

Information From the Access-Ability Committee

The University of Prince Edward Island is committed to making the campus as accessible as possible to persons with disabilities, and those with special needs. New facilities and new policies are planned with the special needs of the individual in mind, and where possible the Administration continues to re-design older buildings, to improve parking conditions, and to provide academic and support services. As yet, not all areas of the campus are accessible. A University committee exists to explore the needs of persons with disabilities and to take action to initiate change. The following is a list of names to contact for assistance:

| | |
|---|----------|
| Student Services | 566-0423 |
| Counselling | 566-0488 |
| Tutoring | 566-0425 |
| Health Centre | 566-0616 |
| Security Department | 566-0600 |
| Access-Ability Committee (Student Services) | 566-0423 |
| PEI Council of the Disabled | 892-9149 |

The PEI Council of the Disabled provides a variety of programs, training, information and resources and works closely with the Access-Ability Committee on campus. Everyone must realize that what we achieve in life is not limited by our bodies but by the strength of our determination. When we can't walk or can't reach out to touch someone or can't speak the words we're thinking, we need opportunities to realize our potential, to experience the finest quality of life, to choose pride and independence.

Did you know that on Prince Edward Island one in seven people (18,450) have a disability? This often surprises the general public as they indicate that they don't "see" that many people with disabilities in their community. Many only view those with highly visible, physical disabilities such as people who use a white cane, a wheelchair or who are missing a limb as individuals with disabilities. However, many more people have hidden or invisible disabilities such as epilepsy, heart conditions, diabetes, arthritis, learning disabilities, etc. Remember, people with disabilities are people first, who happen to have a disability.

What do disability and handicap mean?

A **Disability** is a functional limitation or restriction of an individual's ability to perform an activity.

A **Handicap** is an environmental or attitudinal barrier that limits full participation by people with disabilities. Here are a few examples. A flight of stairs is a handicap to a person who uses a wheelchair, or negative attitudes about disabilities are the biggest handicap.

Accessibility is not simply a question of getting through the door or reaching a telephone. Real accessibility means equality. Do you see me as your equal? Can I get information or services or enjoy the same opportunities as you? Your time and understanding can bring about changes which mean real equality -- real accessibility.

Becoming Aware

Becoming aware can take many forms. Always remember that you must focus on people's abilities, not their disabilities! Remember to Treat all people as you yourself like to be treated. You know that people with disabilities are not all alike; they have the same wide variety of skills and personalities that other people have. Treat all people who have disabilities as individuals. One must also note that there are ranges of abilities and not everyone requires or wants your help. Don't insist on providing help or be offended if your offer to assist is not accepted. One key ingredient to becoming aware is remembering not to make assumptions or generalizations. For instance, do not assume that persons with disabilities are sick, unintelligent, poor, dependent, unemployed or helpless. Finally you can relax and accept that the person with a disability is exactly that, a person who happens to have a disability. Do not let any negative stereotyping, superstitious myths and preconceived notions about disabilities

cloud this fact. And please, ask, listen, and don't assume. These are the three most important tips to remember.

When you meet a person who has a disability there are a few things that you can do. You may offer assistance if asked or if the need seems obvious, but don't overdo it or insist on it. Respect the person's right to indicate the kind of help needed. Also, be considerate of the extra time it might take for a person with a disability to get things said or done. Let the person set the pace in walking or talking. Another part of meeting a person with a disability is conversation. Please remember that when speaking to the person speak directly to a person who has a disability. Do not consider a companion to be a conversational go-between. If at some point you decide they need help remember to never start to push a wheelchair without first asking the occupant if you may do so and do not lean on a person's wheelchair when talking.

When meeting a person who is blind or visually impaired, identify yourself and let the person know you are addressing them by using their name or touching their shoulder or arm. Be sure to tell them when you are leaving. While you are in their presence give whole, unhurried attention to the person who has difficulty speaking. Ask questions that require short answers or a nod or shake of the head and speak clearly and distinctly to a person with a hearing impairment or who has other difficulty understanding. When full understanding is doubtful, rephrase or write notes.

How Can Faculty/Staff Help?

Accommodating people with disabilities does not always involve major renovations or considerable effort on your part. The following are some painless suggestions which are easy to implement.

1) Allowing extra time for exams and assignments. 2) providing alternative forms of testing (i.e. oral exams) 3) finding accessible and/or more appropriate locations 4) providing appropriate seating within the classroom 5) asking the student what works for them. 6) accessing reading and book lists in advance 7) providing separate rooms to write exams. 8) making photocopied material clear and legible.

Watch Your Language (Words Shape Attitudes)

Language is a powerful tool in the shaping of ideas, perceptions and attitudes. The language you use can assist in promoting positive attitudes.

| | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Instead of: | Please use: |
| Disabled | Person with a disability |
| Handicapped | Person with a disability |
| Crippled by | Person who has a disability |
| Afflicted with | Person with a disability |
| Normal | Non-disabled |
| Victim/Suffer | Persons with a disability |
| Retarded | Persons with a mental handicap |
| Deformed | Born with |
| Confined to a wheelchair | Wheelchair user |
| Deaf and Dumb | Person with a hearing impairment |
| Brain damage | Head injury |
| Wheelchair architect | Architect who uses a wheelchair |
| Blind Lawyer | Lawyer who is blind |

The Access-Ability committee is looking for a student representative for next year. If you are interested in being a part of this committee, then please contact Mary Johnston-Hunter at the Department of Student Services. Finally, always be aware that through careful consultation with students who have disabilities, an accessible learning environment can be attained.