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Employment Opportunities for College and University Graduates with a Learning Disability



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There has been little attention paid to the experiences of students with disabilities in colleges and universities across Canada after they graduate. This is of the utmost importance since the number one ranked concern of postsecondary students with disabilities relates to employment: more specifically, to finding and maintaining a job (Martiniello, Barile, Budd, Nguyen, & Fichten, 2011). These students were particularly concerned about employment accommodations, disclosing their disability, and a perceived need for interview and job readiness skills (Martiniello, Barile, Budd, Nguyen, & Fichten, 2011).

Some of students' concerns are the result of the many misconceptions that abound about the employment prospects of individuals with disabilities (Jorgensen, Fichten, Martiniello, Nguyen, Barile, Budd, & Amsel, 2013), including the mistaken beliefs that accommodations for employees with disabilities in the workplace is expensive (Canadian Association of Independent living Centres, 2007) and that people with disabilities do not have the required educational requirements (Government of New Brunswick, undated). Such myths must be taken seriously as unemployment and underemployment have been a persistent concern not only for postsecondary students, but also for people with disabilities in general (Fogg, Hernandez, & McMahon, 2010).

Students with learning disabilities were also concerned about employment (Barile, Fichten, Jorgensen, & Nguyen, 2013). These students reported that finding a job was difficult because of the extra time they had to devote to their studies, which did not allow them to work during the academic term; this led to a lack of work experience and job readiness skills. They also reported feeling that employers were not very receptive to disclosure of their learning disability, which one student labeled as an 'invisible disability' and suggested the need to sensitize prospective employers to issues related to learning disabilities.



A recent study by the Adaptech Research Network shows that 83% of graduates with a learning disability found a job within two years of graduation. This can be compared to the over 93% of recent

postsecondary graduates without disabilities (Statistics Canada, 2013). Most of the graduates with LD had one job and were working full-time for an average of 40 hours a week. Graduates with a part-time job worked, on average, 16 hours a week. Most graduates with a learning disability who were employed (83%) were satisfied with their job; however, these jobs were not necessarily related to their program of study. For example, only about one-third of participants reported that their job was very closely related to their field of study, with another 39% reporting that their job was not at all related. The rest indicated that their job was "somewhat related" to their program.

Seventeen percent of graduates with a learning disability were unemployed. However, factors that differ between those graduates who are employed and unemployed are unclear. Males and females were equally likely to be employed. The same is true for graduates whose program of study did and did not have an internship. Other factors that were not related to employment include self-reported grades, the type of institution attended (college vs university), the highest qualification achieved (college diploma, bachelor's or graduate degree), number of disabilities other than LD, age, and the type of program (professional/career technical vs. general/pre-university).



In summary, students with a learning disability who graduate from postsecondary studies are finding jobs and are satisfied with these, even if they are not working at a job that is closely related to their field of study. They do, however, have concerns about maintaining employment. These include issues related to discrimination and accommodations, including: being refused an interview or a promotion, being denied a job accommodation, being given less responsibility, and being paid less for performing the same task (Lindsay, 2011). To ensure equal access to employment for students with disabilities who graduate from postsecondary studies, the labor market needs to be better prepared for the diversity of potential employees who will be seeking employment in the future (Barile et al., 2013).

References

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