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Presentation Proposal

Accessible Media Policies: Creating, Implementing and Sustaining   them in Higher Learning Environments

Submitted by:
Karen Walker, Accessible Media Coordinator
George Brown College, Toronto, Canada

Presentation Summary:

With 10% of Canadians between the ages of 15-64 having a disability and only 3% of all printed material in Canada available in multiple formats such as Braille, audio, large print, and captioning, the need to address and rectify this disparity is urgent. The federal government recognizes it has a role to play in this regard and will work with the provincial and territorial governments to close the gaps in education and skills development for people with disabilities. The Government of Ontario responded to the needs of Ontarians with disabilities by passing *Bill 118* thereby enacting the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* that will create standards to remove or prevent barriers in both the public and private sectors. Ontario Colleges also recognize the need for new methods of program design and delivery and have a mandate to provide accessible and equitable education to a diverse population of learners.

The post secondary demographic of students aged 15-24 in Canada accounts for 4 million people, of which 4% have mild to moderate disabilities; the leading ones being pain, learning and mobility. To achieve timely and equal access to all academic resources, George Brown College is responding to the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* by introducing a new policy on Accessible Media. Students who are Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing, along with students with various learning disabilities will have access to even more materials and resources in the format of their choice. The college aims to provide an academic experience that is socially, culturally and

educationally fulfilling. By supporting faculty in preparing their course materials in accessible formats we can provide a learning environment that is adaptable and universally designed to foster academic success.

Youth with disabilities are less likely to finish high school and therefore not have the opportunity to continue with post secondary education. Of those who do continue with higher learning, only 7% graduate from college. This group of learners faces more challenges than their peers without disabilities in terms of accessing education and ultimately, employment.

Changing perceptions and attitudes is paramount to progress. If we view the idea of disability and accessibility as a mismatch between the learner and the education being offered, we can conceive positive and creative solutions that contribute to an enriched learning environment. By sharing strategies and best practices, faculty, staff and students can combine ideas and resources to work towards the common goal of academic accessibility and equity.