

## COU UPDATE – October 31, 2008

*This document is for information purposes only.*

Subject	Issue	Status
University Operating Grants	Executive Heads at their retreat in September identified operating funding as their number 1 priority. University operating costs have been rising more rapidly than revenues for some years, and the turmoil in financial markets is hurting pension plans and endowments, which compounds the existing pressure on operating budgets	A University Day has been planned for representatives of Ontario universities to visit Queens Park and this message will be communicated. At the same time, a small sub-committee of members and COU staff has been tasked to build a new case around sector operating issues.
Capital Funding	The Ontario government committed \$60 billion to a ten-year infrastructure plan. MTCU, with support from the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure (MEI), is developing a long-term capital planning process to meet the province's infrastructure needs, including those in the postsecondary sector. The Courtyard Group a third party, is guiding/facilitating the exercise.	<p>In response to considerable COU advocacy, the Ontario government has agreed to include new construction and deferred maintenance within its \$60 billion 10 year infrastructure plan.</p> <p>MTCU is collaborating with the newly named Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure on details. Over the summer and early fall, MTCU collected information from universities on their top 5 capital priorities. Now John Ronson of the Courtyard Group has been hired by the government to provide a long term funding strategy as it pertains to universities just as he did several years ago for the hospital sector. His team has visited 13 universities and colleges and expects to visit all institutions by the end of December. They are expected to report to the government in the winter.</p> <p>As well, there is a Technical Advisory Group (Universities), consisting of CUPA and government representatives which has met twice to discuss the government's approach to develop a long term capital plan. The approach involves an examination of several elements: (1) demand &amp; enrolment growth projection, (2) labour market information &amp; research, (e) educational trend, (4) assessment of current infrastructure landscape, (5) capital financing and (6) space management.</p>
Student Mobility and Pathways	The provincial government would like student mobility and pathways enhanced at the postsecondary level.	COU is continuing its consultations with Colleges Ontario on ways to facilitate student mobility and pathways across the province. This item is a top priority for MTCU.

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Quality Assurance	Significant changes are under development for a new quality assurance process for graduate programs, based on recommendations from an earlier review of the process.	<p>The Quality Assurance Transition/Implementation Task Force has been meeting on a regular basis since May 2008 to develop new and refine existing quality assurance processes at the graduate and undergraduate levels.</p> <p>The Task Force has proposed replacing the current approach to appraising existing graduate programs with an audit process, similar to UPRAC – the current Undergraduate Program Review and Audit Process. The Task Force has also proposed that all new undergraduate programs be reviewed using an appraisal model similar to the one now used for graduate programs. Guidelines are under development for both processes.</p> <p>Oversight of graduate quality assurance is transitioning to the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV), which already oversees the undergraduate component.</p> <p>One of the considerations before the Task Force is membership composition and selection of the soon-to-be established Ontario Universities Quality Assurance Council (OUQAC), which will be the new body responsible for assuring academic quality and accountability at Ontario’s publicly assisted universities. It will operate at arm’s length from OCAV and COU. The search for an executive director for quality assurance has begun.</p> <p>Task Force membership consists of representatives from OCAV and the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies, along with the COU Academic Colleagues. A quality assurance expert, an academic from a COU-member institution, also sits on the task force.</p>
Textbook and Technology Grant	The Ontario government announced in March 2008 this new grant. It promises \$150 per student in 2008-09 and will increase to \$300 by 2010-11.	<p>In consultation with COU, MTCU developed a delivery model and set guidelines for universities on how to deliver the grant. As well, COU worked with MTCU to ensure that universities maximized the promotion of these grants to students in the fall. We are still awaiting Ministry reports on the volume of students who have taken up the grant, and whether further steps are necessary to market it.</p> <p>The first cheque will be available to students this fall. Up to 550,000 postsecondary students are expected to be eligible to receive the grant. The textbook and technology grant will be an ongoing Ontario government program and over the next three years, \$385 million will be directed to these grants.</p>

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Student Access Guarantee (SAG)	MTCU is holding consultations on the SAG.	MTCU recently set up a committee, chaired by HEQCO, to review the effectiveness of the SAG. HEQCO will prepare and submit a report to government sometime this year. Members of COU's Task Force on Student Financial Assistance are participating in the review, along with members of Colleges Ontario.
Confirmation Statistics 2008-2009	OUAC statistics show an increase in secondary school confirmations for fall 2008, a trend that has occurred over the past few years.	As of September 11, 2008, there were 64,067 confirmations compared to 61,942 at this time last year, representing an increase of 3.4%.  In June 2008, OUAC launched its new Universities' Site (formerly the Admissions Site) featuring schedules, memos, updates, quick links, manuals and other documents. The site is designed specifically for university personnel ( <a href="http://admissions.ouac.on.ca">http://admissions.ouac.on.ca</a> ). Applicants are required to use the main OUAC website ( <a href="http://www.ouac.on.ca">www.ouac.on.ca</a> ).
Ontario Universities' Fair (OUF)	The OUF is the largest event of its kind in Canada ( <a href="http://www.ouf.ca">www.ouf.ca</a> ). It is organized by a committee of the Ontario University Registrars' Association and includes representatives from Ontario's universities, COU and the Ontario Universities' Application Centre	Ontario Universities Fair 2008 was a resounding success! More than 100,000 individuals visited between September 26 to 28. Held at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, the annual event attracts thousands of high school students and their parents who are provided with an opportunity to visit with all of Ontario's publicly assisted universities and learn more about the programs, how to apply for university and campus life.
University Information Program (UIP)	Under the auspices of the Ontario University Registrars' Association (OURA), a review is underway of the UIP, similar in purpose and scope as the one conducted earlier of the Ontario Universities Fair.	The UIP review committee selected a qualified third party consultant to lead and facilitate the initiative. Guided by pre-determined set of objectives, the review is now in the data gathering phase. A final report is expected in late December 2008 or early 2009.

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<p>University Accountability Initiatives</p>	<p>Universities are committed to demonstrating accountability to their stakeholders and funders.</p>	<p>Ontario universities are demonstrating results for the public funding received in a variety of ways, including :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COU is launching its <b>University Accountability</b> web site, with links to accountability pages of each university, by the end of October.</li> <li>• OCAV's <b>Academic Integrity</b> web site is being launched at the same time.</li>   <li>• National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) – All universities received their NSSE results in August from surveys conducted earlier this year. Since 2006, institutions have been using results to revise policies and practices to positively impact student engagement in areas identified by their own students. The survey will be conducted every three years.</li>   <li>• The NSSE system report, which compares aggregate data for Ontario institutions to those in other parts of Canada and in the United States, is expected to be available soon.</li>   <li>• Canadian Graduate &amp; Professional Program Student Survey (CGPSS) – In 2007, Ontario universities participated in this new graduate survey with the aim of using the data to improve the graduate experience. Results have been received and are being analyzed by institutional planners. The intent is to share record-level data among participating institutions in Canada for institutional planning purposes. The survey will be conducted every three years.</li>   <li>• Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) – Ontario institutions are also participating in this survey to benchmark the retention and graduation of their students.</li> </ul>

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Pensions/ Endowments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pensions Benefits Act review</li>   <li>▪ Impact of financial market crisis on financial assets</li> </ul>	<p>The Ontario Expert Commission on Pensions (OECPC) has concluded its work and issued an interim report which CSAO will be discussing at its Fall meeting, November 3 and 4, 2008. The Minister of Finance has indicated that the report will be released to the public in November. See <a href="http://www.pensionreview.on.ca/english/docs/OECPCInterimReport.pdf">http://www.pensionreview.on.ca/english/docs/OECPCInterimReport.pdf</a></p> <p>CSAO is reviewing the impact of the worldwide crisis in the financial markets on university pension plans. It is also assessing the impact on endowments and how this may affect student awards/scholarships.</p>
University Health Insurance Plan	Costs of UHIP	<p>The COU is reviewing concerns about the cost of UHIP to international students. International students and their parents have been lobbying their universities to lower or eliminate UHIP premiums. A joint letter from COU and the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) will be sent to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care ,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• requesting reinstatement of OHIP coverage which should include all UHIP members (foreign students, faculty and staff from abroad, and their dependants).</li> <li>• A joint Executive Heads/Student meeting with the Minister to discuss the issue.</li> </ul> <p>Dr. Paul Genest, recently met the Deputy Minister of Health and Long-term care and the Deputy Minister of MTCU to discuss various issue including UHIP. The Council of Senior Administrative Officers (CSAO) who is responsible will be discussing this and other UHIP issues at its Fall 2008 meeting.</p>

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Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ University Sector Climate Change Statement</li> </ul>	<p>At the Executive Heads Retreat on September 12, 2008, it was decided to draft a made-in-Ontario Climate Change initiative. CSAO was charged with drafting a statement for Ontario universities. CSAO delegated this task to the Ontario Association of Physical Plant Administrators (OAPPA), an affiliate of CSAO. An OAPPA sub-group drafted the first preliminary version which was sent to Executive Heads for information purposes only at the October 30, 2008 Executive Heads meeting.</p> <p>CSAO is reviewing this document fully in consultation with their OAPPA colleagues and other institutional members and will provide a revised document to Executive Heads.</p>
Violence in the workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Review of Ministry of Labour paper</li> </ul>	<p>COU and its affiliates –CSAO and the Council of Environmental Health and Safety Officers (CEHSO) provided commentary on the Consultation Paper on Workplace Violence Prevention released by the Ministry of Labour (MOL) on September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Many of the questions posed in this paper were of an operational nature and are unique from one institution to the next. COU addressed common perspectives and concerns regarding the approach the MOL will take with respect to workplace violence in Ontario.</p> <p>COU submitted its response to the MOL on October 27, 2008.</p>

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Education Safety Association of Ontario (ESAO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="414 233 748 296">▪ Inequitable funding model</li></ul>	<p data-bbox="776 233 1451 590">Ontario universities along with schools boards, libraries, and colleges are members of ESAO. In the past, Ontario universities have had serious concerns about the performance and structure of ESAO. COU recently submitted comments to the Workplace Safety Insurance Board (WSIB) relating to the “Illustrative Future State Model” outlined in a report from the Occupational Health and Safety Council of Ontario entitled “Roles Review and Realignment” dated September 5, 2008.</p> <p data-bbox="776 636 1451 957">Ontario universities support the apparent direction of the proposed model that would significantly reduce the number of Health and Safety Associations (entities), create multi-stakeholder governance and enable the streamlining of administration. However, the model does not address the funding inequity universities face in the current model and COU has indicated its interest in meeting with WSIB to address these concerns.</p>

## **Learning Disabilities: A Guide for Faculty at Ontario Universities**

**John Logan  
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**COU Academic Colleagues Working Paper**

October 2008

*The Working Papers Series consists of short papers on academic issues prepared by Academic Colleagues. The topics chosen by the caucus of Academic Colleagues are championed by one or two colleagues. Although drafts of each paper are discussed by the full caucus, the final version of the paper represents the opinions of the authors and not a consensus reached by the Colleagues. The authors present their paper to the full Council as a matter of interest and to stimulate discussion. The papers as finalized do not represent COU policy. They are simply a mechanism for investigating and opening discussion on matters of interest to the Colleagues and the Council—and their readership at large.*

# Learning Disabilities: A Guide for Faculty at Ontario Universities

## Introduction

Universities in Ontario have been required to accommodate students with learning disabilities (LDs) since the early 1990s. Despite the longstanding existence of policies regarding accommodation, many faculty members have only a limited understanding of LDs, the range of academic accommodations designed to compensate for LDs, and the underlying rationale for accommodation. A limited awareness of LD and associated issues is not surprising given the lack of formal instruction the majority of faculty receive on this topic. In turn, this limited awareness has led to some faculty to feel uneasy when asked to provide accommodations to students with LD. Therefore, the goal of this paper is to review the following topics related to the accommodation of students with learning disabilities: 1) the rationale for accommodation; 2) how learning disabilities are identified; 3) the range of learning disabilities faculty are likely to encounter and how they would be typically accommodated; 4) how courses can be designed to “indirectly” incorporate accommodations; and 5) implementation of academic accommodations in Ontario universities.

### 1. The rationale for accommodation

The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada defines LD as follows<sup>1</sup>:

“Learning Disabilities” refer to a number of disorders which may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. As such, learning disabilities are distinct from global intellectual deficiency. ([Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2008a](#))

One important feature of LD that is not described in this definition is that LD is an “invisible” disability. Seeing a person with LD, it is not obvious that that person has a disability. Nonetheless, its lack of obvious outward signs makes LD no less a disability. And, like all disabilities, LD requires accommodation.<sup>2</sup>

Accommodation for disabilities, including LD, is mandated by Ontario Human Rights Code (“the Code”). As of June 30, 2008, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) is the government agency responsible for interpretation of the Code and providing guidelines for accommodation, as well as advocating for human rights in Ontario, while the Human Rights

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<sup>1</sup> This definition does not include Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Although considered clinically separate from LD, in this paper I will treat ADHD as a subtype of LD because substantial overlap exists between individuals diagnosed with LD and those diagnosed with ADHD ([Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2008b](#)).

<sup>2</sup> Limits on accommodation for disabilities do exist but Ontario government policy is to set a high threshold for not accommodating a disability. See later in this section.

Tribunal of Ontario is responsible for enforcement of the Code ([Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008a](#)). The rationale for accommodation is centred on the recognition of “the dignity and worth of every person in Ontario”, and the requirement that “appropriate accommodation is available for students with disabilities” ([Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008b](#)). The OHRC uses the term “duty to accommodate” to reinforce the legal requirement for organizations to provide accommodation. This means that accommodation is not an option; rather, an organization *must* provide accommodation to those with a disability.

According to the OHRC the goal of accommodation is *not* to provide an advantage to those with a disability. Instead, the goal is to “provide equal benefit”, meaning that persons with a disability are provided a means to accomplish a task that puts them on a level playing field with persons without disabilities. (Implementation of “equal benefit” in the context of LD will be covered in Section 3.) A key concept in accommodation is that individual differences from person to person dictate the kind of accommodation that is provided. Therefore, accommodations will vary from person to person, with no “one size fits all” accommodation appropriate for all persons with a disability ([Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008b](#)). Finally, the concept of “reasonable accommodation” is important to consider. The Code states that accommodations cannot cause “undue hardship” for those asked to provide the accommodation, where undue hardship would include excessive cost or violation of health and safety standards. That said, the bar is set high for those arguing that providing accommodation is not feasible.

The Code applies to all disabilities in all contexts. However, the OHRC recognizes that education is a unique area that requires specific guidelines for dealing with disability, including LD ([Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2004](#)). The range of accommodations for LDs are reviewed in Section 4.

## 2. How learning disabilities are identified and assessed

Learning disabilities are typically (but not always) identified prior to post-secondary education. For example, if a child has dyslexia (defined as a problem in reading or writing that is not associated with general intelligence), it is often identified by a classroom teacher as the child learns to read. Parents or pediatricians may also identify a potential LD. Nonetheless, it is also possible for a LD to not be identified until adulthood. A critical difference between post-secondary evaluation for LD and those that occur before a post-secondary evaluation is that identification alone is sufficient to obtain accommodation for a LD in elementary or high school. However, for accommodations in post-secondary settings a confirmation of a LD is required ([Harrison & Holmes, 2008](#)).

Confirmation of LD determined by an in-depth assessment called a psychological assessment ([Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, 2008](#)) or “psychoeducational assessment” (e.g., [Carleton University, 2008](#)).<sup>3</sup> In Ontario psychoeducational assessments are carried out by registered psychologists ([Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, 2008](#)).

A psychoeducational assessment consists of an assessment of psychological abilities and an assessment of educational performance compared to the performance of similar aged individuals. Both sources of information are necessary to diagnose a LD.

The psychological tests evaluate intellectual functioning and include intelligence tests such as the Wechsler scales (WISC – Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children; WAIS – Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale) or the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale. Intelligence tests are designed to measure a wide range of abilities, including verbal ability, spatial ability, memory, and other basic intellectual capacities. In addition to intelligence tests, tests can be administered to measure educational achievement, such as the Woodcock Johnson Tests of Achievement. (For more on specific tests used to assess LD, see [Kidd, 2008](#).) Educational achievement can also be assessed by examining performance in academic settings (grades in different subjects, for example).

In addition to the psychoeducational assessment, information from several other sources is evaluated in order to diagnose a LD ([Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2008a](#)). This includes a detailed interview and an evaluation of the individual’s social and emotional history. The goal of these additional evaluations is to establish the individual’s developmental history, any family history of LD, physical health (e.g., any neurological issues, such as head injury), possible concurrent issues, plus reviewing previous assessments. A thorough assessment of psychological and educational abilities plus other information requires from four to six hours to complete.

By virtue of how LD is defined the overall objective of the assessment process is to determine if a difference exists between the average general intelligence of the individual and some subset of their intellectual abilities that would be consistent with a selective deficit of functioning. Thus, for example, reading could be selectively impaired while vocabulary, spoken language, spatial abilities, etc. are not be impaired. Information about medical history is necessary to rule out neurological problems, such as a concussion, being responsible for the deficit. Similarly, an examination of academic records can indicate if the impairment has been an ongoing problem, consistent with a diagnosis of LD.

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<sup>3</sup> The terms are used synonymously by some sources but are used to refer to different components of the evaluation by other sources. I will use the term psychoeducational assessment because it describes more accurately the two primary components of the assessment process.

### 3. LD types and how they are accommodated

LD covers a range of potential disabilities. According to the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada,

Learning disabilities result from impairments in one or more processes related to perceiving, thinking, remembering or learning. These include, but are not limited to: language processing; phonological processing; visual spatial processing; processing speed; memory and attention; and executive functions (e.g. planning and decision-making).

Learning disabilities range in severity and may interfere with the acquisition and use of one or more of the following:

- oral language (e.g. listening, speaking, understanding);
- reading (e.g. decoding, phonetic knowledge, word recognition, comprehension);
- written language (e.g. spelling and written expression); and
- mathematics (e.g. computation, problem solving).

Learning disabilities may also involve difficulties with organizational skills, social perception, social interaction and perspective taking. ([Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2008](#))

If ADHD is considered as a LD, then impulsivity and lack of planning would also be considered characteristics of the disability.

The final part of the definition of LD provided by the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (2008) describes “interventions” that would permit an individual with a LD to achieve success in their life. These interventions include specific skill instruction, accommodation, compensatory strategies, and self-advocacy. The first three interventions refer to a set of overlapping concepts that would permit an individual with LD to deal with potential disadvantages that he or she may encounter in academic or workplace environments.<sup>4</sup> Accommodation, the nominal focus of this document, could include skill instruction and compensatory strategies if a broad definition of accommodation is used. Thus, interventions could include an awareness of the disability on the part of the individual and monitoring the relative success associated with various interventions, as well as the specific interventions themselves. (An example of how these three intervention components overlap is time management skills; these are critical for virtually all individuals with a LD yet are not really specific to any one setting, and would not seem to fit the definition of a compensatory strategy or accommodation. For a comprehensive list of compensatory strategies in a variety of settings, some of which also fit the concept of accommodation, see [Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2008](#))

Accommodations for LDs in post-secondary academic settings span the range from general, broad-based accommodations such as extra time for completion of assignments and tests or a quiet space for testing, to more specific accommodations such as having a reader for text-based

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<sup>4</sup> My characterization of these interventions as overlapping concepts is based on a lack of clear and distinct definitions in the LD literature for the terms “specific skill instruction”, “accommodation”, and “compensatory strategies”. In this paper I will treat them all as accommodations.

information. Accommodations are designed to fit the needs of the individual student taking a specific course. That is why most university centres for providing services to students with LD require that the student consult each term with the faculty member who will be teaching the student's courses. Based on the student's needs and the format of the course, specific accommodations will be proposed.

[Drover and Owen \(1997\)](#) provide the following list of accommodations for LDs in post-secondary settings:

- extended time for tests, exams
- reduced course load
- course counselling
- audio versions of texts
- reading scanner for print material
- voice output computer
- reader (support person)
- scribe for oral work (support person)
- specialized organizational tour
- audio recording of lectures

Not included in Drover and Owen's list but nonetheless a frequent accommodation is a quiet room designed to minimize distractions, a typical accommodation for students with ADHD.

Probably the most common accommodation is extended time for assignments and tests. It provides a straightforward way to compensate for the reduced information acquisition capacity that is often part of LD and because it is relatively simple to implement in academic settings. Sometimes faculty question the extended time accommodation because they consider it unfair, arguing that all students would perform better if they had extended time. However, most centres that deal with academic accommodations cite evidence that providing extended time to those who do not have a LD does not significantly increase their grade (e.g., [University of Illinois, 2008](#)). Other accommodations are typically added if extended time alone is insufficient to compensate for the student's LD. These additional accommodations will vary depending on the type of LD present. For example, students with an auditory processing deficit would benefit from listening to an audio recording of a lecture in order to pause and repeat parts of the lecture if they were unable to process the information adequately in its initial presentation.

#### 4. Alternatives to accommodation

Accommodation can allow a student with LD to compensate for their disability. However, an alternative to accommodation has been proposed that in its most idealistic form requires that the student with LD be treated no differently than the student without LD yet maintaining an equitable environment for all students in a course. Universal Design for Learning (UDL; also referred to as Universal Instructional Design or UID) "is a framework for designing curricula that enable all individuals to gain knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm for learning. UDL provides rich supports for learning and reduces barriers to the curriculum while maintaining high achievement standards for all" ([CAST \[Center for Applied Technology\], 2008a](#)).

UDL incorporates three components: multiple means of representation, multiple means of expression, and multiple means of engagement ([CAST, 2008b](#)). Multiple means of representation refers to providing information to students in different formats so that they can acquire information via at least one of the formats if they have problems acquiring the information in other formats. Multiple means of expression refers to an analogous idea applied to how students' knowledge of course material could be evaluated. Thus, students would be provided with the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge in different ways or formats. Finally, multiple means of engagement refers to how an instructor could use different ways to motivate students to perform well in a course.

UDL may be a challenging concept for many faculty as it violates a long-held view in post-secondary education that a course is structured so that there is “one way” to present information and evaluate students, and motivation is limited to the instructor showing up for class and lecturing. While this description of university teaching may be something of a caricature, it is one end of a continuum that has as its opposite the ideas embodied in UDL. UDL is all about options. Options for many faculty will invoke the concept of “extra work”, introducing “inefficiencies” into teaching a course. However, UDL has the potential to address this criticism because it also incorporates accommodations as a kind of by-product of designing a course with options. Thus any net loss in “efficiency of delivery” is offset by no longer having to explicitly provide accommodations. Moreover, UDL is akin to Universal Design in other contexts: it also benefits all students, even those who do not have a LD. An argument for this claim is based on designing physical objects. If a sidewalk curb has a cut-away design leading to the street (as seen in most modern intersections), then not only are those in a wheelchair likely to benefit, but also those who walk from one side of the street to the other as they are less likely to trip and fall on the curb, as well as benefiting those who use a stroller or wheeled luggage ([University of Minnesota, 2008](#))

Implementation of UDL ideally begins when an instructor designs their course as all the features of UDL can be “built-in”. However, components of UDL can be accomplished by something as simple as placing course materials on a website thereby making them accessible to blind students, ESL students, and students with a LD ([University of Minnesota, 2008](#)). The University of Guelph has an unusually detailed website that describes the tenets of UDL and practical advice for how to implement UDL in a course ([University of Guelph, 2008a](#)). The site contains a checklist for UDL that is particularly useful for dealing with practical issues in applying UDL principles when designing (or redesigning) a course ([University of Guelph, 2008b](#)). While it may be the case that UDL will not completely obviate the need for accommodations for LD, it has the potential to reduce the need to make special arrangements in many cases.

## 5. Implementation of academic accommodations in Ontario universities

Academic accommodations for students with LDs are broadly similar across Ontario universities based on an examination of information provided on university websites. In this section I will focus mostly on accommodations for tests, recognizing that accommodation also incorporates everyday classroom environments and academic environments outside the classroom. I deal with these latter environments in final part of this section.

Accommodations require the active involvement of the student, instructors, and an institutionally-supported centre (hereafter referred to as “the centre”) that facilitates the accommodation process. The process is initiated by students who are expected to identify themselves as having a LD to staff at the centre. The centre provides information to the student about how accommodations are provided at the university, including the following: what forms of documentation are required to receive academic accommodation, the student’s responsibilities in contacting individual course instructors, and the range of services that the centre can provide to the student with LD.

The accommodation process begins with the student contacting the centre. For any accommodation, whether LD or otherwise, the student is required to provide current documentation by a “regulated medical practitioner”, such as a physician, psychiatrist, or psychologist. For a diagnosis of LD, the documentation takes the form of a psychoeducational assessment that must be completed by a clinical psychologist. The documentation must contain a statement that the student has a diagnosed LD that is ongoing and calls for academic accommodation. Documentation based on previous assessments may need to be updated to indicate the student’s current status with respect to their LD. When the appropriate documentation is provided by the student to the centre, the student is registered by the centre (meaning that the student is formally acknowledged by the institution as having a LD that requires academic accommodation). At the same time the student provides their documentation, they would typically consult with a centre staff member who would be assigned to that student.

Depending on the university, once the student is registered with the centre the student either contacts the instructors of their courses or the centre contacts the instructors to arrange the specifics of the required accommodation. The centre determines the details of the accommodation based on the student’s documentation. Instructors are consulted about the accommodation to determine if the accommodation suggested is appropriate for that course (e.g., if a recommended accommodation was to not penalize the student for grammatical errors in tests and assignments and one of the stated goals of the course was to provide instruction in grammar, then the accommodation would not be suitable for that specific course). Students are typically required to make arrangements for accommodations anywhere from five days to two weeks prior to the test or assignment due date.

Historically, instructors were responsible for administering academic accommodations to the student. If an accommodation required the student be provided with 1.5 extra time to complete a test (for example, a one hour midterm test extended to 1.5 hours), the instructor or teaching assistant for the course would have to deal with the accommodation. Generally, this type of accommodation would require the test to be administered separately from the rest of class, in terms of both location and time, an arrangement that caused friction in some cases as faculty considered the hours spent administering accommodations as diminishing the hours available for grading and other course-related activities. One way to address this issue is to centralize facilities for administering tests to students who require academic accommodation. This typically takes the form of a invigilated room bookable by faculty or by the centre. Instructors arrange to have a copy of their test delivered to the centre or the institutional office

administering the room; the test is returned to the instructor usually within 48 hours. Many Ontario universities have adopted this centralized model.<sup>5</sup>

Another component of accommodation for LD is the provision of assistive services or adaptive technologies. Ontario universities make available a variety of these services, including (but not limited to) the following:

- note taking
- writing/content tutors
- learning assistants, learning strategists, ADHD coaches
- screening and referral for assessment for suspected learning disabilities or ADHD
- laptop computers for tests and exams
- audio recording devices
- voice recognition & text-to-speech software

### Conclusion

Academic accommodation allows students with LDs to compensate for their disability. Ideally, accommodation permits them to compete on a level playing field with non-LD students. Although accommodation is required by law, it does not need to be viewed solely as an onerous, government-imposed requirement on institutions. Instead, it should be viewed as a mechanism that allows students with LDs to realize their goals and to maximize their contribution to society.

Ontario universities have developed effective procedures for implementing academic accommodations for students with LDs. These procedures will continue evolving to meet the growing and changing needs of students, instructors, and institutions.

Nonetheless, Ontario universities must raise the level of awareness among faculty members about LD and the legal and moral requirements to provide academic accommodation. As noted in the introduction, anecdotal evidence suggests that not all faculty have completely accepted the rationale for accommodation. I would argue that a major factor underlying the reluctance to accept the validity of academic accommodation is the lack of an effective communication strategy that presents a reasoned argument for providing accommodation. In addition, when materials are given to new full- and part-time faculty, generally, they are not as informative as they could be. Providing relevant information to instructors as they begin their academic careers would go a long way to dealing with problems of faculty acceptance of the concept of accommodation.

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<sup>5</sup> The model for administering midterm exams and final exams may differ. At some Ontario universities individual instructors and departments are responsible for administering accommodations for midterm exams whereas the university exam office is responsible for administering accommodations for December/April final exams.

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