the evenings, night courses may suit you better. You may not always have the option to schedule courses at your best time of day, but you should try to when you have the option.

Method of evaluation

It's important to know the number and types of assignments (written, oral presentations) and the number and types of tests (multiple choice, essay) required. Consider what type of evaluation will cause you the least amount of stress and allow you to do

your best. For example, if your illness or medication makes it difficult for you to focus and organize large amounts of information, you'll want to consider whether a course that requires two major essays is right for you. Or if you find it difficult to perform well under pressure in an exam situation, it may not be wise to select a course in which 50 percent of the mark is based on a mid-term exam and 50 percent on a final exam.

Remember you may have options. You may be able to arrange for an academic accommodation. (See pg. 28) For example, maybe you feel you will be able to write the mid-term and final exams as long as you have accommodations designed to reduce your anxiety (e.g., writing in a quiet location with more time).

Course reviews

Want the inside scoop on a course or an instructor? Some colleges and universities have course evaluations done by previous students available from student union offices or the Registrar's Office. Or talk to other students about their experience. It may help you decide what course to select.

"The first year I started off slow. I was only part-time, so I was only taking two courses. Then I bumped myself up to 3 courses, and then I bumped myself up to four."

Your own interests

It's always easier to study something that interests and excites you. When you're first starting out, you may want to choose courses you'd really like to take and leave some of the less interesting ones for later. Just make sure you take into account any prerequisites that are required to take more advanced courses in subsequent semesters.

A note about marks: College and university courses can be a lot tougher than high school. Your marks will likely be lower — most people's are. Many students also find their marks improve after the first year. Keep your perspective — marks aren't everything!

Your first few weeks: plan ahead



The beginning of a term can feel overwhelming. Running from office to office, finding classes — there are lots of details, lineups and people. Not to mention the fact that you seem to be handing over money at every turn for deposits, books and fees.

A word of advice: plan ahead. There are many things you can do before school starts that will minimize the pressures and stress.

Registering for courses in advance

Most colleges and universities require that you meet with an academic advisor before you begin registering for courses. This allows you to review your course selection to make sure you are setting the necessary foundation for your program. If a meeting is required, make an appointment well before the beginning of term. It's a good idea to talk to the Disability Services Office before that appointment, so you have a clear idea about the number of courses you want to take.

Online registration has become the norm for some colleges and universities. Others allow you to register over the telephone, using an automated system. In these cases, you will receive instructions from your academic advisor on how and when to register. Using these systems can help reduce stress, since you can register from the quiet of your own home when you are relaxed and have energy.

If in-person registration is required, some colleges and campuses will arrange early registration for students with disabilities, so you don't have to wait in line-ups in the first week. Consult with the Disability Services Office.

Taking placement tests

Some institutions may require you to write placement tests before you can register. This is especially true if you have not completed a high school diploma and/or are registering as a mature student. The test helps them determine which first year courses you should take as a basis for your studies. These tests are most often required in the subject areas of English and math. If you need accommodations in order to write a test, you can arrange them with the Disability Services Office.

Avoiding the bookstore rush

Campus bookstores are usually extremely busy the first few weeks of term, with long lineups. Ask for course outlines/syllabi well in advance and make your trip to the bookstore before classes begin to avoid the rush. You'll also avoid the risk of the bookstore running out of copies of your textbook.

If course outlines aren't available in advance, you can ask the Disability Services Office to provide you with a letter that allows you to bypass the lineups.



Visit the campus before classes start

Many colleges and universities offer campus tours for new students throughout the summer. These tours offer a good chance to familiarize yourself with the campus before the beginning of term.

It's also a good idea to visit the campus on your own and find the location of the offices you'll need: Disability Services Office, Counseling or Student Services, Registrar's Office, Admissions Office, the Library and the Cafeteria. Find your classroom locations and the closest washrooms. Ask for a campus map, or find one on the website. Make notes to remind yourself of where things are.

Plan the route you will take to get to campus. Try a dry run at the time of day you will be traveling so you can estimate how much travel time you will need. If you are driving, figure out the route, how much traffic you can expect and where you can park. Special parking rates or passes are often available for students. Buy yours well in advance of the rush. If you are traveling by transit, find out if you will need transfers, and what the stops will be.

Participating in orientation activities

Some colleges and universities have orientation weeks, with special social events to help students get to know each other. Many of these are focused toward students living in residence. These events can provide an opportunity for you to get to know other students, especially if you have moved away from home to come to school. Some colleges and universities also have orientation events especially for students with disabilities, so check with the Disability Services Office.

All of these events take place during the first weeks of the term when you may be experiencing the stress of starting something new, so you'll have to decide whether you have the energy to participate.

Connecting with peer mentors

Some institutions have peer mentors to help first-year students make the transition. These are other students who can show you the ropes, answer questions and be a friendly face. Check with the Disability Services Office or Student Services to see if this program exists at your college or university.



Academic accommodations: how they can help



What is an academic accommodation?

An academic accommodation is an arrangement that is put in place to support a student with a disability. It can be anything from having an extension on an assignment, to being provided with an academic tutor, to writing your exams in a quiet, separate room. Accommodations are provided to “level the playing field” for you. They are available because your disability may put you at a disadvantage compared to other students who don’t have a disability.

Accommodations don’t mean you are being given a special break or an unfair advantage over other students. You will be evaluated using the same standards as everyone else. How well you do in school is still up to you. The accommodation just makes sure you have the chance to demonstrate your real ability.

“I don’t like to be treated differently or always given extra help. Sometimes it’s hard because you don’t like to feel, “I’m a disabled person.” But try not to be ashamed of it and go in as soon as possible and get the help — so that when you do need it, or get sick, it’s there for you.”

It’s important to remember that receiving accommodations for a psychiatric disability is your right.⁷ You don’t need to feel bad about asking for an accommodation. You’re not asking for a favour — you’re just asking for the same chance to learn as everyone else.

How do you arrange for academic accommodations?

The Disability Services Office will help you arrange for academic accommodations. In order for you to receive accommodations, your college or university will require specific documentation from your psychiatrist or psychologist.

“It’s not like a regular disability. With mental illness it changes and fluctuates. It takes on various forms and you don’t know what’s going to happen. One week you could be fine and the next week you could be screwed up, so it’s hard to predict.”

It is important to talk to the Disability Services Office as early in the school year as possible, because arranging accommodations usually takes some time. If you can, make an appointment to see them even before the school year starts. The idea is to have accommodations in place ahead of time if, and when, you need them. Think of it as insurance.

What documentation is required?

In order to receive any academic accommodations, you will need to provide the Disability Services Office with written documentation of your disability. Requirements vary from institution to institution so check with the Disability Services Office to find out what information they need. (Sometimes this information is included in the Disability Services section of a college or university website.)

⁷ The Canadian Charter of Rights and provincial Human Rights legislation protects people with disabilities from discrimination based on their disabilities. All colleges and universities also have policies in place to ensure that discrimination doesn’t occur.



Generally, you will have to provide a detailed letter from a psychologist, psychiatrist, family doctor who is familiar with your case, or registered clinical social worker. The letter must be based on a recent evaluation. It will include such things as:

- Relevant medical history.
- How your condition might affect your academic performance.
- Current medication and how that medication might affect your academic performance.
- Specific accommodations required as a result. The key here is what accommodations are necessary. You are only entitled to those that are necessary.

The letter is treated as medical information. It is confidential and kept on file in the Disability Services Office, for use by that staff only. It will not be shared with your instructors or anyone else in the college or university without your permission. If you have concerns about confidentiality, ask to see the confidentiality policy.

What academic accommodations do you need?

Academic accommodations are based on your specific disability. Not all students need the same accommodations. You will need to sit down with staff in the Disability Services Office to figure out how your disability affects your learning and what accommodations you need as a result.

Sometimes it can be hard to decide what accommodations you need:

- You may not be completely aware of how your disability affects your life.
- It may take a while to work out what kinds of accommodations you need and which ones are helpful.
- You may need accommodations in some courses and not in others, depending on how the course is taught and what assignments and tests are required.

- Your need for accommodations may change during the year. Depending on your mental health you may need to use the accommodations some times and not others.

You don't have to have all the answers. Talk to the staff in the Disability Services Office. They have experience in this area and can help you think it through.

CHECKLIST: YOU MAY ALSO WANT TO ASK YOURSELF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- What are my strengths? What have I done well in the past?
- What things do I have trouble with in school?
- Of the things that cause me trouble, what are related to my illness or the medication I take?
- What strategies do I think would help me?

Some typical academic accommodations

As you review the following list of possible academic accommodations, there are several important points to remember:

- Accommodations are based on documented need. You will only be eligible for accommodations that address the challenges caused by your disability. The goal is to provide you with the support you need, while helping you to be as independent as possible.
- The Disability Services Office will work with you to decide what accommodations will help you and what ones you qualify for. The accommodations listed here are just examples. There may be others that better suit your particular situation.
- Not all accommodations are available at every college or university.
- Not all accommodations are available for every course. Depending on how a course is structured, some accommodations may not be possible.



Classroom accommodations

My illness or medication causes problems with:	Possible accommodations
concentration, keeping focused, processing information, organizing my thoughts, dealing with social situations	<p><i>Peer note-taker</i> A formal arrangement where someone in the class takes notes for you. You still have to attend class, but it may help to reduce your anxiety and allow you to participate more in class.</p> <p><i>Taping the lecture</i> This can supplement your own note-taking, and reduce the pressure of having to capture all the information. If you use a digital recorder, the software will allow you to download the lecture to your computer for easy access. You will need to get the permission of your teacher prior to taping.</p> <p><i>Preferential seating</i> You can arrange to sit in the front of the classroom and away from windows to help reduce audio and visual distractions.</p> <p><i>Note-taking technology</i> Laptops, personal digital assistants (PDAs) with folding keyboards or small word-processing keyboards such as AlphaSmart (www.alphasmart.com/products/as3000_overview.html) or Dana (www.alphasmart.com/products/dana_overview.html) are an option if you find taking notes using a keyboard easier than handwriting.</p>
anxiety	<p><i>Companion/accompanier</i> Another student can walk you to class and sit with you in class.</p> <p><i>More frequent breaks</i> You can arrange to step out of class when you need to move around to relieve stress, anxiety or restlessness.</p>
thirst caused by medication	<p><i>Beverages in class</i> Permission can be given to have beverages in class if this is not usually permitted.</p>

HOW A CLASSROOM ACCOMMODATION HELPED:

Michael is a first-year construction technology student. He has trouble with concentration so he found it hard to focus on what the instructor said in class and take notes at the same time. With the support of the Disabilities Services Office, he was able to arrange to get copies of notes from another student after each class, so he could listen to lectures without the pressure of taking notes.



Assignment accommodations

My illness or medication causes problems with:	Possible accommodations
concentration, keeping focused, processing information, organizing my thoughts	<p><i>Academic coach or tutor</i> One-on-one help can be provided to help you with studying and your assignments.</p> <p><i>Readings in advance</i> Sometimes arrangements can be made for you to have the course materials in advance so you have extra time to read them.</p> <p><i>Assistance editing essays</i> A coach or tutor can provide help by helping you edit your essays for organization, clarity, grammar and spelling.</p>
anxiety	<p><i>Extensions</i> In some cases, deadline extensions can be arranged. This can help reduce stress, particularly if you have several assignments all due at the same time.</p>

HOW AN ASSIGNMENT ACCOMMODATION HELPED:

Julie is a third-year arts student. In her second semester she had three major essays all due within the same two-week period. When she is under pressure, she becomes very anxious and is unable to focus on any one task. She finds it hard to read or organize her thoughts on paper and often has trouble sleeping.

Julie was able to arrange with one of her instructors for a two-week extension; another instructor gave her a three-week extension. To make sure she met the new deadlines, she created her own schedule for researching and writing each essay. The schedule helped her to stay on track and reduced her anxiety.

"Sometimes if you know that you're going to have to hand in all this stuff, it's good to ask for an extension early on. It's the stress of getting things done that will impact you, especially if you're prone to anxiety or depression or any other psychiatric type of symptom."

"For me I don't have problems with exams at all. I've never needed accommodation on exams, but I need accommodation on writing."

"If I need to have a break or just a breather, I know I can just leave the class."



Exam accommodations

My illness or medication causes problems with:	Possible accommodations
<p>concentration, keeping focused, processing information, dealing with social situations</p> <p>anxiety</p> <p>fatigue, concentration</p>	<p><i>Preferential seating</i> You can arrange to sit in the front of the exam room and away from windows to help reduce audio and visual distractions.</p> <p><i>Quiet location or separate room for exam</i> It may be possible to write an exam in a separate room with only a few students or on your own in a supervised area.</p> <p><i>Supervised breaks during exam</i> You can arrange to step out of the exam when you need to move around to relieve stress, anxiety or restlessness.</p> <p><i>Changes to scheduled exam dates</i> Arrangements can be made to write tests on different dates if you have several taking place in close succession.</p> <p><i>Extended time for exams</i> You may be able to arrange for additional time to complete your exam.</p> <p><i>Exam broken into segments with rest breaks</i> This reduces the effects of fatigue and allows you to focus on one section at a time.</p> <p><i>Changes to scheduled exam times</i> Exams can be scheduled for times when you work best, for example, afternoon rather than early morning</p>

HOW AN EXAM ACCOMMODATION HELPED:

Andrea is taking two courses towards a business degree and both courses require a major final exam. Exams are written in a large room with several hundred students. The first time she wrote an exam, she found the noise made by other students very distracting and couldn't focus on the test. She also found that the time pressure made her very anxious and unable to organize her thoughts, even though she knew the material well.

This time, with the help of the Disability Services Office, she arranged to write her two exams in the university's disability testing centre, with only a few other students present. She was also given three hours to write each two-hour exam. This allowed her the time she needed to organize her thoughts in point form before she answered each question.



How will the academic accommodation(s) be put in place?

Once you and the Disability Services Office have determined what academic accommodations you need, they will prepare a letter for you to give to your instructors. They will also help you decide how to approach your instructor to request the accommodation.

"If I'm writing a test and people are talking, or people are flipping pages or the teacher keeps interrupting. I can't focus, I get distracted."

What if an instructor refuses to grant an academic accommodation?

If you feel an instructor hasn't understood your explanation of your needs, or doesn't agree that you should receive certain accommodations, talk with the Disability Services Office as soon as possible. Staff in the office can help to resolve the issue.

"I had an accommodation where I had to write three exams in three days, and my anxiety got so bad that I asked if I could write one about two weeks beforehand because I knew that that was going to be a problem for me."

What if you don't want to disclose your disability?

In order to be eligible for academic accommodations, you do need to disclose your disability to the Disability Services Office. But that's the only place you need to provide information about your illness. Your instructor simply needs to know that you have a documented disability; you don't have to discuss what kind of disability you have.



"I don't like a crowd of people, it's just stressful. So it's easier when you go to a small classroom with a small group of people. I was a little more relaxed, I felt like I didn't have to deal with a lot of people."

Making the grade: how to succeed in your studies



Essays, reading assignments, exams — get ready, there'll be a lot of them. And if you don't already have good writing, studying and organization habits, it's time to learn some! Most students find it takes some time to adjust to the academic demands of college and university. But there are some strategies that can help.

"There have been times when I've been doing research that my head was just so full of information...."

Use the resources available to you

All colleges and universities have a variety of services offered to all students free of charge to help them with their studies.

Learning/study skills centres

These centres offer a wide variety of resources and services:

- Assessment of your aptitude for a particular program or career path.
- Assessment of your learning style and help to develop strategies and skills to accommodate that style.
- Courses and tutorials in study skills, reading skills, writing skills.
- Tutors and academic coaching.

Assistive Technology Centres and Computer Labs

Some colleges and universities have special centres to help students with disabilities access computer technology and software programs that can help them with their schoolwork. You can get advice and try out products. Some institutions also have special computer labs for students with disabilities.

Libraries

Researching and writing essays and papers is a new experience for most students going to college or university. Often college and university libraries hold free workshops early in the semester to teach students skills like how to use the library, how to research papers, and how to find things on the internet. Make friends with the reference librarians. They can answer your questions and explain how to find what you need.

Developing your skills

Doing well in school requires a lot of different skills, whether or not you have a disability. Spend some time developing your skills in the following areas:

Study tips

- Join a study group or create one yourself. A study group is a group of students that gets together to review lecture notes or reading materials, work together on assignments and help each other stay on top of course work.
- Find a class buddy who will share lecture notes if you miss a class, and who you can talk to about assignments.
- Skim your lecture notes of the previous lecture before going to the next one.
- Summarize lecture and text notes using flash cards or rewriting notes on the computer.
- Break down your assignments and set small goals. For example, if you have to read a book, set a goal of reading one or two chapters at a time.

"You have to know yourself."



"The day of the exam, I don't even do any studying. I just try to keep my mind empty. I try not to cram."

- Work for a short period of time and then take a break and reward yourself.
- Decide which assignments are the priority and work on them first.
- Make sure you understand the assignment and what is required. Clarify with the instructor or teaching assistant if you aren't clear.
- Give yourself plenty of time to do assignments. Try to complete them several days in advance so you have time to proofread and polish them.
- Avoid studying in areas with lots of distractions that can affect your concentration (e.g., bad lighting, bad ventilation, loud noise/other people).
- Take advantage of quiet study locations, such as libraries, to escape the noise and stimulation of residence. Many institutions now use wireless technology, so you may be able to connect to the internet through your laptop from a variety of locations.
- If your medication affects your vision, or you have trouble concentrating, you may prefer to listen to assigned readings. Text-to-voice software (e.g., Kurzweill 3000 www.kurzweiledu.com/products_k3000win.asp) allows you to scan pages of text. The computer then reads the pages out loud. If your instructor provides readings or notes online (e.g., for distance education courses) — you can download the file and have your computer read it to you.

Writing tips

- Ask your teaching assistant or instructor if they are willing to look over your assignment/paper.
- Use the writing tutorial service if one is available at your school.
- A number of computer programs are available to help you with writing assignments. If your campus has an Assistive Technology Centre or Computer Centre, you may be able to access them there:
 - If you find it easier to think out loud rather than putting words on paper, try voice recognition software that types text as you speak (e.g., Dragon NaturallySpeaking www.scansoft.com/naturallyspeaking/).
 - Brainstorming/mind-mapping software helps you to organize your ideas by creating a diagram using colours and shapes. It then takes the diagram and creates an outline using headings and subheadings so you can write your paper (e.g., Inspiration 7 www.inspiration.com/productinfo/inspiration/index.cfm; Mind Manager). Most word processing programs also have an "outline" feature which can be used to organize your thoughts.
 - Trouble with grammar? Grammatical support programs monitor and correct your grammar as you type (e.g., Grammar Expert Plus www.wintertree-software.com/app/gramxp/index.html; Grammar Slammer <http://englishplus.com/gramslam.htm#grmslm>).

CHECK IT OUT

The Adaptive Technology Resource Centre of the University of Toronto has an online resource (www.utoronto.ca/atrc/reference/tech/techgloss.html) that describes and compares the various software programs and technologies available.



*"If I do a little bit at a time —
spend an hour every day —
it's better than spending eight
hours during the weekend."*

Organization/time management tips

- Get course outlines well in advance so you can plan ahead for assignments and tests.
- Download lecture notes before the class if they are available on the internet.
- Plan out your work for the whole term. Start with the due dates and work backward. For example, set dates for having the research completed for the paper and for completing the first draft.
- Set earlier due dates for yourself so that you have extra time.
- Set up a weekly schedule for yourself — scheduling in study time, social time, etc.
- Stay on top of your homework and assignments. Workload and the stress that comes with it usually increases as the term goes on. Don't leave things for the last minute.
- Get books and resources ahead of time so you have the time you need to do required reading.
- Avoid early morning classes if your illness or medication makes it hard to wake up or concentrate in the morning. (Note: some times class schedules don't allow you that flexibility.)
- Consider doing advance reading during vacation breaks so you have a reduced workload during the semester.
- Use an agenda or palm pilot/organizer to schedule school work, personal activities and appointments.
- Keep your workload realistic. Consider taking less than a full course load.
- Learn to prioritize.
- When you get stuck, try doing something else for a while and then come back to it.
- Organize yourself the night before so you know what you are doing and where you are going before you start your day.

CHECK IT OUT

There are lots of websites that provide resources to help you improve your study, writing and time management/organization skills. Here are just a few:

University of St. Thomas Study Guides and Strategies (www.studygs.net/)

Virginia Tech Study Skills Self-Help Information (www.ucc.vt.edu/stdysk/stdyhlp.html)

University of Texas Learning Centre (www.utexas.edu/student/utlc/handouts.html)

York University Learning Skills Program (www.yorku.ca/cdc/lsp/)

Linda Walsh's Sites to Promote Academic Success (www.uni.edu/walsh/linda7.html)

Staying healthy: the importance of a support network



The verdict is in. Having a good social life isn't a luxury. It's important for good mental health. You need people around you to celebrate the good times — and support you in the bad times. With the constant demands of schoolwork, it may feel like you don't have time for a social life. Make it a priority. Being with other people can help you keep things in perspective, give you the chance to talk through problems and get the support you need to solve them, and above all — allow you to relax and have some fun!

"If you really want to find kind people in this world, people who are really willing to help, then go to a church on Sunday morning."

Develop your informal networks

The more wide and varied your support network, the better. Try to connect with people early in the semester, when your energy is apt to be higher, so you have connections already in place when school year pressures start to mount.

If you've moved away from home to attend college or university, you've had to leave family and friends back home. Finding new support networks is even more crucial, so you'll need to make it a priority.

"For me, I need someone there. I don't know where I'd be if I didn't have my mom to help me out. She's been there through everything."

"Having those resources in place was important for me. I had counseling; I had somebody monitoring my medications; if I needed accommodations I had that option open to me..."

The following offer opportunities to reach out:

- Family and friends know you and care about you. They're in your corner.
- Study skills groups are a great way to connect with people while helping with your schoolwork.
- Your local faith community may provide an opportunity to meet caring people you can connect with.
- Some associations for specific mental health disorders have active chapters and support groups, even in smaller communities (e.g., the Mood Disorders Association, Schizophrenia Society, CMHA). The local branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association can usually provide information on what support groups are available. The Web Resources section of this resource is a good place to start if you want to find the chapter nearest you.
- Student activities offer an opportunity to connect with other students and develop interests outside your academic work (e.g., drama, music, chess, sports, student council).
- Student clubs may help you find a group of peers that share your experience (e.g., specific religious or cultural groups, LGBT groups — Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Trans-gendered, and mature/non-traditional student societies).



"You do feel isolated — very isolated. And you can't talk to people about it because they don't understand... When you walk into a (peer support group)...you just feel great. It's almost like family."

Peer Support Groups

Some colleges and universities have established support groups for students with psychiatric disabilities. Sharing experiences with someone who has lived through the same experience can be very reassuring, and other students can also provide advice on accommodations and other supports. If a peer support group doesn't exist on campus, talk to the Disability Services Office about getting one started. If meeting in person isn't an option, computer listserves and chat groups offer the option of creating a "virtual" support group.

Take advantage of services on campus

While the Disability Services Office is the obvious place to find support on campus, don't stop there. A wide variety of resources for students are available. Check out the services provided by:

- Health Services
- Counseling and Mental Health Services
- Vocational or Career Counseling
- Study Skills Centres
- Chaplaincy or multi-faith centres
- Student Services
- Campus Women's Centre

Mental health professionals: keeping them in the loop

Chances are you have a psychologist or psychiatrist in the community providing you with care. Or you may receive care from a General Practitioner (GP) or family doctor who has a special interest in psychiatry. Or you may have a social worker or case manager who has worked with you on various issues. You will probably want to continue to see that professional regularly, but you may also want to connect with a counselor on campus to talk about school-related issues.

If you are moving away from home to attend college or university, talk to your GP, psychiatrist or psychologist to determine what support arrangements you need to have in place. It may be that you agree to maintain telephone contact or check in periodically when you return home for holidays. Or you may decide that you need a referral to someone in the area where you will be attending school. That way you can have person-to-person contact and someone in place should your health deteriorate or a crisis arise. It's important to have this arrangement worked out in advance.

"My doctor is sort of my sounding board to know how I'm doing. On the one hand I can try to deduce myself how I'm doing, but from what happened last time I learned that I wouldn't always know that I was getting sick."

Accepting and managing your illness



One minute you're excited about new ideas and energized by the intellectual challenge. The next minute you're overwhelmed by the amount of work, and wonder whether you are smart enough and strong enough to make it. Don't worry — everyone feels that way.

"I'm not sure I really accepted the fact that I had a disability until my second or third year, until I basically really had to. When I did, it was a lot easier."

But it can be hard to feel you're doing okay when you constantly have to be aware of how you are coping and whether there are any signs that your illness is coming back. Learning to accept and live with your illness can be tough. You need to:

- Remember you are a person first. Your disability doesn't define you.
- Keep perspective. You'll have bad days and good days.
- Be patient with yourself. You're coping with a lot — more than a lot of other students.
- Focus on your strengths.
- Celebrate your achievements. One big achievement is having the guts to take on college or university in the first place!

"Don't beat yourself up. Because your marks will fluctuate some times and you know that you could have done better if you weren't a little bit off that day. But don't beat yourself up over it. "

"You have to always, always, always put your mental health first."

Managing your illness day to day

Your success in school will depend a lot on how well you manage your illness. You've probably already learned from trial and error what you need to do to stay healthy — but it never hurts to be reminded . . .

- Assume responsibility. You're the only person who can manage your illness. Your doctor, your instructors and the Disability Services Office can't do it for you — it's your responsibility.
- Don't take on too much — too many courses, too many outside commitments or just too much of anything.
- Learn to work with your high and low times. Work hard when your health is good, so you can give yourself space when you aren't at your best.
- Take care of your physical, emotional and spiritual health. Exercise, sleep, healthy eating, leisure time with friends aren't luxuries — they're essentials.
- Take your medication as prescribed — consistently and regularly.
- Recognize your warning signs. If you know your own illness, you'll be able to catch problems early and take care of things before they become a crisis.
- Learn to ask for help and support when you need it.
- Think twice about using drugs and alcohol. They can make symptoms worse and interfere with your medications.
- Don't panic if you have a bad day. Learn to be flexible and keep going.



MORE TIPS FROM STUDENTS:

"I have a membership at the gym. In good weeks I might end up there six days a week. When things get tough — three or four times a week. That's been the biggest help for me. Because the gym — that's the place where you can go and just really let everything just fall off your back. There's never been a day when I've been sitting in the gym with 100 pounds over my head worrying about something at school. It just doesn't happen. For me, going there everyday is just the biggest release. That's stress management right there."

"Take your medication. That's big, because you'll start to feel out of whack and that will throw off your whole life."

"For me it's very important to follow a very strict diet. Don't drink caffeine if you can manage and don't eat a lot of sugar. It helps get rid of anxiety. You don't feel it as much if you don't eat sugar or caffeine."

"I can tell you from years of experience that drugs and alcohol don't get you anywhere. It doesn't matter how small — even once or twice a week — if you have mental health problems and you're on medication, it's a really, really bad scene. It can take what you have and intensify it, intensify the effects of your syndrome or whatever you have...you have to stay away from that."

"Without eight hours of sleep, I really can't function properly at all. I'm really on edge."

"You have to eat well, too. There's a lot of days when you might not have time to pack a big lunch to come to school, and at a campus like this, there's meals provided really once a day, at lunchtime. After 1pm, the cafeteria closes down, so the only food you'll find in the school is in a vending machine. A can of pop and a bag of potato chips or a chocolate bar is not a meal supplement. If you're taking meds you have to eat full, balanced meals. You can't live on stuff like that."

"You need to take some time for yourself — whether it's taking a bath, or enjoying music, or talking to friends. You don't think it will make a difference but it really does."

"...with all the information and juggling work, juggling research for a project and keeping up with my readings and doing homework and being prepared for the exams I found myself having to take some extra medication."



*"I do things that relax me.
I try and avoid the news."*

Stress: how to cope

Classes, assignments, essays, exams — those are some of the more obvious causes of stress at college or university. But there are lots of everyday stressors too — concerns about finances, problems in a relationship, getting stuck in traffic, computer troubles — the list goes on and on.

"Striking a balance between work and play is extremely important, because I'm a perfectionist and when I should be enjoying myself I'm working. It doesn't make for a very good situation."

Learning to manage stress is critical because it can adversely affect your mental health and left unchecked, can contribute to episodes of illness. There are lots of books and resources with suggestions and exercises to help you. Your college or university may even offer workshops in stress management. Learn what works for you and practice applying it. If stress is a real problem for you, you may need help from a professional.

Quick tips to reducing stress

- Keep things in perspective. Don't get flustered by one bad mark or one period when things aren't going well.
- Talk to someone about what's bothering you.
- Identify what helps you relax and practice doing it.
- Take a break from what is causing you stress.
- Get enough sleep. Go to bed at a reasonable time every night.
- Try meditation, tai chi or yoga.
- Make time for fun in your life.
- Watch your diet — especially your intake of caffeine and sugar.
- Exercise regularly. Most colleges and universities have good fitness facilities.



"Treat yourself a lot. That's one thing that I've started to do this year. I've never had a hobby that I've enjoyed or anything until this year. This year I went out of my way to find things that I enjoy."



If you're having trouble

One of the most important things to remember if you start to feel that you can't cope is that you are not alone. The Disability Services Office is there for you. If you are struggling with your course load, feeling that the pressure is too much or having warning signs that your mental health is starting to suffer — talk to the Disability Services staff. Don't wait for things to get worse. Don't wait until the day before the assignment is due, or the exam is scheduled. It's harder to solve problems on short notice.

You're also not the first person to ask for help. Lots of students have times when everything seems to be going wrong and they feel they can't find their way through it all — including those without disabilities. Don't be too hard on yourself.

"Growing up in a small town, I had this dream that I was going to go away to school — this was something that I really wanted. And then when I went away to school and saw everybody functioning, everybody handling things — and here I was dropping out. I thought it was over."

Contacting instructors⁸

If your illness is starting to interfere with your ability to attend classes or hand in assignments it's preferable to let the Disability Services Office and your instructors know what is going on. This is especially important if you are going to need to request extensions or other accommodations. Unfortunately this is probably the time you feel least able to have this kind of conversation.

"Now that I look back, I might not have dropped out, had I known what I know now."

An email or voicemail message is a good alternative to a face-to-face conversation with your instructors. It allows you to be clear about your situation without the stress of personal contact. If you decide to use email, just remember to leave a voicemail message as well, since some instructors don't check their email regularly. Another option is to write a note and leave it at the department office or mail it using campus mail.

Whatever communication method you choose, simply explain your situation briefly. If you have already given the instructor a letter from the Disability Services Office earlier in the semester — remind him/her of that. If you haven't previously disclosed to the instructor, and aren't sure what to do, talk to the Disability Services Office.

Withdrawing from courses

Colleges and universities have strict regulations about withdrawing from courses and not completing course work on time. Specific deadlines are set out in the college or university calendar for dropping courses without academic or financial penalties. It is your responsibility to meet those deadlines. If you withdraw after those deadlines, you will receive an "incomplete" on your academic record. If you don't withdraw, and don't complete the necessary course work, you will receive a failure.

⁸ Adapted from York University, Psychiatric Dis/Abilities Program, <www.yorku.ca/cdc/pdp/academicsupports.htm> (20 February 2004), Crisis Management.



If you are receiving a student loan or other funding, it is also important to consult with the Student Financial Aid Office before withdrawing from a course. Your full-time or part-time student status may be affected.

It is important to remember that if you miss deadlines due to your illness, you may still have options. Talk to the Disability Services Office — they can help you decide what to do.

Deferred standing and other options

If you become ill during the year and will not be able to complete a course as a result, there is another option to receiving an “incomplete” or “failure” on your transcript. You can “petition” for *deferred standing*, which allows you additional time to complete the course.

Some institutions will also allow you to petition to have a poor grade or a failure removed from your academic record if illness or hospitalization has been the primary factor affecting your work.

Petitioning is a formal process. It requires a written request, often with medical documentation. This can be particularly difficult when you are ill. However, the Disability Services Office can help you with this process, so talk to them first.

It is also important to remember that some institutions limit the number of deferrals granted to a student in any one semester or during their entire program.

"I couldn't finish my year completely because I had to go back to the hospital near the end. So I left and was in the hospital maybe a month and a half, two months."

Note: Every college and university has different rules and processes for withdrawing from courses and petitioning for deferred standing. The Disability Services Office can help you understand your options and choose what is best for you.

Withdrawing from school

One of the difficult things about mental illness is predicting when things will go wrong. Some students may need to withdraw from school if their mental health deteriorates. It can be a difficult decision to make, but a necessary one. It doesn't have to mean the end of your studies. Many students return to school once their illness is under control.

"Even if you end up in a position where you're dropping courses or you fail courses, it's not the end of the world. In a few years it's not even going to be a second thought."

If you are in this situation, it's important to talk to the Disability Services Office about your options. They can help you to withdraw officially so you can avoid problems if you decide to come back to school in the future. Try not to see this as a failure. It may simply be a chance to take a break, assess your options and get your health back.

Getting the care you need

Remember that your mental health always comes first. Don't wait until things become really difficult. Talk to the Disability Services Office. Talk to your psychiatrist or psychologist, or contact crisis services at the local mental health clinic or hospital. Let your family and friends know what's going on. All of these people can help you sort through your next steps. Most importantly, they can give you the support you need to get back on your feet.



Back to school: challenges for mature/non-traditional students



If you are returning to college or university after many years out of school, your experience will likely be different than younger students in several ways.

Different life experience

To begin with, you have more life experience than many younger students. That, combined with your age difference, can make it difficult to connect with other students and find a peer group. Given the role of a social network in maintaining mental health, you may need to get a little more creative. Many colleges and universities have societies or associations for mature students.

Remember that your life experience also means that you have a lot to offer your peers and younger students. Over the years you have probably had to learn to accept and live with your disability. Your experiences and strategies could be very helpful for younger students with less life experience.

Additional responsibilities

As an older student, there is more likelihood that you have other responsibilities and pressures. You may have a partner and children. Perhaps you are returning to school part-time and continuing to work part-time. It's important to recognize the realities of these additional stresses, and take them into account when choosing a course load.

Need for skills upgrading

You will also need to take seriously the issue of skills upgrading. If you have been out of school for some time, you may find the discipline of reading, studying, and researching and writing assignments and essays more of a challenge than students who are currently in school. Often college and university courses assume a high level of computer literacy.

Services designed with you in mind

The good news is that many colleges and universities have made a point of taking into account the needs of mature students. They offer specially-designed upgrading courses, academic counseling and support tailored to your needs. Remember, too, that mature students often do better in school than younger students. Those with a disability may find they are more successful as older students because they have better supports in place and are often more motivated than when they were younger.

If you're considering graduate studies



If you're currently in university and doing well, you may be thinking about graduate studies as a possible next step. Perhaps an MBA or law school beckons.

The stakes are higher in graduate school. There is more competition and far more stress. However, more and more students with psychiatric disabilities are choosing to enroll in graduate studies and are successful in their programs.

Different expectations

Graduate programs expect a great deal more independence and initiative from students than that required at the undergraduate level. You will need to assess your ability to work independently, without a lot of feedback and support.

The higher expectations and pressure may also mean that you have to take advantage of support that you did not feel the need for in your undergraduate years (e.g., the Disability Services Office, Counseling Services).

However, there also tends to be more flexibility in graduate programs — regarding deadlines, for example. This flexibility may help to balance some of the other pressures.

Dealing with disclosure issues

For many students applying for graduate studies, the decision about whether to disclose their disability becomes more complicated. The fear of stigma and discrimination may be higher, and with good reason. The intense competition for admission, and the competitive environment within the program, may not provide an environment conducive to support and academic accommodations.

It's wise to consult with the Disability Services Office of the university you are considering before you submit an application. Staff members will know the culture of the graduate programs within their institution and can advise you on how to handle the disclosure issue.

The ins and outs of financial support

Tuition fees for graduate studies, particularly professional programs, are steep. Graduate scholarships are available to both part-time and full-time students. Similar to the undergraduate level, it is also possible for a student with a disability to carry less than a full course load and retain full-time status. Talk to the Disability Services Office about the required documentation.

Employment as a teaching assistant is another standard source of income for graduate students. However, if you find teaching too stressful it may be possible to arrange for a research assistantship instead. Or you may find you can manage a teaching assistantship if you reduce your course load. Again, you will want to talk to the Disability Services Office well in advance, to determine the available options.



You're on your way



You've done your prep work. You've made your decisions. You're on your way! The next few years will be exciting, challenging, frightening (at times) and exhilarating. Be proud of yourself and celebrate your accomplishments — large and small.



**And just remember — you can do it.
Good luck!**



Web resources

Budgeting for college/university

Education Cost Calculator/Online Budget Calculator

<http://srv650.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/cs/sfp/24/clindex.jsp?langcanlearn=EN>

Career planning

www.jobsetc.ca/category_drilldown.jsp?crumb=12&category_id=412&lang=e

College and university disability service providers

National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) Edlink

www.neads.ca/en/norc/edlink

Distance learning

Canada's Campus Connection www.campusconnection.ca

Funding sources

All sources

National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) online financial directory

www.neads.ca/en/norc/funding

Student loans

CanLearn Interactive www.canlearn.ca/financing/getmoney/govtloans/clindex.cfm?langcanlearn=EN

Canada Study Grants for Students with Disabilities

CanLearn Interactive

www.canlearn.ca/nslsc/apply/On/nlStuGra.cfm?LANGNSLSC=en&IT=PUBLIC&row=2#permanent

Bursaries

CanLearn Interactive www.canlearn.ca/financing/getMoney/clbur.cfm?langcanlearn=EN

Canadian Millennium Scholarships

CanLearn Interactive www.canlearn.ca/financing/getmoney/govtloans/clgra.cfm?langcanlearn=EN

Scholarships

Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada

www.aucc.ca/programs/scholarships/alphabetical_e.html

Canadian Mental Health Association, British Columbia Division

www.cmha-bc.org/content/whatwedo/lornefraser/lornefraser.php

Scholarship Search <http://studentawards.com/english/canlearn/>

ScholarshipsCanada.com www.scholarshipscanada.com



Web resources

Mental health organizations

Many of these websites have helpful sections of links to other mental health resources.

National

Canadian Mental Health Association www.cmha.ca

Mood Disorders Society of Canada www.mooddisorderscanada.ca/

Schizophrenia Society of Canada www.schizophrenia.ca

Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada www.anxietycanada.ca/

British Columbia

Canadian Mental Health Association, British Columbia Division www.cmha-bc.org

Mood Disorders Association of British Columbia www.mdabc.ca

British Columbia Schizophrenia Society www.bcass.org

Anxiety Disorders Association of British Columbia www.anxietybc.com

Alberta

Canadian Mental Health Association, Alberta Division www.cmha.ab.ca

Schizophrenia Society of Alberta www.schizophrenia.ab.ca

Organization for Bipolar Affective Disorders Society (Alberta) www.obad.ca/

Saskatchewan

Canadian Mental Health Association, Saskatchewan Division www.cmhask.com

Schizophrenia Society of Saskatchewan www.schizophrenia.ca/skprov.html

Manitoba

Canadian Mental Health Association, Manitoba Division www.cmhamanitoba.mb.ca

Mood Disorders Association of Manitoba www.depression.mb.ca/

Manitoba Schizophrenia Society www.mss.mb.ca/index.php

Anxiety Disorders Association of Manitoba www.adam.mb.ca/



Web resources

Ontario

Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario Division www.ontario.cmha.ca

Mood Disorders Association of Ontario www.mooddorders.on.ca/mdao.asp

Schizophrenia Society of Ontario www.schizophrenia.on.ca

Anxiety Disorders Association of Ontario www.anxietyontario.com

Quebec

Canadian Mental Health Association, Quebec Division www.acsm.qc.ca

AMI Quebec: Alliance for the Mentally Ill Inc. www.amiquebec.org

Société québécoise de la schizophrénie (SQS) www.schizophrenie.qc.ca

L'Association / Troubles Anxieux du Québec (ATAQ) www.ataq.org

Revivre www.revivre.org

Fédération des Familles et Amis de la Personne Atteinte de Maladie Mentale www.ffapamm.qc.ca

New Brunswick

Canadian Mental Health Association, New Brunswick Division www.cmhanb.ca/index.html

Schizophrenia Society of New Brunswick www.schizophrenia.ca/nbprov.html

Prince Edward Island

Canadian Mental Health Association, Prince Edward Island Division www.cmha.pe.ca

Schizophrenia Society of Prince Edward Island www.schizophrenia.ca/peiprov.html

Nova Scotia

Canadian Mental Health Association, Nova Scotia Division www.cmhans.org

Schizophrenia Society of Nova Scotia www.ssns.ca

Newfoundland

Canadian Mental Health Association, Newfoundland Division www.cmhanl.ca

Schizophrenia Society of Newfoundland and Labrador www.schizophrenia.ca/nfldprov.html



Web resources

Software and technologies

Comparison Guide

Adaptive Technology Resource Centre of the University of Toronto
www.utoronto.ca/atrc/reference/tech/techgloss.html

Specific Software Programs

Dragon NaturallySpeaking www.scansoft.com/naturallyspeaking

Inspiration 7 www.inspiration.com/productinfo/inspiration/index.cfm

Grammar Expert Plus www.wintertree-software.com/app/gramxp/index.html

Grammar Slammer <http://englishplus.com/gramslam.htm#grmslm>

Study, writing and time management

University of St. Thomas Study Guides and Strategies www.studygs.net

Virginia Tech Study Skills Self-Help Information www.ucc.vt.edu/stdysk/stdyhelp.html

University of Texas Learning Centre www.utexas.edu/student/utlc/handouts.html

York University Learning Skills Program www.yorku.ca/cdc/lsp

Linda Walsh's Sites to Promote Academic Success www.uni.edu/walsh/linda7.html

University of Melbourne and the Australian Catholic University
www.services.unimelb.edu.au/ellp/publications/towards.html

Student organizations

National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) www.neads.ca

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