

## Stakeholder summary

### Graduates with disabilities take longer to complete their programs

Persons with disabilities face considerable barriers in accessing postsecondary education, but a new study from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario shows that once enrolled, they also face obstacles in completing their degrees. Credential type, program area, type of disability and Grade Point Average (GPA) influence whether a student requires more time to graduate than their non-disabled peers.

#### Project description

The paper, *Succeeding with Disabilities: Graduates with Disabilities and the Factors Affecting Time-to-Completion*, examines the experiences of students with disabilities who graduated from five Ontario colleges between 2007 and 2010. The study uses administrative data from each of the colleges' disability services offices to determine whether students with disabilities took longer to graduate than students without disabilities. Cambrian, Conestoga, Georgian, Loyalist and Sheridan colleges were selected as they are located in five different regions in Ontario and represent different-sized institutions.

The study also looked at what factors affect students' GPAs; what program area, credential type and type of disability affect time-to-completion; and whether the use of services and accommodations affect the time it takes to graduate.

#### Findings

The results show that compared to a similar group of graduates without disabilities, graduates with disabilities take slightly longer to complete their programs. This finding was consistent with a recently published HEQCO @ Issue paper, [Disability in Ontario: Postsecondary education participation rates, student experience and labour market outcomes](#). The paper was an extensive summary of HEQCO research on students with disabilities in Ontario, focusing on their participation and attainment rates, transition and in-school experiences, and labour market outcomes.

Taking longer to graduate was also associated with having a lower GPA, implying that these students may be struggling academically. Lower GPAs were also associated with being enrolled in a health program or an advanced level diploma. Females and older students tended to have higher GPAs.

Both program area and credential type affected time to completion. Graduates with disabilities enrolled in business or health required more time to graduate, as did those completing advanced diplomas. Graduates with disabilities competing certificate programs were less likely to require more time to graduate, as certificate programs have fewer requirements to complete.

Graduates with psychiatric disabilities are more likely to require additional terms to graduate, when compared to the reference group, graduates with ADHD or learning disabilities.

Small sample size and lack of reporting from some participating colleges limited analysis on whether services and accommodations affect time to completion. However, on average, students with disabilities made little use of the services available to them.

## **Conclusions**

The author makes a number of recommendations in the report, including duplicating this study in other provinces to verify the trends across Canada, as well as a study on why some graduates with disabilities do not use the services and accommodations available to them.

*Succeeding with Disabilities: Graduates with Disabilities and the Factors Affecting Time-to-Completion* was written by Kelly L. Woods and Marjorie Cook, Georgian College; Lindsay DeClou, HEQCO and Ursula McCloy.