

Resources for Career Conversations with Students with Disabilities



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



We want to see students thrive, grow and build meaningful lives and careers. This guide offers a starting place to improve your literacy about the way that disability may intersect with job search and career navigation. Enhance your learning by referring to the [student-facing version](#) of this document.

Just as you would with any other student you're coaching or advising, respect the individual's knowledge about their experiences. Take a strengths-based approach and support the student to identify and leverage their talents.

TIPS TO GET STARTED

1. Begin the conversation by trying to understand what has brought the student to you. Don't assume that a student is seeking support related to their disability.
2. When referring to a student with a disability, always refer to the person first and the disability second. For example, "the student with hearing impairment..." is more correct than saying "the hearing-impaired student." If you are not sure how to refer to an individual's circumstances, ask the student.
3. Building professional networks in employment communities that value the students' skills and abilities is a useful strategy to emphasize as you help them seek opportunities for work. We've listed some organizations in the Resource section at the end of this guide that might be helpful.



UNDERSTAND THE TERMINOLOGY

Human Skills and Resources' Development of Canada's Federal Disability Guide describes disability as,

a complex phenomenon, reflecting an interaction between features of a person's body and mind and features of the society in which they live. A disability can occur at any time in a person's life; some people are born with a disability, while others develop a disability later in life. It can be permanent, temporary or episodic. Disability can steadily worsen, remain the same, or improve [...]. It can be the cause, as well as the result, of disease, illness, injury, or substance abuse (2013).

For those of us that do not commonly work with individuals with disabilities and/or do not have personal experience in this area, it is commonly forgotten that disabilities can be both visible and invisible, chronic or temporary.

UBC uses the following definition in [Policy 73](#), which outlines protocol for academic accommodations for students with disabilities.

Person(s) with a "Disability" or "Disabilities" means persons who:

- have a significant and persistent mobility, sensory, learning, or other physical or mental health impairment;
- experience functional restrictions or limitations of their ability to perform the range of life's activities; and
- may experience attitudinal and/or environmental barriers that hamper their full and self-directed participation in University activities.

As signified by the breadth of the definition of disability, a person's disability does not need to be permanent in order to qualify for workplace accommodations. Additionally, It is possible that you will work with students that do not identify as having a disability but who could be entitled to workplace accommodations.

Please note that UBC administers academic support to students with temporary health conditions differently than to those designated as having a disability. Please read more about [academic concessions](#).

GET INFORMED

SOME STATISTICS TO CONSIDER:

In 2014, Statistics Canada produced a report that outlines factors associated with employment participation of persons with disabilities along with their job characteristics. Here are a few of their key points:

- In 2011, the employment rate of Canadians aged 25 to 64 with disabilities was 49%, compared with 79% for Canadians without a disability.
- Approximately 1 in 2 university graduates, with or without a disability, held a professional occupation. However, graduates with a disability were less likely to hold a management position and earned less than those without a disability, especially among men.
- Among Canadians with a disability, 12% reported having been refused a job as in the previous five years as a result of their disability.

The [Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling](#) produced a literature review on career development for persons with disabilities in 2015. It is a highly recommended resource for practitioners. Additionally, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada's Federal Disability Resource Guide can be found [here](#).

THOUGHTS FROM AN ALUMNA:

Q: What advice have you received that resonated with you and helped you navigate the early years of your career journey?



Don't let someone else dictate your life. Only you can decide for yourself if you can or cannot do something. If someone won't accept you for who you are then they're not worth trying to convince otherwise. This is particularly true when it comes to workplaces as well, you want to find a place where you can thrive and will support you rather than have to fight them on everything. It isn't your dream company to work for if you have to hide a part of yourself. If someone tells you, you can't do something then prove them wrong, this is the best form of getting to say I told you so.

- Alex Klemm, BKin '13, MRSc '17, MM '18

EXPLORING DISCLOSURE & WORKPLACE ACCOMODATION

Depending on the individual's specific needs, persons with disabilities may consider whether or not to disclose their disability and may need to identify and ask for workplace accommodations.

The choice of disclosure depends on the visibility of the disability. For example, a student that depends on a wheelchair to be mobile doesn't have the choice not to disclose their disability. On the other hand, a person with chronic pain, anxiety, or another invisible disability may have more choice about whether or not to disclose and at what point.

COMMON OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISCLOSURE

- on the application
- at the point of invitation to interview
- during the interview
- upon receiving a job offer and after beginning the job

DISCLOSURE TIPS

1. If you are exploring whether disclosure is needed, a good first step is to invite the student to share how or if their disability affects them on a daily basis. From there you might be able to identify workplace accommodations to suit the functional impact.
2. Students have a legal right to confidentiality of their disability. When the student is speaking about their disability to employers, they should know they only need to disclose the functional impact of their disability in the workplace, rather than the nature or personal history of their disability itself.
3. Asking the student whether they have pursued past accommodations through Centre for Accessibility can give you a sense of how familiar the student is with seeking accommodations, discussing their disability and navigating these systems.
4. If a student has a disability with multiple functional impacts or multiple disabilities and is registered with the Centre for Accessibility it is strongly encouraged they work together with their Primary Accessibility Advisor (found on their Accommodation Letter). Please see students.ubc.ca/access for more information.
5. Deciding if and when to disclose a disability is a personal choice and each student will need to develop a strategy with their unique needs in mind, including their level of comfort with each disclosure option.

Refer to the student-facing version of this document to learn more about advantages and disadvantages of disclosure during each of these stages of the recruitment process.

PROVIDE RESOURCE REFERRALS

In addition to the essential resources outlined in the [career navigation guide for students with disabilities](#), the following resources may be useful to familiarize yourself with and refer students to, depending on their individual case.

CANADIAN RESOURCES

[Centre for Accessibility](#) for information about accommodations related to academics and work-integrated learning programs (eg. co-op, practicum)

[Canadian Council on Rehabilitation & Work](#) and their [Work Ink Employment Site](#) to find job postings by equity employers.

[Canadian Hearing Society](#) for employment services and resources for those that are culturally deaf, oral deaf deafened or hard of hearing. Based in Ontario.

[Canadian Mental Health Association](#) for resources to support employees and employers to sustain wellbeing in the workplace. Also see their [BC chapter](#) and their [Not Myself Today](#) campaign.

[Canadian National Institute for the Blind](#) for individuals with sight loss. Provide resources to support academic and workplace success.

[Futurepreneur Canada](#) for anyone exploring starting a business.

[Government of Canada Opportunities Fund](#) for support preparing for, obtaining and maintaining employment or self-employment.

OPPORTUNITIES

[Coast Mental Health Employment & Education](#) for opportunities to transition into or back into meaningful work.

[Disability Awards](#) to access Canada's portal to awards and scholarships for students with disabilities.

[Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Program](#) for Western Canadians interested in accessing a network of business professionals and resources related to building a business, training and development, mentoring and one-on-one counselling.

[Lime Connect](#) or mentorship, internships, scholarships and support finding full-time employment.

[Next Billion](#) for internships and mentorship in the tech industry.

[Open Door Thrive Program](#) for individuals living in Vancouver that identify as having a mental health condition or addiction. Offers coaching, career resources, bursaries and more to support individuals to achieve their wellness goals.

[People in Motion Employ-Ability Program for Canadians](#) to support students with physical disabilities to prepare for future employment. Offered at no cost to those that qualify.

[Work Able](#) offers paid internships through the Government of British Columbia.

This guide was developed on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the Musquaem peoples.

*This guide was developed collaboratively between the Centre for Student Involvement & Careers and the Hari B. Varshney Business Career Centre and in consultation with UBC'S Equity & Inclusion Office, the Centre for Accessibility, students, alumni, staff, and faculty who have lived and scholarly experience related to the subject matter.
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